

WORN

Bridget Ratidzo

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WORN
(Book 1)
Bridget Ratidzo

Chapter One

I gulp in a considerable amount of air, just to maintain my sanity. It never occurred to me until this very moment that it took so much work to be sane. And these are some of the things that go unnoticed. Yes the blessings of life we all have and are oblivious to their blessed existence. Or it is just me at the verge of my regular anxiety attacks. Okay maybe not an actual anxiety attack—but what do I call my heart soaring off the ritcher scale and my hands slightly shaking just because I am looking at the three story building. The building looms before me and seems to grow bigger as I approach. Even its blue and magnolia coat of paint and professional flower hedges that surround it dims its foreboding appeal to me.

I inhale deeply again. So this is a popular well known self-helping therapy to calm down nerves. Its circular medicine- it should work. Close your eyes, breathe in and out repeatedly for about—is it five minutes? – Then open your eyes and face the giant. Or to be more precise a giant monster building I am going to be slaving away all year.

Ugh! This is ridiculous- I of all people don't need anyone to tell me that circular health advices never worked. I fixed my tote bag on my shoulder and pushed my glasses over the bridge of my nose. No I don't have an eye problem, but the fake black rimmed eye glasses are part of my new look. And that is nothing fancy.

I can do this- nothing is ever going to change if I stand here looking like I am about to run for the hills. I look at myself in my mind and I consider that as my wild mind. I should run for the hills!

I force my feet forward, nerves wretch in the pit of my stomach like spades of hell as I stride towards the campus. The college banner comes to my eye sight and my stomach turns even harder.

The gates almost make me cringe as I approach them. It makes it all a reality and I hate reality.

The campus isn't small or big it's just average for a place that costs nine thousand pula per semester.

'Here goes nothing!' I mutter under my breath and I force myself forward. It shouldn't be that hard.

A small group of students or teachers are by the entrance, I can't be sure—they all look grown up and are dressed like professionals. I keep my head down as I march past them and their lively conversation. It's Monday, so I guess they are talking about the weekend. Some normal people have exciting stories from the weekend and some of us come from it running like a bat out of hell.

Crowds make me nervous, or just people in particular and I also have a new life mission to be invisible to go with my new look.

It all came down to this after my whole life turned upside down and I stayed two years trying to figure out exactly what happened. It was father who finally decided that I had figured it out for long enough and it was time to go on with my life.

I don't even want to know how he pulled off getting me enrolled into college in the first place to finish a degree program I started two years ago—

Whatever he did, is the reason why I am here right now looking for the HOD's office.

I manage to walk past the buoyant group and I am inside the building, feeling a little double headed as I walk down the corridor with my papers in hand. A few people cast glances at me in the hallway and I make sure not to meet anyone's eyes. I feel like it's written all over my face; where I am coming from.

Pastor Luke said we should all learn to control our thoughts and how we perceived things. I recall the Sunday sermon. Good point, but I don't see how that helps someone like me. Not that anyone over there would know

The Church had a huge congregation, a kind of crowd I could easily disappear in and never be known. But the man had some weird habit of recognizing anyone in that church. Nowhere to hide there

But I could hide here. No one to look at me. No one to see my existence and no one to know of my presence.

This is my new life mission. To be invisible. Because I have concluded that the ultimate conclusion to having seen one of life's most rare horrors is to become invisible among mankind. That's a unique trait at least.

And I do almost manage to remain unnoticed most of the time in my life. Even at home. I simply know how to become the background. You know the back ground that fades when one is admiring the real object of a painting, yes that's me. The fading back ground.

My family is big. I have one sibling, my older brother who I'm still trying to figure out if he is really a child in the house or another parent. He is so bossy and domineering like father. But its father's nature to be domineering, he is just playing his role—what of brother? Maybe he is just learning how to become father when the time comes and I would gladly say woe betide any poor soul that's going to find itself under the life learned comradeship.

