

The Sun is a Journeying Star

Nemi

Do you ever think about the end?

My subconscious sneers. Everybody thinks about the end.

Tell me, when was the last time you thought about the end?

Mine was the day you broke your news to me. I asked Abere if he knew what would happen when the sun stopped traveling the Milky Way. I never ask my brother anything, and you know this.

“Hopefully, we would already be dead before anyone knew what was happening.” he quipped.

“Is it possible that some of us would live?” I asked.

“You will not be among those that live. You are not one of the main characters.”

What did he mean by main characters? I shrugged it off. All I knew was that if this was my end, I did not want to die an unmemorable death – *all die no be die*, so I reached for my phone and dialed your number.

“What are you doing?”

“I am filling out my visa application.”

“Fiye, when did you start applying to schools in the US?”

“It was random. It just happened.”

How did it just happen? My subconscious screamed. “Do you want to tell me how it happened?” I voiced instead.

“A friend thought I should apply, and I did.”

“Who is this friend?”

“Since I told you this news, you’ve been selfish. I expected better from you, Nemi.”

“Please don’t leave me, Fiye. We have so much to build with.” I pleaded, crying.

There was silence before I heard the disconnected beep.

Astronomists say the sun travels the Milky Way in a 230 million-year journey. If all humans lived to a hundred, it would take each person 2.3 million lifetimes to see the end

of an orbit. The sun is a constant star you see... like water, like you. *Like you and I were supposed to be.* My brother was right. If we were genuinely ending, I would die before anyone knew what was happening.

“I am moving to America.”

I jumped, straddling you.

Your eyes were almost empty with this news, and I slowly realized it meant different things to both of us. For you, America told the story of a new degree, new adventures, and new people. For me, America was the dark rift that was beginning to block the sun and bring the end.

“People now do long-distance, and it works fine. Many Nigerians have inter-continental relationships like us.” *Like us.* Your mind had already moved thousands of kilometers away from me, and the distance was crowding.

“Those people are not us,” I whispered, tightening my hold around your shoulders. “I need the sun to stay warm.”

You laughed. My world was ending and you could still laugh.

“My little drama queen.” You reached up and grabbed my tear-ugly face, “There is Whatsapp and Facetime.”

“There is also 8 hours between us, Fiye.” I said, burying my head in the crook of your neck. I loved how you smelled like a bit of me and a bit of you.

“If you stay too long in the sun, you will burn. Let go.”

You dropped me.

Did you even love me?

If so, could I have hoped for a different ending?

Fiye

“I am moving to America.”

I watched your nose scrunch up in confusion, and your eyes dim with realization as you straddled me.

“There is also 8 hours between us, Fiye.” You said.

In all the questions you had, there was a center — *you* were always in the picture. I wanted to have things that were about me without you.

Sometimes, the both of us took up so much space, Nemi – one in which you eclipsed me. I hated that being in a relationship with you meant I was flame and light only for you, so when you called that evening, I knew I had to make you end things.

Then you called the morning after, and I knew I did not have the heart.

Nemi

They say that if you love something, you let it go. If it comes back to you, it is yours. What if it does not know how to find its way back? What if it gets lost like you did?

“There are a lot of things I do not know. It is hard to keep up. I need a break.”

“We can do it together. I can help you, Fiye.”

“You cannot.” Your voice was cold and distant.

“It’s just the first month. Things are bound to be hard.”

There was a fire in your eyes.

“Hard for whom?”

“You just moved to a new country. I read it is normal to have imposter syndrome.”

“A lab mate will help me with all the physics stuff.” You said.

“I can help, too,” I grumbled. “I want to help.”

“You are thousands of miles away. You. Cannot. Help.”

It was the first and last Facetime we had. Three months later, I got notified of your first-ever Instagram post. I always thought our relationship would be the first thing you posted about. You opened your account because I told you we could share Instagram video memes. I half expected a reel with Coldplay’s *A Sky Full of Stars* and all our happy moments until you told me you were moving to America. Coldplay was our musician, and you had chosen that song for us.

“You light up my path, baby.” You had said.

I hurried to your timeline, knowing it would not be a reel or anything about us. Would it be something about America? I zoomed in.

Was this your lab mate who was helping with *all the physics stuff*?

Your smile was different, wider. Your fingers layered on her shoulder like they were used to being there, like they knew her shoulder was home. The caption read, “The best of months.” You had said the exact words to me a few months into our relationship.

I started to text and then erased. I typed and erased it again. Then I wrote, “What are we, Fiye?”

I saw you type and stop. Type, then stop again.

“We are pencils in the hands of the creator.” I finally received; a laughing emoji attached.

I returned the hot, red, angry one.

“You like drama. What was that zodiac sign thing again about drama?”

“I thought you did not believe in zodiac signs?”

“But you do, and it obviously influences you.”

“Do you love me, Fiye?”

“I will call you. I have to log off. I am heading to the lab.”

Centuries ago, the sun was worshiped as a life-giving star. Today, I worship the sun for more than life. I worship because, like the moon, I do not have my own light.

Fiye

I called to tell you about America. It was a place of extremes. Winters were too cold, and I had heard the summers were too warm. The people either needed to be more friendly or were too friendly. Work either needed to be more challenging, or was extremely so. I was even failing physics. Who fails Introductory physics?

