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The twitching started early in the week. Monday, to be precise. The same right toe twitching that was my body's way of warning me that something bad was going to happen. Typically, these premonitions triggered a series of events that eventually culminated in that thing that I was warned about.

The first time I experienced this was when I was 6 years old. I vividly remember telling my mother about it. She, ever the worrisome one, immediately rushed me to the hospital fearing some neurological disorder. As it turned out, there was nothing wrong with me. The doctor simply theorized that I had probably eaten too many sweets or was not getting enough sleep. Clearly, he did not think it was important. My mother did not believe him, so we went to three more hospitals. They all said the same thing: there was nothing wrong with me.

My mother finally accepted the doctors' diagnoses, and sent me to bed two hours earlier than usual, for one whole week. I, of course, was not pleased, since that meant that I would miss some of my favorite TV shows. If anything, I had hoped the doctors would tell me to spend more time in front of the TV. What? I was only 6 after all. On the third day of my "therapy" and two days after the twitching started, a man came from the village, one of the numerous uncles I had heard of, but had never seen. I saw him that day, and he brought bad news: my maternal grandmother, Iya Elepo, who sold palm oil, was dead. I cannot explain how I knew, but deep down inside, I knew that that was the bad thing that was supposed to happen.

Over the years, 15 years to be precise, I learnt to pay close attention to the timing and frequency of this warning. I noticed that it was quite different from the twitching I observed in other people. My ex-boyfriend, Richard, for example, had involuntary twitches too. But it was with a different body part: his eye. And it was for a completely different reason. I doubt that he actually noticed it, but I certainly did. You see, his eye twitched whenever he was telling lies. It was his left eye and it twitched nine times within one minute. Yes, I counted. That was how I knew he was lying when he told me he had spent his Easter weekend at a cousin's house. Any further doubts I had were erased when I overheard him telling his best friend what really happened.

It was as I had suspected: he spent that weekend at Sade's house. Sade, who had actively discouraged me from dating the same guy. I found this out in the afternoon of the next day. That night, I paid him a visit, dressed in black and slashed his car tires. In some circles, it is known as vandalism or destruction of property. In my mind, it was simply a send-off present. All of that happened a month ago. This week was different.

On Monday afternoon, when the premonition started, I was in class. I ignored it because I assumed it was because I was wearing a new pair of shoes, and they were a bit too tight. However, on Tuesday, it happened again. I paid attention this time because I was wearing another pair of shoes. These ones were older and more comfortable. My anxiety increased each day and so did the frequency and duration of these twitches. And then all of a sudden, it stopped. Right in the middle of a prayer meeting in church.

"... And Lord, may we always be at the right place at the right time," Pastor Daniel prayed before we said the grace. I did not say Amen.

My mind was far away from the church. I was planning what I was going to wear to the club that night. It was Friday night, you see. By the time we recited the grace, which in my absent-mindedness I did not join in saying, I had picked out my outfit: a tight-fitting blue dress that
stopped mid-thigh. And by tight, I was not kidding. This dress left nothing to the imagination, which was my intention. It was the club, after all. And I was on the prowl.

As soon as I got to my dorm room, I got dressed and waited for my friend, Yemi to come and pick me up. I did not have a car, but Yemi did. She often gave me rides to Wal-Mart, and other places, without any complaints, which to a student studying abroad, is a God-send. Yemi arrived less than 10 minutes after I rouged my lips with my favorite red lipstick. Her car was packed full of three other excited young women: Oge, Mariam and Josephine. They were all Nigerian students, who like me, had left home after secondary school to study in the United States.

Oge was the energetic and ambitious Biology major who never seemed to have a bad hair day. That girl's hair was always on point. So was her appearance. Mariam was the shy, timid, but firm History major who was always talking about switching to Chemical Engineering. This was her father's idea. He did not see why he should waste his hard-earned money sending his daughter to learn why men fought wars and how expensive the 'clean-up' afterwards was. She had stood her ground, and it looked like her father was beginning to accept Mariam's decision. Now, it appeared that Mariam was the one who needed to be convinced to stay the course with History.

