

East of Eden

Salawu Olajide

November 19, 2021



Love drought

All the loving I've been giving goes unnoticed

It's just floating in the air, lookie there

Are you aware you're my lifeline, are you tryna kill me ..Beyoncé?

This was the music playing on my AirPods. I realized that I have always found it a little too dramatic when I see movies where people run off to another city to begin a new life after a break up. A whole life in a place, ending because of one relationship. Ridiculous! Except of course the individual had plans beforehand to change the environment. But here I was, doing the same thing, seeking solace in a new environment even if it was for two days. Let me escape into fantasy for a while and not deal with the pain threatening to rip me into pieces.

Through a journey of six hours on the road, listening to music that made us want to get up on our feet and dance, regardless of the fact that we were in a bus, with two incredible guys acting as our MC, by name Horsagie and Franklin, we made our journey to the Paradise of Ikogosi spring resort.

I look at the last message I had sent to him, once more, "I love you and I miss you , but I am giving you space to miss me too."

I mutter to myself , *what the fuck!*, who actually writes to a guy like that and shows such vulnerability!.

The words of my favourite girl tells me that I should learn to give her space, but I don't know how to. For the first time in my adult years, I was deeply in love with someone who was supposed to be my best male friend and things had gotten way past first base smooching.

Well, the consequences of it all was what I was dealing with . I often feel I am too much of a hurricane for him, the poor boy probably didn't know what to do with me.

Looking through the faces of fifty people seated around me, we were both enjoying the sight of the natural world passing by our window, capturing mountains that seemed to kiss the sky, or in some other cases as if it was erupting into the clouds. I could literally feel my heart squeeze at the amount of beauty my eyes beheld even as we made the journey . Whilst our feet arched and begged for stretching, begging for blood to flow in vertical direction in our limbs as opposed to our sitting positions, we took time to get to know each other, who we are and what we do. Majority of us were students of the University of Benin. Obviously, after the stressful semester, everyone wanted a break from the pressures of the school and its environment. We were informed by the head that others had already arrived at the venue, some who were from Lagos .

It occurred to me that the majority had come as couples, and for the very first time I felt pure envy, wishing at least that my girlfriends could have made it to the journey , even though I couldn't get a boyfriend, a girlfriend would have been perfect for this trip . Once again I am grateful that I had planned this trip for myself, a much needed getaway from the drama of love, or more like loving someone too much.

We arrived at Ikogosi spring resort and I felt like I had walked into an incredible dream, a place so beautiful and perfect in scenery, a mixture of green, red and the perfect azure sky. The trees were so still , one could think it was a backdrop placed there to create the scenery. The red flowers in the environment were in perfect position, like nature was flaunting her beauty and all we could do was admire . We made our way to our already allocated rooms and found out that my own room was already taken by another so we had to switch rooms. The resort itself was very serene; but I would not give it a five star rating as it seemed the place was still undergoing renovation. The incredible Mr Reuben Abib who is head of Operations and the overseer of Ikogosi spring resort promised that it would be better upon our next visit . He assured us that the quality of service would be of great improvement as he has taken over ventures like the Lacapana tropicana and other resorts across Nigeria, in bringing them to Five star quality. A man of American Indian descent who has spent most of his life in Africa, first as a journalist then as an Operation manager of resorts, he says he feels more deeply rooted in the culture of Nigeria.

We had planned to visit the warm spring but the day was already over and we could only make our way to the pool of the resort after having dinner.

Dinner was the heart food of the state, Pounded Yam and Egusi which we all agreed that it was lovely and the pounded yam was made to perfection, (the real deal, not the semi processed yam put to boil on water; I am talking about the types sold in Lagos , the one that reflected their lifestyle of microwaved food, haste and lack of attention) . We were already getting acquainted with one another in a way that it soon began to feel like we all knew each other, apart from the pairing system of room management. We felt at ease with one another and maybe it is because we shared the common factor of being students of Uniben. Or maybe it was just us, the people, laughing, smiling at ourselves genuinely.

Elixir

After dinner we made the move to the pool which was heated, and to our shock it was revealed that the pool came directly from the warm spring, all natural with no chemicals.

The resort's operations director, Sir Reuben welcomed us, revealing to us that the pool had healing abilities for those who were sick and most of us found it difficult to believe as we were in doubt. I

was tempted to ask him if the water has the ability to heal a broken heart but well, I also found it unbelievable that the water had any ability at all.

