

Until love came

I lay down on my couch pondering about my current relationship. Poking it with my thoughts, hoping the relationship bubble would burst and I would silently reside in reality. Maybe this was reality, but it was so surreal.

Subconsciously, I had expected the worst to happen. Things were going too smoothly, and it seemed too good to be true. I was happy, but I was scared my happiness would attract misfortune.

The past twelve months have been emotionally strenuous and I've been tempted to end our relationship. I like him, maybe even love him, and I'm certain he feels the same way. But what if it happens again? What if he backs out again for another unknown reason?

I was in senior secondary school when I met him. I had a goal of attending an Ivy League University abroad. My academics were the priority for me and so a relationship was the last thing on my mind. Most of my female friends were not in a relationship which made staying focused easy.

We still hung out as a girl-only clique until one of our female friends succumbed to the pressures of a guy who had been wooing her for years non-stop. His persistence gained her approval, and the ladies agreed to let him date our friend, who all of a sudden found him attractive.

Unfortunately, it didn't stop there, almost everyone started pairing themselves up with one another like the animals in the time of Noah.

The guy I was to be paired up with, was someone I greatly disliked. Our friends concluded that it was cute the way we were always at each other's throats and that mutual interest could be the

only reason for our constant conflict. But that wasn't true. I couldn't find Dave attractive no matter how much I thought about it. We were too different. We couldn't agree on one thing and to top it off, he brought out the worst in me. I'd hide his notebook, sometimes, and even throw it away while I submitted the class assignment to our teacher. I relished seeing him punished and getting in trouble. I was surprised by my actions and reactions, I couldn't believe I could stoop so low.

One time we had a serious fight and a teacher was close by to see us throwing things at one another and then decided to punish us. We were told to assist in preparing the field for the sports activities for the day and pick up the trash in the field when the sports activities were over. I was content that he wouldn't be playing basketball that afternoon. Although he argued with the teacher and almost prolonged our punishment, I was still happy.

We helped prepare for the sports activity independently until I needed help in picking a heavy metal ball used for the shot put. I was arrogant and decided not to ask for help. Pride does go before a fall because my arrogance led to my fall. The heavy metal ball was used to support the board behind it, so, immediately after I lifted the metal ball, the board fell flat on me. I tried lifting it but it was too heavy. I struggled to keep the board from my face with my hands, while I was scream-crying for help. I heard footsteps rushing towards my direction and someone helped lift the board up. Someone I couldn't recognize with the pool of tears in my eyes asked if I was fine and instead of replying yes, I continued to cry uncontrollably. It couldn't have been more embarrassing, I was hugging this person tightly and he was patting me, saying, "It's alright. You're fine now. Don't cry." After hearing his voice, and realizing it was Dave, I tried fighting back my tears but they kept coming.

Our teacher came in and asked what had happened and then reprimanded us for not working together. We walked out of his office and stood at the entrance for further instructions as our teacher was too annoyed to tell us what to do. I knew it was my fault for not asking for help and I should have apologized but I was too embarrassed to speak. To my surprise, he apologized.

"You don't need to say sorry, It was my fault that this happened," I said apologetically

"I saw you and could have offered to help. I hope you weren't hurt?"

"Everything had happened so quickly, that I didn't have time to check for injuries. Thanks for asking," I responded

Wearing an apologetic look, he said, "I never thought I'd hear you say that," and walked off.

The teacher informed us to return to our class and that we'd continue our punishment some other day. Ever since that day, he had been nice to me which seemed weird. I felt uncomfortable having him around helping me carry heavy stuff and not arguing with me.

The sudden change was obvious to everyone and the girls plaintively concluded that he was traumatized by seeing me struggle with a heavy object over me, but it made no sense because I wasn't even injured. At first, I was going to leave this change as that, but I was too unsettled and decided to ask him about it.

"Isn't it a good thing we're not arguing anymore?" he said calmly.

"I'm not saying it's not, I'm just asking for a reason"

"Are you sure you want to know the reason?" he said as he looked anxiously

"Is everything alright?" I asked

"Yes, I'm fine. I just felt bad about that incident and wanted to make it up to you," he answered staring at me.

"Oh, you don't need to be. It's fine. You can stop now. You being nice and attentive to me is new and has me bothered," I said, trying not to sound rude or pushy.

He laughed forcefully and said, "I know right? I'd see you later, I guess?"

"Yeah, sure." Then we parted ways.

We spent the whole term not being enemies but not friends either; just saying our casual hello and goodbyes and minding our business. The next term, we were paired up to prepare for a Science competition at another school. The time we spent together was enough to show me that he was an incredible person but I wasn't sure of what he thought of me until after we took first place in the competition. He told me he liked me and asked me out. We began dating in our second year in secondary school and before the third year, we broke up.

The transition from enemies to friends to inseparable partners to strangers took a toll on me. It happened suddenly. I couldn't even tell when I was losing him until he had something to say before the Summer holiday to our final year.

I stood happily waiting for him in the lab after we finished our class. He went out and came in after everyone had evacuated the vicinity.

"What's up?" he said gently as he stood opposite me, backing the platform with chemical salt compounds.

"I'm good, you?" I responded shortly.

"Everything has been fine. I just want to say something important before we go on a break," he answered

"Ok. What is it?" I said smiling

He sighed heavily like something was bothering him.

"Don't take this the wrong way, but I'd like us to take a break in our relationship," he said with a sullen face

"What do you mean?" I said

"I'm saying I'd like us to break up," he said

"What do you mean break up?" I said laughing.

But his look seemed too serious to be one of those causal jokes. I thought he could be playing a prank since he liked pulling one once in a while just to see me freak out. And so I decided to play along.

"Is it something I did? You know we can always work it out if I did something wrong."

