

Leaving Normal

I left all I knew and had behind.

When the wave came and my friends started to disappear, I knew I had to as well. I had dreams of what my new life would look like. I knew what I thought I wanted and I had the delusions of how easy it will be to attain these heights. After all I survived Nigeria, how hard could the white man's land be? I was a fool. It was truly an experience but before I tell you about it, let me introduce myself.

I am Temi Temple, a 27 year-old Lagosian from an upper middle class family with a single parent. Yes! My last name is Temple (well, my father's name is Temple) and yes, I said Upper middle-class! Many would say that class had been folded into the middle-class years ago but when you grow up with an old-money name like mine you know better than anyone how important it is to hold on to any upper class you find. Even and especially when you didn't have the money the name came with for everyone else.

I never had a lot of friends, hell I could barely keep up with the few I had and this country still tried to take them from me. First came the pandemic and it took my relationship away. The relationship I wanted to use to beat the curse of the women in my mother's family. Then came Nigeria, taking away the little I had left. Words can not describe how dejected I felt.

Before the year 2020, I had been depressed for a whole other reason. I could not find a job, regardless of how hard I tried. I even called the almighty Temple's to come to my aid but to no avail. As the only new generation Temple (also read as illegitimate) that studied at the University of Lagos you would think they would move heaven and earth to get me a job. You would think my unfortunate father would use his influence for good. My mother and I went through it all. We cried, fought and prayed. At first, I was happy to rest and be at home. I was happy because the love of my life was not too far away from me. I didn't have to do much because he lived in the area. I just needed a N100 to take a bus and I'd be at his house. Then the problems set in, We started to fight over every single thing. Nothing I did made him happy and he was too broke to make me laugh. I couldn't deal with issues at home and issues with my boyfriend. So I lost him and then he got a job. I was clearly the bad luck in his life.

With nowhere to go and few people to talk to, I stared into space often and regretted a lot of my choices in life. I woke up to check my mails and acted like the rejections didn't bother me. I told myself I was fine and those roles weren't mine. But I knew then that I was lying and something was wrong. If I could not get the roles that required little to no experience or special skills, how would I ever get a job? If my last name could not open any doors for me and my credentials were useless, what did the future hold? The anxiety I felt whenever I got a new email threatened to kill me.

The next best thing was to leave the country for its owners. I was ready for my bright future abroad. I was already dreaming of the places I would visit and the things I would do. My school was going to be in London definitely because where else could I live? I shared my news with the group chat and we all started planning. I had found my mojo again and it was in the United Kingdom, so I had to go and meet it there! First, I had to cry and beg my mother to find the money by any means possible. Armed with a list of schools, courses and a

bucketful of tears to unleash at just the right time, I went to discuss my options with my benefactor. She said yes!

A little more than a year later, I set off for my new home. I cried and laughed but it was all I had dreamed of. I was more than ready to face my new life. I did not end up in London but I was close enough. I did not need to tell my friends as the plan was to surprise them when I landed. I knew I was going to miss my mother but in a year I would have enough to come visit or send for her to come over. The plans were set, the goodbyes were said and I was off.

It was raining when I landed and I took it as a good omen that the rain was washing away all the bad luck I had experienced and ushering me into my season of growth and abundance. The first animal I had the misfortune of seeing was a rat at Heathrow but for the first time in my life I did not scream. I did not need to; it was fate's last prank to remind me of where I was coming from. It had to be because no other reason was acceptable.

It was not. Fate was not tired of playing with me. I had relocated but my desperation to do so had landed me in a room smaller than the carton Indomie came in. I couldn't spread my arms wide without touching both sides of the wall. In my head, I only had to tolerate a year of this. School was hard, I had no business studying for a Master's degree and then working while doing it. I did not even like school. Whatever was I thinking? I know I wanted to leave home but did I really deserve this?

One of the worst parts of my new life was the loneliness. I was constantly surrounded by people yet I felt so alone. The nearest one of my friends was 2 hours away. I was so sad. After everything I had done and all the plans we had made in the group chat, we could not even see each other often. Everyone was too busy trying to make ends meet and who could blame them? With school fees and rent to pay, even I had a lot on my plate. I cried and kept crying but it was only for some time, yes?

At some point, I had to put my big girl pants on and deal with life. I could cry but at the same time I had to make it out of the ghetto. While I didn't like school, I hated my part time job even more. I wanted to be rich but who knew I'd have to clean up faeces to get there? It was tiring and endless but I had to do what I had to do. The best part was everyone was going through a similar phase. For a change, I was not alone in the struggle even if I was struggling alone. Either way, I had a year to blow and nothing was going to stop me.

Doing school, work and life was very interesting and challenging but I was not going to be fazed. Somehow there was still a little itch I needed scratched. You see I had been single for a while and while it left me free from drama, it also left me very bored and very horny. Many would argue that with the state of my life and the numerous things I was juggling this should not have been a concern of mine. They'd have been right but I was no saint and I desperately needed to get some. How I chose to do it however was a dilemma on its own.

