

Heads up? This story ends in tears. Not yours of course but mine. It ends in snot-filled weeping, regret, 'I am a fool' thoughts and shame, but that is what you get when you believe an Edo man. I always say that Edo men are who people think Yoruba men are and I stand by it. In fact, it is the hill I am willing to perish (read: live) on. Please, nobody should look at my name and ask "*ahahn*, my good sis Ehinomen, but are you not Edo?" because quite frankly, I did not forget my tribe before reminding you that Edo men wicked die. So, hold my hand, let me tell you the story of A, and how he used my eyes to see *pepper*.

A had cancer—or so he claimed anyway, because we would eventually find out that his story had plenty k legs. He was caramel skinned, cute (to me) and exuded really calm gentlemanly vibes, the type you would get easily attracted to because he always knew the right things to say and do. I met him when we were both in 100 level and had newly resumed university. A mutual friend who knew we attended the same university introduced us to each other. Truth be told, if I could turn back the hands of time, I would reply "no, thanks I'm good" to the introduction, but what is life if not full of decisions you cannot undo and steps you cannot retract?

A was not my spec—or so I used to loudly declare both to him and my friends. When he told me he liked me, I cheekily retorted, "Me that I have friend zoned you". If I had known what this man had in store for me, I would have run for the hills instead of shining my teeth like a mug because that was what I was. A mug.

We had a solid friendship and he struck me as a good man, so I was not surprised to find out two of my friend's roommates who were his course mates liked him. I would laugh at the ridiculous situation because in my head, it could never be me. I no longer say this phrase except in extreme situations because life sat me down on a Saturday afternoon pointed a finger at my face and said, "It can be you. In fact, it will be you. Bet?"

The real drama started when A started dating someone else. Like someone possessed with long throat and evil spirits, I realized, "Wow, wow, wow, and I like this man oh!". We started taking more strolls in the night after weekly church services, which my school forced us to attend. He would listen with rapt attention to my plenty gist and laugh at my dry jokes. There was an intensity to his stare, whenever he sat looking at me as I talked about anything and everything, that made me fluster and feel so self-conscious — like he was my audience of one and I could not miss a beat because he would care enough to notice it. We would be talking on the phone and he would cut short my gist with a random "I love you", sometimes even followed by sweet words like, "I think you are an extremely amazing and wonderful woman. I think you are smart and I love listening to you". He would buy me food—which we all know is the way to a woman's heart— introduce me to his friends (unfortunate people), hold my hand when we walked and give me good night kisses right there in public. As someone whose top love languages were words of affirmation, physical touch and quality time, this man had put me in his bottle, closed it shut and thrown it inside the Atlantic Ocean.

My brothers and sisters, I was in love.

If you are wondering where his girlfriend was in this whole situation, she was right there in the school with us. Her karma must be strong because the amount of *shege* I have seen after A is a lot and I sometimes just think, "This must be my punishment for doing this to that babe". There were days when guilt would consume me and I would tell him I could not do this anymore; if he wanted to be with me

then he had to be with me fully. He always explained that he had told his girlfriend about us, but he felt guilty being the one to do the breakup because of everything and wanted her to be the one to leave.

Please and please, nobody should ask me what kind of foolish excuse that is and why I listened to it. I do not have an answer. All I know is that I listened to him. In my excuse, it felt believable because there were nights she would call and ask to see him, but he would tell her he could not see her because he was with me. Again, we were in public, we never really hid ourselves, so I thought, "Well, he is not trying to hide me so why should I doubt him?"

Besides, he did many things that would not allow me doubt the genuineness of his affection towards me. On a random day, I complained about not having a pillow and the next day, I got a new pillow and a cute teddy bear from him. He also got me a cute pair of shoes for my birthday and made me do a treasure hunt to find it. We would be having a conversation and he would complete my sentences before I did. He was my shoulder to cry on and actually listened to me. At the risk of sounding ridiculous, I will add that I felt like he genuinely saw me. I found it all so cute and even though I was hardly at peace, I kept being pulled in by his charm.

"Ehinomen, I know it sounds ridiculous, but please wait for me. I do not love Tare, it is you I want to be with," he said one day while we sat together in a small restaurant. My head was filled with thoughts of how this was wrong and not worth my time, but in the end, when I opened my mouth to speak, "I'll wait" is what I heard myself say.