Then, there was Josephine, the tall, logical Mathematics major. She never outgrew her tom boyishness, and we often teased her on this point. Her typical response was "Abeg, waka! We can't all be like Oge." All three ladies sat on the back seat of Yemi's Toyota Camry. Yemi herself was getting a Masters in Chemical Engineering, the same course Mariam's father wanted her to study.

I, of course, was an Economics major in my final year. As an only child, there was never any talk about me picking a major that was not palatable to me. Economics was my choice, and my parents had no say in the matter. I sat down in the front passenger seat, and within seconds, we were off. Our destination was the Red Flame, a popular night club in our small, university town.

On getting to the Red Flame, we got a rude surprise: the place was boarded up. A few of the regular patrons who had also not received the memo, stopped by and we all learnt the news from a nearby Chinese restaurant: the owners of the club had been evicted for conducting criminal activities on the premises. They had received prior notices and warnings from the City for months, but had ignored the warnings. Meanwhile, notorious gangs had been frequenting the spot with fights and gun fire exchanges becoming increasingly common. As you can imagine, this made the surrounding businesses very uncomfortable, and they filed multiple complaints. So, the City finally shut the Red Flame night club down.

Now that we knew the back story, the next question was: What were we going to do for the rest of the night? We were all dressed up and certainly had no intention of going back to school to study. This was our one night out and we were going to make it count. So, Yemi called a friend on the phone and asked him to recommend another club or bar. He gave her the name of another club: Dance Fever. It came highly recommended for the music and of course, the drinks. Apparently, the DJ was a Nigerian and we were bound to love his selections.

However, Yemi's friend did warn us to be careful, as the club was right in the middle of a rough neighborhood. Once we got inside though, we would be fine. That's what he said. Not quite long after we set out for this new spot, the twitching started again. What was this about? And why now of all times? I simply ignored this last warning, determined to have a good time. I never asked the other ladies how they felt about visiting this particular club, but they all seemed to be on board with our change of plans. So, to Dance Fever we went. Mistake Number 1.
After getting lost a few times, we finally arrived at Dance Fever night club. Yemi's friend was right. The neighborhood was rough. Several police cars passed by the club as we were getting out of the car, and we could hear sirens wailing not too far away. Nonetheless we went inside because none of the other patrons seemed to be disturbed by the surroundings. We decided that we too could overlook it for that night. Mistake Number 2.

At the entrance, there were two bouncers, and for some strange reason, they both looked very familiar. Truthfully, only one of them looked like a real bouncer, like he could pick up a man with one hand, and break all his teeth and both his knee caps without using a baseball bat. The other "bouncer" looked like he was just a sidekick. A powerless, wimpy-looking, toothpick of a man, who coincidentally had a wooden toothpick dangling carelessly from his mouth. Ironically, it was this sidekick who almost spoilt the night for us.

He asked to see our ID cards. That was standard. No problem. We all presented them to him to prove that we were old enough to be there. However, he peered at Mariam's ID card longer than usual, and said that it looked fake. He said that she looked too young to be 21, which was true, except that she really was 21. The rest of us began to argue with him, talking at the same time as if the man could understand each of us speaking at once. He simply ignored us and told the big, muscular bouncer not to let us in.

That was the stand-off when a young man emerged from the club, an un-lit cigarette in one hand, and a lighter in the other. He asked the bouncers why they were detaining such pretty women. The minute he opened his mouth, I knew he was a Nigerian. And I don’t mean the obvious fact that he had an accent. No, it was really the way he said "Pretty" that gave him away. He sounded just like my cousin who had just moved to the US a month before and was already trying to sound American. Yes, that dead giveaway accent really came out when he said that word. It came out as "Preedie." If not for the uncomfortable situation we were in, I would have burst into laughter on the spot. But, there was nothing funny about what the bouncer was doing, and I knew Mariam would not appreciate the joke at that point. So, I just shut up.

On hearing the stranger's question, the sidekick told him that a high schooler was trying to get into a nightclub with a fake ID. Mariam almost knocked him down in her rage, but Josephine, the logical one, held her back. Yemi, Oge and Josephine began to yell at the bouncer, but he simply ignored them. He was clearly lying and Mariam did not appreciate being accused of a crime that high school students were known for. Maybe the stranger did not realize it at first, but as soon as my friends began to yell at the bouncer, he finally understood it: we were also Nigerians. That changed the game completely.