First came the Nigerian community, I joined the various groups with hopes that I would find someone interesting to couple up with. I did not, what I found however was an incessant dating pool filled with seriously murky waters and disrespect. Next came the immediate environment search, I decided to look around and see who was giving me any signals my busy life had caused me to miss. There were more than a few but again nothing I wanted. I

was not about to ruin the Temple name with an undignified dalliance leading nowhere. So off I went to the drawing board and this time I enlisted the resources within the group chat, my ever-loving friends! Of the many ideas they had (most were stupid and went unrecognised), the suggestions I took were online dating and going to church! Apparently if I couldn't find a man in the church, I could at least find Jesus Christ who is a safer alternative. (I didn't find Him)

Did you know people consider Tinder a platform for non-serious relationships? I didn't either. Anyway, I signed up on Hinge with one of my girlfriends. We wanted to experience it together and swap stories. At the same time, I went to church to fortify my efforts with prayers! As God would have it, the pastor preached about fruitful endeavours. It could be because of the upcoming semester exams but to me this was a sign that my actions were ordained by a higher power! When I was signing up, I decided to be cheeky and to indicate that I was down for different genders and was open to all. To be fair, my mother always said my impulsiveness would be the death of me. Glad I am still alive to prove her wrong!

First date was the church boy that couldn't keep his eyes or hands to himself. He was sweet, a little too sweet in my opinion but I knew in five minutes that it was not going to work. I stayed for the pizza and the movie. Next came the friend of a friend who was convinced that he had bagged a rich man's daughter. I mean he wasn't wrong my father was rich but he was definitely with the wrong daughter. He thought I was a citizen and that was why he had decided to take me to a proper restaurant. The joke was on him because he wasted a week's worth of his care worker salary on a fellow Tier 4 Visa holder! I fully enjoyed the pasta and lobster though. Next came the Indian guy in my class and he was fun! We had nothing in common, we could barely hear each other but he had beautiful hair and I was convinced he was worth the occasional 'ehh' and 'sorry, come again'. He was not. This fellow fully expected me to split bills equally with him even after he insisted on an expensive restaurant and ate the most expensive meals! On top of my sales assistant wages? Ori mi ko! I blocked him fast.

In the middle of all this, I reached out to Papa Temple to plead my case. After being tossed around by multiple assistants, I spoke to the man and he listened. Thank God! Papa Temple was in a good mood. He sent me enough money to pay the rest of my school fees, and my rent for some months with a promise to send money the next month. The man didn't even realise how much money he had given and what it meant to me. Eat the rich abeg! He also decided to introduce me to his friend's son in London. Another member of the 1% club that expected everything to be handed to them. I was sure he would be annoying and I wanted nothing to do with him but I said thank you as expected.

With a renewed hope in humanity or my father, I went on a date with the most beautiful personality I have ever encountered. With a smile that shone like a diamond, Rainbow was truly a beautiful woman. Our date was light and fun, we talked about everything from the weather to our families and even our dreams. We discovered that in certain areas we were alike and, in the rest, we were poles apart. A perfect match! I definitely felt something even as this was new for me. She dared me to enter a drinking competition. I laughed and went ahead to drink. The last thing I remember was a kiss. I woke up in my bed. Perfectly tucked in with a faulty memory and a ridiculous smile. Wait, did I say perfectly tucked in? I was tucked in all right but with nothing on under yet I had never been happier. Lying next to me

was none other than... the novel I'd left there right before I went out. Annoyed that I couldn't remember how the night ended and what I had done, I made an attempt to stand. Then I saw the note. She'd left me a note! She thanked me for an awesome night and promised to see me again. We saw again and again.

While all this was going on, I completed my exams and went off for a 2-week holiday to spend time with the girls. Everyone was coming for the reunion; the Airbnb was booked and I was ready to have fun! I also prepared my report on the dating activities, taking the time to get my story straight and remove all mentions of Rainbow. I was not ready to explain my sexuality or to have my relationship scrutinised by my friends regardless of how close we are. I was so happy to see my girls even if I was missing my main girl.

"Hello, I am Fola. It's really nice to meet you. My father said you might want to speak with me about settling in to the UK. Let me know when you'd like to talk"

That was the message I got while I was with my friends. Why would I want to talk about settling down in a country I had been living in for months? What the hell did old Temple tell this person? I was so irritated. How dare they think I need help when he had barely helped me? When he had forgotten his child for years and acted like I didn't matter? Anyway, I called the woman that had introduced me to the Temple name (my mother) and I asked her what she thought it all meant. She said I should reach out to him and see where it goes. I could tell that she was being mischievous but I honestly was not in the mood. I replied the message snarkily and let Fola whoever know that I did not need his help in any way, shape or form. His response? *"Lol!"*

I was pissed! I got back to my Rainbow and tell me why she said she wanted us to take things slow as I was stifling her. Me? Stifling? WTF! It felt like I was losing everything again and to make matters worse, my mother kept asking about Fola. I didn't even know who he was or what he sounded like. His last message was still haunting me and I knew I had to reply soon but I had no idea what I wanted to say. What was funny? Was he being sarcastic? Who did he think he was?

I decided to watch reality tv while I drowned myself in cheap wine. I knew it was a bad idea when the TV characters started walking around my tiny room. I knew I was messed up when I started crying and calling Rainbow. I knew I was even more messed up when I started begging and she hung up. I definitely messed up when I made the next call and took out all my frustration on the unlucky person. It was Fola and it was definitely the start of a whole new mess. Needless to say, he definitely knows I did not appreciate his 'lol!'. The problem now is he is angry!

Oh, and the good mood I met Papa Temple in when I called? That was the mood he got after settling on an arranged marriage between his daughter (me) and his friend's son (Fola). I truly exchanged my mundane life for one I had no business with and the blame lies solely in the ridiculous year 2020!