

You are dead inside , something tells you that you will remain so for a long time . It's time to get up and go , at least that's what your alarm clock says , fighting the urge to throw a pillow at the horrid thing to silence it, you rise with a slowness only a snail could aspire to. It is Monday and you have come to resent this day and every other one that comes after it , maybe not Friday and Saturday, those two days bring you a modicum of joy. On Friday , you're all too happy to wave good bye to your exasperating co- workers . On Saturday , you love to snuggle the pillows on your bed and watch re-runs of all your favorite shows which you missed during the week on your new flat screen TV, you made sure the handy man mounted the television facing your bed for that reason . Spending five days per week in a lifeless and all too consuming environment you now refer to as work does not seem like a fair trade for money anymore . Maybe you had once enjoyed the thrill of going to work and earning money , you can't remember how that feels now.

You take your index finger to your eye lid and rub away as you try to stand up from your bed a yawn escaped your mouth ,your feet lands on something soft and fury ,you hear a shrill sound coming from the direction of your feet, you've stepped on your pet cat again ,you do this almost every morning but the slow-witted grimalkin refuses to sleep anywhere other than the side of your bed . You open your eyes now , Si Si ,your black cat is giving you a wrathful look with her eyes , you mouthed ' sorry ' as you made your way to the bathroom and she Purred , as if to say 'all is not forgiven' .You adopted her from the street specifically because of those gorgeous black eyes that has a yellowish gold line across it , your mother sprinkles holy water on Si Si each time she visits despite being a Muslim, according to her , the cat harbors a dark energy accompanied by spirits ' ordinary ' eyes can't see and you wonder to yourself how your mother is able to see those spirits despite having ' ordinary' eyes herself . You chuckle to yourself, maybe you enjoyed your mother being uncomfortable around SiSi more than you should.

It's 8 o'clock now ,you're wearing a black lace G string , it's impractical and extremely itchy but that's the only clean underwear you have left, you did not wash your cloths during the weekend , you were not busy but you kept procrastinating and here you are on a Monday morning , in the most uncomfortable underwear you own ,you make a mental note to do your laundry when you get back from work .You open your kitchen cabinet and mindlessly finger the bows and plates in it as you scroll up your time line on Twitter with your right hand , you begrudgingly stop mindlessly scrolling on your phone when your eyes caught a glimpse of the time on your gold plated wall clock that was gifted to you by your brother as a house warming present ,you take out the transparent bowl you like your corn flakes in and prepared your breakfast which you had to wolf down because you didn't have enough time to get dressed and dash out to your car .

You can hear the sound of the rain as it hits the roof of your car , your windshield wiper is trying the best it can to swab away the water but the poor thing is no match for the roaring rain so you park at the side of the road , maybe if you wait a while , the rain would stop and you can be on your way to work .

' *Ah Han*, why did you stop the car' someone said .

You had honestly forgotten that you were not alone . Your coworker Yewande is car- pooling with you , you don't remember the specific reason you offered to pick and drop her off at work everyday till her car is fixed ,It might have been because she sounded helpless or you were happy to do it

because she's the only person you can stand in your office but none of that nonsense matters now because here you are , an unpaid chauffeur to a Lagos ' Big girl'. You had expected her to sit at the passenger seat the first day you drove to her house to pick her up but she had jumped in the back seat with a leopard print purse that had her make up in it ,she is at the back seat of your car doing up her face up with utmost assiduousness ,she does this every day.You wonder if it's necessary , all that make up ,she is beautiful with it but even more so without ,you're the only one in the office she has 'allowed' to see her bare face , you know this because she had told you so on the first day . She's looking at you now with a questioning brow and those alluring eyes of hers , you can tell that it is easy for people to fall into them and get lost .

You wanted to say 'Are you dumb, can't you see it's bloody raining, didn't you tell me that you had an accident in the rain and now your car is at the mechanic ? You want both of us to be car less,abi ?'

' I can't see the road ahead , so I parked to avoid accident, one can't be too careful in these Lagos streets, you know?' ' You said .She shrugged off her shoulders as an answer , she doesn't look too concerned as she returned to her make up application .