He turned to the bouncers and told them to let us into the club immediately because we were his sisters. That was a fairly common thing with Africans in the diaspora. The Senegalese woman who braided my hair every couple of months called me her sister. So did the Ghanaian man who owned the African grocery store two hours from our school. But the thing is I actually had some sort of a relationship with these people. What I did not expect however, was that a stranger at a club would refer to us as his 'sisters.' I did not think the bouncers would 'buy it,' but surprisingly, it worked.

Mariam snatched her ID card back from the sidekick who refused to apologize and we all matched into the club, led by our knight in regular clothes. That was when he introduced himself to us: his name was Ezekiel, and he was the sole DJ at Dance Fever. His stage name though was DJ Blaze.

Apart from the fact that I had never met a DJ who had such a pious-sounding, my-parents-are-serious-Christians type name, I knew I would never forget him simply because he literally saved
the day. I mean, how on earth would we all go into the club, leaving Mariam to stand outside there alone? Thankfully, we never had to make that choice and it was all thanks to Ezekiel, a.k.a DJ Blaze. As Ezekiel was introducing himself, something else finally hit me: the reason why the bouncers looked so familiar. I knew them.

They were the same bouncers I had seen several times in front of the Red Flame. As soon as I realized who they were, I began to wonder about this nightclub which we were visiting for the first time. Furthermore, as I looked around the interior, I began to see similarities between the two clubs in the layout, the décor, and even the lights they were using. I decided to ask our new friend, DJ Blaze, the most pressing question: was this club owned by the same people who used to own Red Flame? His answer was "Yes."

What if the same gang problem that they had at the Red Flame was already playing out at Dance Fever? I voiced my concern to both DJ Blaze and my friends, but they both dismissed it. DJ Blaze said he had been working at Dance Fever for about two years and apart from typical scuffles between unruly patrons, who were most likely drunk, the night club was pretty safe. As far as he knew, there were no gang-related or criminal activities going on at the club. Well, there was no more twitching and DJ Blaze's explanation sounded reasonable, so I accepted it. So did my friends. Mistake Number 3.

After escorting us to the bar, DJ Blaze abandoned us to return to his station. His short break was over, and he needed to get back to work. My friends got their drinks of choice. I did not drink because as we had previously agreed, I was the designated driver and had to stay sober. This did not bother me in the least because it was not the drinks I had come for. It was the music. And DJ Blaze was setting the club on fire with the music.

He had carefully selected a good number of contemporary Naija hits by artistes we were familiar with: TuFace Idibia, P-Square, D'Banj, Davido. Name it. They were all there. And the people at the club absolutely loved it. He mixed these songs with the more popular American songs, and many others from all over the world, without missing a beat. He was simply amazing!

As soon as my friends finished their drinks, we all hit the dance floor. The dance floor was a clearly marked space with old-fashioned disco balls hanging from the ceiling. It was in front of the DJ's station, which meant that we were all facing the DJ as the music played. All the way at the back, several feet behind us, were glass doors, which doubled as the main entrance and exit. We could see the silhouette of the bouncers outside the door from inside the club. So, it was not a very large place.

In between rotations of songs and especially when he was switching from one musical region to another, DJ Blaze would briefly insert the sound of shattering glass. The first time it happened, we all turned back and looked at the glass doors, thinking something had broken them. They were intact. But we could make out DJ Blaze's wide-toothed grin as he watched our reactions. He did that a couple of times, until we finally got used to it and even began to expect it.

So we kept on dancing, trying to out-do ourselves with dance moves like Alanta, Azonto and even Alingo. But, as at yet, I had not had the opportunity to show off my favorite dance move: the Komole. It was common to see people komole-ing at typical Nigerian functions like weddings, birthday celebrations and certainly at church services. The music at such events had a certain traditional tilt, so it made sense to crouch or bend low at crucial points of those songs. But, can you imagine any person komole-ing in the middle of an American nightclub? I hadn't but I knew that if the music was right, I would do it.
DJ Blaze must have been reading my mind, for all of a sudden, while we were all alingo-ing, etighi-ing and azonto-ing to P-Square's *Alingo*, he suddenly switched the music.