He soon leaves us to get our drinks ready and the brave-ones dive into the pool while music is blasting to the roof tops.

Leaving my fellow comrades, I made a move to know more about the place and I was opportune to be seated with Mr Reuben and his two friends, High Chief Ayo Ademiluwa and High Chief Dr. Jide Josiah the Obanla of Ikogosi, one who is the Head of Sports for the youths in the Ikogosi environment of Ekiti state and the other was one of the king makers .

Mr Reuben revealed that his company just took over the management of the resort in the month of March and has since been making changes that would make the place accessible and affordable to everyone .

The chief speaking in parables said that his role in Ekiti as a whole is like that of the proverbial He-goat, "Who is the child to his mother and also the father."

By this, he means that the land in which Ikogosi was built on belonged to his family "The Asaye's" before the government took ownership of it. Which makes him the owner of the land by descendantship and also the fact that he is the managing director of the Resort .

I looked around the people I was dining with and realized I was seated amongst royalties and once again I questioned myself if I won't do a Postgraduate degree in Journalism. After all, traveling is a way of discovering one's self and I wasn't doing so bad in getting quality information whilst my comrades were having the time of their lives, I took my leave from Mr Reuben who handed me his card, after which I joined the party.

I finally dove into the pool water and tears nearly rolled out of my eyes as the heat of the water hit my soul. I observed people taking pictures and my newly made friends implored me to join in. Whilst I was grateful about their desire for me to play with them, I enjoyed the feel of the water on my own before deciding to join in. I noticed some couples tangling bodies inside the water and while I was amused as to the act and imagined them drowning from all that tangling, I was jealous because I didn't have one. By 2:35 am in the morning, we all left for our rooms .

A dish of jollof was our Breakfast for the next morning. A few of us at the same table complained about the taste of the food. Mr. Reuben, who was already fond of our group, apologised for the kitchen error. Someone made the remark that if only our leaders would take responsibility like this guy, maybe this country would be a better place and I felt that as I wondered to myself , maybe it was because Reuben was a white man, that he accounted for himself so much or maybe it was his character. Either way I was duly impressed by the man.

We took our leave for Arinta waterfall.

Our ride was fifteen minutes. We arrived at the place surrounded by bush, we almost thought the place was non-existent. A tall man who said he has worked there for five years directed us to the magical waterfall. We started seeing the water levels (seven in total) until we got to the place where water sprung from!

I, being the lead in the crowd, quickly found the perfect place to secure my bag and went into the waterfall , shivering from the sheer magic of it all. I was in the highest feeling of emotions as I watched water pour out, the others began to join in the magical experience. Soon enough, we were all taking pictures and enjoying the rush of the water for it seemed that as we screamed louder, the

water sprung out harder, like it could actually hear us, a terrifying but beautiful experience as I feared that one would slip and go meet their maker, but that didn't happen, a miracle!.

We reluctantly leave Arinta after three hours to visit the magical Ikogosi warm spring, another phenomenal place where both cold and hot water meet but never mix. The tour guide this time by name Adeyeye Akolade, a woman in her forties, tells us the history of the spring, about how a hunter priest who had two wives transformed into the water. The one who was fair turned into warm water (she had a personality of being harsh) while the one who was dark (was gentle in nature) turned into the cold water. We observed that the warm water ran from a certain direction and the cold water from another direction, both meeting at a particular point but never mixing together. The lady goes further to show us the warm spring water which reveals that if one has malaria, all the person has to do is put their legs into it and stay there for some time, and the person would be healed. The other side of the water she revealed helped in the healing of arthritis. Mostly she told us that if one were to drink from the warmer water, it would help in their sexual performance, and also the warmer water would help in giving a clear skin! She went further to show us the part of the spring that if one should bathe, will bring about prosperity! Of course! We all dived our legs into the water, as it was crystal clear and we wanted to benefit from whatever miracle the water might bestow on us. With a content heart we leave the premise of the warm spring.

We don't say Goodbyes

We spend the night with the ritual of a bonfire, the fire itself, the very first bonfire I was seeing in my life stood tall in its magnificence, with sparkles cracking out, I felt myself feeling hypnotized by its color but the cough threatening to come out of my chest humbled me to seat far off from it, soon enough I am grateful for my decision to sit far as it happened to fall in the manner of Humpty Dumpty, which would have caused great damage to anyone who would have been there but we all were with fortune.