My fingers were crossed. His prolonged silence had me desperately hoping it was a prank and nothing serious.

"Folu, it's not you. It's just... There's nothing wrong with you. You are one of the best people I've met. I'm grateful for everything you've done for me...But I can't go on with this," he said

It was becoming quite clear that this wasn't some act or prank, and that it was serious.

I asked, "Should I give you some time to think this through? Are you sure you want to break up with me? How did you even come to this conclusion?"

With watery eyes, he said, "I'm sure and I am sorry it had to be this way. Can you please just let it be?"

"You can't be serious. This is so sudden. Were you forced to do this? You don't look alright. Please make it clear because I don't understand," I said trying to fight back tears.

"There's nothing to understand. Just say yes," he said calmly.

It took me a long moment to let the information sink in. He stood there, now backing me, waiting for my reply. I gave him what he wanted. I said "yes", like I was finally setting him free from whatever had tormented the young man to gather the courage to break up with me.

My summer holiday was ruined. My emotions were in turmoil. I couldn't tell any of my friends because I knew what they'd ask; they'd ask the same question I was still asking myself and trying to wrap my head around. But there was no solid conclusion except that it had to be his problem.

We met again coincidentally at an event more than two years ago, and long-lost emotions resurfaced: happiness, pain, joy, sadness. Surprisingly, I was glad to meet him again. It's funny how I still liked him, knowing how much pain he had put me through. Looking at him, I couldn't find a place in my heart to despise him no matter how much I wanted to. We exchanged pleasantries, numbers, and our life experiences. We started again as friends, acknowledging the feelings we had but taking it slowly until we were sure we wanted to spend our lives together.

Still on my couch, reminiscing, my phone notification brought me back to the present. A message on the notification banner from Dave said, "Let's meet up this evening, I have something to say."

My mum walks into the room and I tell her.

"Finally, it took him so long," she said bluntly

"Took him so long to do what mum?" I said laughing.

"I wonder why it takes people in your generation so long to just settle down, eh, life doesn't end when you marry, it actually begins", she said like she was done paying heed to whatever our generation thought.

"You know we're all trying our best. There are some things we'd all like to accomplish alone before staying committed to anyone."

"You can accomplish so much together than alone", she said wearily

"Okay Mum," I answered

"Let's hope he proposes today, you aren't getting any younger. But let's leave that, go get ready,"

She turned away

My sister Sade walks in, "Hey people! Why does it feel like something serious just happened? Was she lecturing you again?" she said laughing.

"You know how she gets whenever I tell her I'm going out with Dave. She gets so expectant. She expects me to walk up the front door every time with an engagement ring. Isn't that funny? Let's hope today is the day, although, I don't think it is."

"Would you keep quiet there and say only the things you want to see happen? You this girl, I've been warning you, I've told you that your mouth is powerful and you should only say good things. Why should you be the one to curse yourself now, haba? Maybe that is why he has not yet proposed," Mother said in exasperation.

Sade raised her brows and looked my way in question, I shrugged and responded almost jokingly, "Iya, I didn't know you were monitoring me. Have you ever considered becoming a detective?" That was enough to piss her off and she responded almost immediately, "You are not serious," then dragged Sade out of the room.

I sat still on my couch and repeated my mantra, "He's not going to break up with me again." Saying it more for myself to believe it, than to calm the fear brewing in my heart. I walked into my dressing room and picked out a purple lace dress he bought me that I hadn't worn yet, a pair of black heels, and a bag. Not confident with what I had chosen, I face-timed Sade and begged her to help pick out a dress.

"How can you be confident with everything else and not your choice of clothes? I think the dress you picked is fine for the occasion," she said as she walked into my dressing room. "You'd be fine, don't worry too much."

"How can I not worry?" I said

"Are you sure you're not overdoing it? Girl, just go. I'm sure you're late already." Then she walked out of my room.

I got ready and looked at my hands imagining a ring on my finger, thinking about what exact ring he'd get me if he were to propose. We had never talked about the sort of ring I wanted. I'm

sure he'd know, he always does. I look into the mirror and say to myself, "You've got this!" and immediately head out.

A chaperone welcomes me and the hall appears empty from the entrance. There is an elaborately decorated table seated at the center of the grand hall. As I approach the table, I see candles, plates, cutleries, and wine glasses. Someone blindfolds me gently from behind, I giggle and say, "You know I can't guess this wrong, I know it's you." He speaks and gives himself away.

"How do you plan a surprise this way? I know I should act along but it was just too easy to miss."

"Ok, I killed it, but I got to hear you laugh," he answers.

He turns me around and hugs me. Still laughing, I ask if everything is alright.

"I've never been better," he responds with a big grin.

We sit and place our order. I ask about work and his family. I tell him about the conversation I had with my mum earlier and he laughs without saying anything.

We are done eating and he says with a stern look, "I know I told you I have something to say. First, I would like to apologize." I give him a questioning look, "Why?"

"I'm sorry for hurting you when I did and walking back into your life like I did nothing wrong. Thank you for forgiving me and trusting me with your heart again. I promise from this time forth I will treasure you like the precious gem that you are if you will please let me."

I sit there baffled. He stands up, walks towards me, gets down on one knee, and says, "Folusho Oni, if not you, who else would it be? I would be honoured if you would grant me the

opportunity to love and cherish you for the rest of my life. Would you take a humble man like myself to be your life partner and best friend for all time?"

Swimming in my emotions of happiness mixed with gratitude, I give him a big hug, trying to hold back my tears. We stay in that position for more than two minutes, then he clears his throat and says, "Is that a yes?" I laugh and say, "Yes, silly," smiling as he slides the ring through my finger. I am so excited. I look at him and say, "Thank you".

He smiles and says, "You deserve it and more."