"Bobo no go die, unless to ba d'arugbo! Bobo, Bobo, Bobo, Bobo, Bobo no go die unless to ba d'arugbo!"

Our reaction to King Wasiu Ayinde Marshall (KWAM 1)'s popular '90s Fuji song, *Consolidation*, was automatic. We all screamed in delight and then rapidly did the komole. The other people in the club continued dancing, but they remained upright, while we all crouched down low. I mean, really really low. If you had stood on an elevated surface looking down at us doing the komole, we would have looked like kids playing *Ring-a-Ring of roses* at the "A-tishoo, we all fall down" part. I could make out DJ Blaze's grin. He was clearly enjoying himself too.

This delightful surprise lasted only about one minute as he quickly switched to another popular American song. Five minutes later, without warning again, he switched to another well-known section of a popular KWAM 1 song:

"... Shokolokobangoshe!"

We all lost it at that point and began to komole with a vengeance. As soon as I heard "Shokoloko …," without even waiting for the musician to finish, I went down. As I did, I heard two sounds within seconds of each other: the first was the sound of shattering glass, and the second was the sound of something whizzing past me. It sounded like it had flown right over my head. I was clueless and assumed that it was part of the music. Plus, my friends were still digging it, and did not seem bothered in the least. Almost immediately, I saw DJ Blaze raise one hand in the air, with the other hand clutching his chest. He fell backwards. At first, nobody did anything. We just assumed he had temporarily lost his balance and would get up. The music kept playing, an American song, this time around. DJ Blaze was still on the floor. I think a full five minutes must have passed before one of the people on the dance floor ventured to the DJ's station to find out what was going on. Slowly everyone stopped dancing as we watched the man disappear behind the table housing the turntables and other equipment. A few seconds later, he began to shout. Initially, we could not make head or tail of what he was shouting about. But, he finally cut the music, and that was when we heard him shout clearly:

"Call an ambulance. The DJ's been shot in the chest!"

We were all stunned. It all seemed surreal. Then, people began to ask each other questions: *How could the DJ have been shot? Where was the shooter? Why was he shot?* But still, nobody had called the cops. The managers and even the bartender were nowhere to be found. It was just the club patrons. Even the bouncers had disappeared. *What was going on?*

It was Josephine, the logical one, who whipped out her cell phone and dialed 911, asking the police to come quickly. As she dialed the number, we all huddled together in a corner, afraid to leave, since we did not know who the gunman was and how the DJ was shot. In fact, it was not until minutes later, when the police finally arrived at the scene, that we finally understood what had just happened.

Apparently, DJ Blaze was right: the owners of the Red Flame were the same people who owned Dance Fever. They were neck-deep into gang-related activities, and had transferred their base from the closed-down night club to this one. Not long after we entered the club, the manager and other employees got a tip-off that a rival gang was heading to that particular night club. They had not bothered to warn the guests of the impending danger, and had absconded through the backdoor. The bouncers who were positioned at the front entrance, did not get the memo, and were there when five armed men came to the club. The bouncers denied them access
and in the scuffle that ensued, one of the guns misfired. A stray bullet went flying through the
glass and hit an innocent man:  the DJ. Both bouncers and one of the gang members were
seriously injured and lay outside the door until the police arrived. The other gang members
absconded, abandoning their mission.

As I heard the ambulance approach, I wondered at just how illogical death was, for it was the
man who had assured us of the safety of this club that had lost his life that night. He was the
victim of a stray bullet. And as I gave the police my statement of the events I had witnessed, I
suddenly realized that the whizzing sound I had heard of an object flying over my head, must
have been that bullet. If I had stood still and not done that last komole, I would have died. It
was not until I saw the police take his body away in a black bag, that I came to terms with the
fact that our new friend was gone. That was when I remembered the Pastor's prayer just hours
before.

"... And Lord may we always be at the right place at the right time."

For the first time that night, I said "Amen."

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About the Author

Sharon Abimbola Salu was born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria where she lived until she relocated to the United States of America. Her stories are mostly set in Nigeria, and she writes the kind of stories she would like to read. A professed lover of spicy foods, she loves experimenting with new recipes, to the dismay of non-spicy food lovers. Apart from writing, photography is her other hobby.

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