You dozed off and only opened your eyes when the sun pierced through your eye lids, you look at the back of your car and see Yewande sleeping with her head angled in an awkward position so as not to smear her make up , you hear a rough hoarse noise weasel out of her nose and you wonder if she's a cultist because normal people shouldn't snore like that .

The road ahead is clear now so you start to drive off but can't drive too far because you're now stuck in the notorious Lagos traffic .You can see the rain water trickle down your wind shield, just as you are about to put on your windshield wipers , two kids rush to your window armed with small buckets and rags , they are joined now by two older boys , they start to fight over who should get to clean your windshield, these kids should be in school learning and not risking their life to clean your window on the off chance that you may give them some ' change' you thought to yourself .You point at the smaller kids and motions for them to come to your window.

' *Nah two of you I wan make you clean my window.*' You said .

The two older kids looked down almost at the same time, the taller one was kicking the floor with the tip of his big toe and you knew they were sad because they thought you had dismissed them.

' *Hayse*, you two , clean the back window.' You say to the older ones , they rush to the back of your car happily scrubbing your window . You don't need their services but you felt bad for them. You search the glove compartment of your car and purse for cash but you had none so you turned to the back of the car and woke Yewande up.

' Wait , are we there yet?' she said while sitting up and adjusting her cloths, she wore a black see through chiffon shirt with a black camisole underneath, she looks every bit a vixen.

'No , we are not there yet , please do you have like one thousand naira , ? You say 'I want to give

these boys cleaning my car' You said .

She gives you a look , the kind of look you would give SiSi if she was misbehaving.

' Everyday since I have been letting you pick me up from my house to work , you always gift out money to strangers on the road,' She said , shaking her head ' This is Lagos for God sake , you cannot just do that, these people can be using the money for *jazz* and you won't know , and you're not a charity organization you know?'

You smiled , in your mind you wondered if Yewande was aware that she herself was a beneficiary of your charity efforts, you know Yewande's mind does not give space for much introspection, after all she had just said she ' let ' you pick her up. she reaches into her purse , brings out a mint condition one thousand naira note and stretches it out to you ,you see her perfectly manicured nails and admire them , you reached for the cash but she snatched it towards herself .

' Buy coke from that lady , and take the change , so that it's not money directly from my hand that you're giving them, that way I know the jazz will not affect me. ' she said

You take the money and roll your eyes ,you're used to Yewande going on and on about spiritual forces who can use money that you give them to bewitch you .You spot a woman balancing a big black bowl filled with soda on her head, a baby latched on her back with a shawl and you wonder if the shawl was too tight around the baby because it was crying profusely now , you hail her towards you and buy a bottle of coke from her. The boys are done cleaning your car so you gave each boy some money . 'Thank you Aunty' you hear each boy say before you roll up your window . They gaily shove each other as they went on to the next car .

You stare at the biometric device your new boss had introduced to the office last month and your tummy starts making a bizarre noise accompanied by a dull lower abdominal ache , this is the third time in two weeks you have come into the office late , according to your boss , late comers will be fined and the money would be taken from their salary .

' Madam, be fast with that thing so we can go upstairs , I'm freezing. ' Yewande said .

You know she just said that to hurry you up, this raging Lagos rain is no match for the blasting snow she must have experienced while studying in Moscow, you quickly placed your thumb on the machine and waited till your name popped up on the screen . You get in the elevator with Yewande and perceive a putrid smell coming from Nneka's direction, you try your best not to react but your face gave away your thoughts.

' Good morning everybody.' You say to your co - workers in the elevator .

' Did you run out of soap ?' Yewande said . She looks up ,holding her nose with her thumb and index finger .

'Nneka, did you run out of soap? Or did you forget to have your bath this morning' Yewande asked.

You're contemplating coming to Nneka's defense because you know that Yewande shouldn't have

said that .

'I'm sorry guys, it's the *Pomo* that's in my bag that is smelling , I bought it from the morning market before work because I'll be too lazy to go and buy it when we close from work.' Nneka said, address everyone in the elevator.