You may also be wondering where my friends were in all this and why they had not reminded me that I was loved at home. Well, they did their best to advise me on the foolishness of the whole situation and I was there cooking up excuses like the chef that I was. I vividly remember my room mate sitting me down and saying "he will not leave her, you know that right? Men do not leave their girlfriends just like that" and I admit, deep down I could tell she was right. This knowledge had little effects on my actions anyway because I still did not leave him.

Just to reiterate what I said before, I was the definition of 'love is blind'.

I think the worst part of being with A was not even the cheating with me, bad as it was. It was his lies about Cancer. It affected everyone who was close to him and in retrospect, I wonder what the need for that lie was. Was it validation he needed? Attention? Love? What exactly would make you lie about having such a crazy disease? His stories about his treatments never added up because he attended a boarding school and I once asked why his parents felt okay sending a son with cancer to suffer in boarding school. To that, he replied that it was to make him strong. I would also joke that he looked fit for someone who was sick because he had buff arms and seemed pretty strong to me, but there was always an excuse, always an explanation. Whether the excuses made any sense was a whole other matter entirely. I did not want to push it when things did not add up because it did not make sense to lie about sickness and I did not want it to seem as though I was insinuating he was a liar. He would say things like he wanted me to look beautiful at his funeral and I would joke about the black sexy outfit I would wear because I wanted to keep the mood light. I look back and I simply cannot believe my eyes.

The worst(er) thing was when he faked his death.

You read that right, he really had his younger brother call me in the night crying that he had died and I was so crushed, only for a new story about his supposed resuscitation to materialize. I really got my mother praying about my “friend’s” health meanwhile all along he was taking us for a merry ride.

This boy had to have been possessed; that is the only sufficient explanation to all this.

Everything came crashing down the day I was talking to my friend during the Christmas holidays and she very giddily said, “I have been talking to someone and I really like him”. If your guess was that she was talking to A, you are absolutely right. She attended another university and I did not see the need to mention that we were a thing to her because did he really belong to me? Plus I believed that if I mattered to him, he would mention it to her.

Brethren, he did not.

She even came to my school, and stayed in my room so she could see him for a few days. He totally ignored me that period and I could not even speak because again, was he really my man?

I cried.

No, I wept.

I would cry till I drifted asleep, wake up in the middle of the night to cry and then cry again the minute my eyes opened in the morning.

For an entire semester, I carried so much sorrow in my insides.

I was a woman in mourning for a man who was not even hers.

February 6th—I remember the date because it was my friend’s birthday and we were all smiling and taking pictures—I logged into instagram and staring right at me were pictures of A and my friend that he had posted to his feed.

“Can’t live with you, yet can’t live without you”

Don’t ask me why I still remember the foolish caption after more than 5 years. *E pain me*, of course I’ll remember it.

There were two other pictures with captions I cannot remember (thankfully) and I immediately broke down.

The tears? They were a rainstorm.

I wept bitterly because truly if I looked at the mirror, I would see I had a huge red nose and a white Afro wig on.

I was a clown in all ramifications.

Days later, A called me and I almost could not believe my ears when he said he did not tell my friend about me because I did not tell her. Gaslighting 101. I yelled and yelled and yelled at him like I had lost my mind because truly my sanity was already gone. This did not deter him because he went ahead to keep trying to get me to forgive him.

He kept apologizing and saying all the excuses that I will not bore you with because we all know the things men say when they are sorry.

Did I forgive him?

Did we get back together?

How did it all end?

Please, I have already washed enough of my underwear outside. Let me keep some of the shame in my closet *insert kneeling down emoji.

I have never followed an Edo man after this encounter because may affliction not rise a second time and may our tribulations not see us in front. I understand I was not the victim in this story, his girlfriend was and I apologized profusely to her. However, this experience also established cheating as a deal breaker for me.

Ironic right?

As someone who was a side chick, I understand fully the lies, manipulation and absolute disregard involved in cheating and I want no parts of it. I think of the things he said to me about Tare, never malicious or with spite but just enough to shift the blame from himself and instead paint her as the woman he just did not want to be with, a woman who was holding onto him when he wanted nothing more than to be free from her. If my man ever says the words I heard and does the things A did for and with me to another woman, I can actually faint. Like, I will fall to my knees in the middle of the road and will have to be placed on oxygen.

Crazy thing? I have only loved one man more than I loved A. That one still showed me pepper, but let's not focus on that please. I will go and wash my head later because it seems my father's people are following me.

Will I ever stop slandering Edo men?

The answer is no.

Will it be well with A?

Also, no.

Even if the time is 3am, if there is an Edo man slander going on, wake me up to participate in it. I will tie my *rappa*, pick up my megaphone and join the crowd.