“I can help you, Fiye.” You chirped.

It was our first FaceTime.

Help who? I wanted to ask. “You cannot!” I informed you instead.

Something about you wanted to be in everything that belonged to me. It was amusing and scary at the same time, and so when I posted that picture, I knew you would hurt. But I knew you would only hurt because you were not in it.

Nemi

Three years was barely a fraction of 2.3 million, but I told myself that I did not come to America for you. I had hopped on the *japa* bandwagon, quit my lecturing job, and came to America as a graduate student because Nigeria had nothing more to offer me.

The academic staff union recently returned from an 8-month-long strike and was still in court with the government over months of ‘no work, no pay’ clapback. The price of a bag of rice had gone up by N2000 again, and all I could think about as I packed my bags was *it would soon only be 2 hours between us.*

... If you still lived in California.

“Everyone who comes to the US rushes to see the first thing that struck them from a movie or book. Where is yours?” my lab mate Dinesh asked at New Student Orientation.

“California.”

“Let me guess – Hollywood sign?” He asked, raising a brow.

I shook my head. “Someone.”

“You have a crush on a celebrity?”

I like Dinesh. He is an International student from India who resumed at the same time as me in Spring. Most other students resume in the Fall, so New Student Orientation was organized only in the Fall semester. Unlike the other students who were taken mainly by the throes of graduate school, Dinesh was always interested in other people’s lives and stories. It was something I liked and despised at the same time.

“Is everyone living in California a celebrity?”

“On most days,” he laughed. “Mine is an easy guess – Times Square in New York.”

I rolled my eyes.

“But I will definitely tag along to California to see your celebrity-*someone.*”

I wanted you to still live in California. I heard from Abere a year ago that you had graduated. Mastered out of your Ph.D. program. You wanted to start making money; a Ph.D. was too long to know your prospects. You had blocked me on social media after that last horrid fight. I thought I would end. I thought the sun had exploded and taken me

with it. But I lost you and found a little light of my own. Maybe you still lived in California, but so what?

Fiye

It has been three years since we ended. I did not think it would be possible to separate my light from yours.

I am trying to remember what the fight was about. I am trying to remember if it is something I made up so you could let me go. Your love was suffocating, but I missed you terribly. *I missed us*. I wanted to know if you found out I could not complete the Ph.D. program, so I left. I was telling people it was because I needed to make money soon. If we were still together, you would not have let me. You would have made it about building our future, and I would have hated and loved you for it.

The last time I spoke with Aberé, he said you worked at a university. I will always be proud of the things I know you will achieve. You always knew what you wanted, and anything you let go of had claw marks ... just like me.

Nemi

Did you know I had started dating again? We met a year ago at one of the on-campus fast food restaurants in the University of Benin. He had been waiting his turn to pay for his food while I half screamed my order to the cashier in the noisy room. Someone had hit or touched one of those cars with the alarms, which would not stop.

“Isn’t the owner supposed to be inside this restaurant?” I screamed, glancing around.

“That would be me. I apologize.” He responded, laughing and raising a hand.

We went out two days later and started dating within a month. He was smitten by me in the way I had hoped you would have been.

I pressured Aberé until he posted a picture of us on WhatsApp. Did you see it? Did it bother you like that picture with your physics-teaching-labmate had bothered me? I am now the crazy woman who does things like that.

You. Burnt. Me.

Nemi

“I am moving to America.”

I broke the news to Faka the day the Nigerian electoral commission declared the winner of the elections. I had contemplated my response to the US-based institution because I was considering everything I could build with what I had. I liked working as an Assistant Lecturer at the University of Benin, despite the miserly pay. I had just begun a PhD in Geophysics at the same university, and Faka and I were going short-distance steady. I was his sun like you were – *are* mine. Still, I did not have enough to keep me from chasing your light. You still called my soul with the vibrancy that light calls colors.

“We agreed that I would turn down the admission, but I have nothing left in this country.”

His jaws tightened in a question. *Am I part of the nothing that's left?* It seemed to ask.

Was that a tear?

My chest tightened.

I was breaking his heart. This man who clung to me with the same absolute darkness that I clung to your light was lost, and I felt nothing. Was this what you felt when you told me to let go?

“We both know that things will not get better.” I stared at the television screen.

He followed my eyes. “America?”

I nodded.

“I understand.” He nodded.

I knew that he did not. If he did, he would have held me tight and begged and screamed like I did with you after you told me I would burn if I held on.

If you stay too long in the sun, you will burn. Let go.

I would make sure Faka did not burn. I would not be the one that his thoughts layered on when he thought about the world ending.

I knew that I could not prevent months and years of him telling friends, rebounds, and maybe girlfriends that I had broken up with him by saying he was part of the things that would not get better in Nigeria, part of the things I did not consider “left.” But I knew that even in those stories, I would be kinder to him than you had been with me, Fiye. I

hated that I had to scale the way you broke my heart to how I was breaking Faka's. There was nothing humane about what you did. You did not love me; I loved Faka – in all the ways that a broken heart could love a person.

Non-english words used in this story

All die no be die – Nigerian pidgin to mean death is different for everyone

Japa – Nigerian parlance for emigration