I, dressed in a white gown that flaunts my figure, making me feel like a goddess wrapped in her glory, out of necessity I am dressed to slay for the event, obviously with no intention to dance, my dress which rests on my body like it was tailored into my skin, did not call for the usual dancing I display while clubbing, which if I had dressed the part would have led to some certain misbehavior on my part that I had no plans for, thus my decision to wear the dress. I know you do not know this but a dress sometimes can cocktail one's behavior and since discovering about myself that I am a wildling on a short and crop top and at any event I wear it to, my girls know that I intend to own the dance floor, but this was not one of those nights.

Tonight I sat close to my roommate, Joseph to the left and Ezekiel, whom we fondly called sugar daddy, who is seated with my other roommate Cecilia, whom for no particular reason I have stored as Cece in my phone. Esther is two seats away from us, as we are seated in a circle, a music box is placed in the middle and someone acts as the DJ. I find him extremely cute as we have had several banter, the day before and that day, sending signals which we were not sure of, but kept sending anyways because we are young and why not?. A few other faces join us, saying they came for a getaway, but this time it's from the city of Lagos and a sly smile forms on my lips, the one that curves in a knowing way.

Palm wine flows in abundance but Ezekiel and I do not find it intoxicating enough for the event and we agree that a proper item for the night would be Scotch, a local delight that was sure to squeeze the kingdom of God out of any Pastor.

We headed to the restaurant to order six bottles of Smirnoff ice (I, Ezekiel, Cece, Joseph) as it seemed we already had formed an incredible bond over two days. Ezekiel lives up to his nickname

by paying for the drinks and I think to myself, "Such an admirable young man"! We rejoin the party and the drink does its work on me, because I begin to find myself smiling and my body easing up a little. We are forced to do karaoke as the lovers dominate the scene by either singing for their loved one, or performing together.

Vector's 'Early Momo' as performed by two lovers stuck to me the most, maybe because of the way it was rendered sequentially by the two lovers or maybe it had already found a place in my heart when Peter sent it to me, describing how he felt about me which I found disturbing at first because of the explicit sexual lyrics but well, lovers have a way of making any song look like a love song rather than sexual song.

We soon got bored of Karaoke and the ultimate game we had been waiting for came on. Truth or dare! The penalty of which if one couldn't perform the given task, would be made to drink. I dread the thought of a dare, dreaded more the thought of palm wine has reminded me a lot about the smell of Fufu, between both, I couldn't decide which would make me vomit, I didn't care to find out either. The bottle is passed from one hand to the other with such speed that the DJ who pauses the music has nothing on me. The drink already taking its toll on me was making me ache to kiss the DJ and all I wanted was a dare to kiss him but, the only dare I got was one daring me to sit down and I was severely disappointed. The dare soon comes to an end and we dance round the fire and my eye scans for the one person I want and I go Ahead and whisper into his ear that I would love to dance with him, this time I am not thinking of Peter, I am not thinking of how much I want him and how I know I'd never have him. I am only focused on this beautiful stranger who I wanted to kiss and my mouth somehow finds a way to slide itself into his mouth and we are kissing, right there! under the open sky surrounded by people who are shocked about my behavior, but well! Who cares?

The host for the night, Franklin and someone I do not remember, come to pull us apart and I am utterly embarrassed by my actions, as everyone is telling me to stop distracting the DJ from his work, but I can't seem to comprehend a word of what's been said except that my eyes are on him and we find a way to share a second kiss before I take my leave for the night. Good nights are said as people leave to prepare for departure the next morning. It is a feeling of fullness that grips me, a fullness I do not comprehend but know that the ache that was in my heart was lessened by the whole magical experience of this place, my eyes catch the sky and the brilliance of the stars as my heart rhyming, " *twinkle twinkle little star, up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky!*" and once again my heart is merry.

Ejiro Edward is a female writer from Nigeria. She was recently made Spotlight artist for *Brittle Paper* and also shortlisted for the Shuzia contest. She has been published in *Down River Road*, *Feral*, *Agbowo*, *Heartland Women Magazine* amongst many others. She is currently a student of the university of Benin and looks forward to being an MFA student. She loves to dance and travel.