' *msheew* , dirty behavior from a dirty pig, how can you bring meat,specifically cow skin to work ? *eww*.' Yewande said.

' Yewande ! It's okay now' you said ,Hoping that would make her stop talking .

'What ? ' she said , pretending to be oblivious of her rude attitude .

it's 5 o'clock now , so you pack up your bag and head towards Yewande's cubicle .As usual, more than seven of your male co -workers are hovering around her and hanging on to every words she says , they look up when you get to her desk , you wished they tried to mask their disinterest, only Wole smiled at you and said hello , at least one of her pets has some sense.

' Yewande , I'll be waiting for you in the car , please be fast so we can beat that *Yama Yama* evening traffic.' You say .

She rises up from her seat and so do her minions , Nnamdi the tallest of them carried her laptop and Segun helps her with her bags . Wole stood up to leave. Yewande dusts off the front part of her pants and strolled towards you with the grace of a feline .

' Let's go.' She orders , like leaving was her idea.

Sunday. One of those days you're very indifferent about , you would have loved it but your mother chooses to visit you most Sunday's and you always have a truck load of chores to do ,which you hate.

'*Ko, ko , ko*' You hear a knock on your door , you know it's your mother and you wonder why she insist on knocking when she could just use the spear key she bullied you to make for her . You open the door and go back to folding your cloths without a glance in her direction.

' *Ekaro ma*, good morning, how was your night?' You say .

She repeats the '*Ekaro*' in a nasal tone , it's something she always does to point out the fact that you did not pronounce the word right.

She's dressed in a black kaftan with gold embroidery on the neck , her bag is placed on the crook of her arm, she has on too many gold rings to count , she unties her turban and drops it in the pile of cloths on your couch as she lay stretched out on the other couch facing the TV.

‘Get me a glass of water , is this how you treat guest or your mother- in -law when they visit you ? You can’t even offer refreshments?’ She said .

She saw you stiffen on the couch as she said that and she instantly held her hands to her mouth to stop more words from crawling out .

‘ *Oko mi*, I don’t mean it like that , I err’ She said .

You forced a smile on your face but you’re not sure if it’s convincing enough .

‘Farooq , might be gone but his mother is still my mother- in- law’ You say .

Your mother starts to weep silently . Although, she had come to visit you every Sunday since the incident , both of you skated around the topic but never discussed it . You get up from your chair to hold her in your arms and stroke her hair telling her , ‘Everything would be okay’ . If someone had walked in on both of you , they would have sworn it was your mother who had lost her four hours old husband to a cardiac arrest after their wedding reception . You wondered why you did not feel anything even though you desperately wanted to feel like crying , tearing your cloths and rolling yourself in dirt , that way you would know you still had a heart beating in your chest ,you knew that if you did all that , it would finally mean you had accepted Farooq’s death was real, maybe you’re not ready for that . You look at the TV ‘ Keeping up with the Kardarshians’ is on and you mutter to yourself ‘ What’s there to keep up with? msheew .’

‘ What’ Your mother said .

‘Oh ! nothing mom’ You say , while you continue to stroke her back .

It’s eight o’clock on Monday , you’re running late for work again but this time it’s not your fault. You had spotted a blue Toyota Yaris parked at the opposite side of your house just as you closed the gate to your house to enter your car , at first you didn’t think much of it , but you noticed the car following you as soon as you started your engine. You passed a couple of unnecessary routes just to make sure you were not being delusional but the car kept following you , you called Yewande to let her know you’re on your way . You get to Yewande’s house and get down from your car , you never do that , Yewande gives you a look and you knew she was wondering what was going on .

‘ Yewande , I think I’m being followed’ you said .

She trows her head back in a fit of laughter , her well maintained weave-on fall perfectly on her shoulders as she comports herself.

‘ You must have watched *plenty* , James bound movies over the weekend, *abeg* let’s go to work *jor*’ She said .

You don’t make any attempt to move ,it’s like you froze up , you’re paralyzed by fear , she grabs the key from your hand and forces you into the passenger sit , you watched as she crouched into the car , one pant leg after the other , she adjust your car seat to her preferred setting , turns to you and says ,

‘ Are you sure you’re alright’ she taps your face a couple times and you shake your head from side to side , you told her that ,now that you think about it , you’ve noticed someone had been following you since the incident but you never took it serious . She raised thick black brows

‘What incident?’ She said .

‘ Farooq died’ You say.

‘ Wait , what! *Babes* , you’re not making any sense’ Yewande said .

‘Well, he died on the day of the wedding after the reception , we were about to get down from the car when he got a cardiac arrest’ You say. ‘We rushed him to the hospital but it was too late’

‘To-mi-wa’ Yewande said, she elongated every syllable in your name to express her shock.

‘ Why are you trying to prank me this early morning , you literally came to work a week after your wedding , if all you said was true,you would not even be going to work everyday, you would be at home mourning,i really don’t have the time for this bull shit, ’ She tucks a rebellious strand of her hair in place ‘I figured something was not well with you but I know this can’t be it , your husband is so young, how?’ she said .

She starts to drive off but stops when she hears your sobs.

‘ I’m telling you the truth Yewande , My husband died and this car has been following me all week.’ You slowly feel your self start to loose your grip .You start going over the possible mistakes you could have made , maybe that’s why someone is stalking you,maybe they are on to you . Your thoughts start to play ‘ fetch ‘ in your head .

Your chest is heaving and tears are flowing freely , your shirt is soaked and you’re starting to feel a tromping in your head . You are trying not to break down and you you might be failing at it . You don’t know if your tears are convincing enough so you cry a little more, hoping she does not suspect.

‘ I won’t lie , I kind of noticed something was off but I figured you would tell me when you were ready’

Yewande reverses your car and heads towards her house . She honks her horn as she gets to the gate ,her gate -man opens the the door , he is dressed in a Nigerian soldier uniform , he salutes her as she drives in, if he’s surprised that Yewande is back so soon , you could not tell because he had no expression on his face .

Your eyes catch the glint of sunlight on the surface of a black Mercedes Benz parked in the compound , it’s Yewande’s and it looks like it is in perfect condition , She saw the confusion on your face .

‘ As I said , you had been acting strange at work , so i lied that my car was bad hoping I could
‘ her voice trails off .

‘I don’t know, I felt something was wrong , I didn't know what it was but my guts kept telling me to do something , I’m sorry’ she said .

You don’t totally understand what she’s saying but you hug her tight , she had saved your life unintentionally, the day she lied about her car , you had been planning to end it all , You had even bought ‘ Sniper ’ the popular rat poison you were going to take after work that day because you could not stand the thought of what you had become . You could not take the rat poison that afternoon because you didn't want a situation where , Yewande would wonder why you had not bothered to pick her up at her house , you knew she would come looking for you that day because she’s nosy and you lived very close to her , you did not want her to be greeted by your dead body. She doesn't deserve to see that , so you postpone it to after she gets her car fixed .You were not trying to kill your self cause of Farooq , No , you would rather end it all before every one discovers what you did .

‘ Muktab’ she yelled .

Muktab is a man in the Nigerian soldier uniform , who towers over your car .

‘ There’s a blue car outside , go with the others ‘ she crooks her fingers at the other soldiers guarding the house which lead them to your car , they are all crouched up against the driver seat of , each of their brows contracting with laser focus . ‘Bring whoever is in the car into the house ,’ She searches her bag . ‘Here.’ She said as she hands over a key to him . ‘Take daddies hummer and park in front of the persons car so they cannot drive off.’ She said.

‘ *Sure ma*’ he saluted as he hurriedly went about the task he had been assigned.

‘ Why are you looking at me like that?’ she laughs ‘Those are the perks of having a high ranking military official as your father , you get to play God sometimes, only in Nigeria, let’s go inside ’ she said.

You step out of the car and look around . You had picked and dropped Yewande from and to work for what seems like a thousand times now but had never stepped foot in her house .The house stood tall among that of her neighbors, it was painted cream with large windows and pillars mounted in front of it , it reminds you of those early 2000’s Nollywood movies with the big houses and tacky ‘everything gold’ furnitures .

You are admiring the large pianoforte in Yewande’s living room , wondering if anyone has ever played it , to the best of your knowledge, Yewande cannot carry a tune to save her life , she’s the very reason you can’t listern to ‘I care’ by Beyoncé anymore , Yewande murdered it with her voice ,not bothering to bury the carcass.

‘Madam, we brought the person’ Muktab said. That snapped you out of your thoughts.

There's a churning in your stomach, you're thinking of all the possible reasons why that person had been stalking you. You're ready for all the consequences of your actions, what if it's a police detective snooping around. You gather yourself and walk as slow as possible, if it's something terrible you're about to hear, you might as well not rush into it. There's a woman standing with a baby resting on her chest and shoulder. She's tapping her feet on the floor, scanning the area, you can see the fountain of tears streaming down her face. 'What an ugly sight' you mutter to yourself.

'Yewande, what's going on?' You said, she must not have heard you because she strolls leisurely towards the woman, raising one flip-flop after the other.

'Hey, madam, what's with all these tears? You're stalking someone and you have the guts to act scared when they caught you' She stops in front of the woman 'Enough of your tears *abeg*, start talking, look around you' she said, gesturing meaningful at the soldiers that stood in the compound 'You're surrounded, *oya*, start talking'.

You want to get a hold of Yewande's mouth and twist it like a car key, this poor woman is clearly harmless, you're not amused by Yewande's scare tactics, you walk towards them now.

'Hello' you wave nervously 'Hi, I just want to know why you have been stalking -' the woman cuts you off 'I'm sorry to disturb you, I don't know how to say this' she says. In that moment of slight hesitation from the woman you know your world is about to be shaken again.

'Well, My name is Zainab and this baby is Farooq's.' She said.

'Which Farooq?, the one I buried? The dead one?' You said. You heard a loud crackle and hysterical laughter, you look around but no one's moving and all eyes are on you, you soon realize that the laughter is from your own mouth, your body is burning, a burning furnace, your legs are noodles and your tummy is butter factory, churning away.

'I'm sorry to disrupt your life, I had called for three months and I got no response, I came down to Lagos from Abuja, he told me he had business here, I found his Lagos office address but when I went to knock on the office gate, no one answered, I later hired a private investigator to help me find him,' she paused 'when the private investigator got back to me, he said Farooq got married in Lagos and died the same day, he got me your address and here we are.'

'How could he? After all we shared how, how? I don't know what I was following you around, I just got curious you know, I don't know why I followed you, I swear!' She said, tears falling down her face.

You keep laughing, everyone is watching you now, Yewande grabs your shoulders to support you cause you look like the lightest wind can turn you into a flying kite.

'Why did you come looking for me? Why are you following me around if you know he's dead? Is my husband dying not enough bad news?' You wonder if you should give the lady a dirty slap to

sell your act. 'You came to disgrace me *abi*? Okay , now that you have told me about this ,what do you expect me to do ?,' Yewande grabs your shoulders and tries to usher you into the house. You don't move , you can't .

'*Guy*, why are you laughing, you're scaring me , I get that you're shocked and people react different in different situations but this is extreme, try and put yourself together .'Yewande gave you a concerned look before beckoning her gate -man.

'Muktab , please open the gate , let this woman out , madam , you can be on your way' Yewande said .

'But I-' The woman says .

'But nothing' Yewande counters.

You're inside Yewande's living room now , you keep laughing, clapping your hands and hissing .Truth is ,the events of today was not too surprising , you knew about Farooq and his philandering ways . You had read his messages by mistake when he gave you his phone to make a call, you did not confront him , you even went ahead with wedding plans , you even tried your best to feel bad when you started adding what you called ' a little something' to his evening whine and morning tea despite being aware of his heart condition .His heart condition killed him. You're a good person , you give to to the poor , you are nice to strangers, nicer than Yewande for sure!, besides 'everyone dies eventually and something must kill a man' you're not a murderer , at least that's what you tell yourself .