My aunt lives with us as well with my uncle; her husband. They have four sons, same age as brother. That makes the house full and very much alive. Uncle and father never get along. The tension is always there in the house. They both had this alpha male thing going on for both of

them and some brother love-hate relationship that cannot be healthy for any human being who is nearby.

Thankfully, aunt and mother never quarrel. But it's not like the opposite sex have got any say in that house

Seriously who agreed to the painful living arrangement? They've been arguing and been at each other's throat for years. The solution is simple—each family should live on their own. Why can't anyone see things from my point of view?

I find myself in front of the HOD's office. I take a deep breath. Oh boy I am so nervous. What is the need? This is a business transaction. I give them money, they educate me. It's a win/win. No one holds the authority there.

'Come in.' a muffled female voice calls from inside. I want to groan. The HOD is a woman. Just great. I glance at my clothes one last time.

Jeans, sandals and an oversized t-shirt I found on a sale the other day. Perfect not-drawing attention look. My just recently relaxed hair is in a bun. Perfect

I push the door open and I step inside. Typical small college institution office complete with shelves of large dated files and a stern faced light skinned woman behind a medium sized desk wither sharp gaze on her computer screen.

I read her name on the name tag by the desk, even her name is intimidating

Crap! She is the exact type of person I try to avoid any time of day. Her head is cut short and she is elderly as well.

She fell into the category I know so well. No I am not stereotyping anyone here. But it wouldn't be wrong of me if certain people looked alike and behaved the same way and I simply place them in a certain cliché for easy identification and future reference of "people I must avoid 101"

'Good morning.' I stammer.

Her gaze makes me feel like shrinking, 'may I help you?'

I hand her my student form and wait as she runs her eyes on it and a familiar distaste comes on her features.

Yeah apparently Zimbabweans and Batswana got off on the wrong foot somewhere in history and now this. And it didn't help that they all thought that if a person is light skinned or good looking he/she cannot be a foreigner. It's a circular psychological law.

'You know everything you need?'

I answer her with a jerky nod and a tight smile which is not returned.

'Good then enjoy your schooling here.'

'Thank you!' I mumble, glad to finally escape from the office.

I march down the hall to my first class. The classroom is just as I expect. I find a desk at the back of the class and I occupy it making sure I have a don't-disturb-me expression. It's all part of my new life mission.

Invisible, invisible, invisible.

Mission accomplished! Wild mind does a happy dance because days go in a blur and I have managed to disappear in the crowd. My life has picked up a routine again, something

normal after two years. Not that people are not aware of my existence but I guess I just learned the secret art of diverting the attention of humans away from me.

All I have to do is get good grades, not get into trouble and this will all be over. Not that I had any idea what I was doing or rather why I was doing it. Why am I studying what I'm studying? Those are hard questions for me. I feel so hollow and gone deep down inside I feel as though my life has lost substance.

It feels like I died and returned as a new person altogether. Like some transformation took place—the memory come to me is slides. Camp fire, river, screams, the jail cell door being shut before my teary eyes. And lastly that devilish grin and wild cruel eyes flashing at me. Yeah I died and I'm not sure who this me is right now

But I guess if you are still breathing, you have to just keep on living. Why do I even still feel anything at all? I shake away the gory thoughts from my head as I march towards the school gates.

Man those gates never cease to spook me. I feel a relief as I finally walk past them. I take out my phone and headsets. Soon music is blasting in my ears as I decrease my pace to a stroll past the lot.

I have to endure this, just—how many months till I graduate? Or I will be sent to the village and my aunt who is my same age will come and take my place. That was the threat Father used to get me out of my phase.

I am not an uptown girl but being dumped in that village my whole life was not very flowery. I may feel hollow and lost but still—

I decide to concentrate on the next song that is playing. It's a Spanish worship song I love so much. Sometimes I wonder if God remembers my existence at all. Or this new me is completely veiled from His sight? I scowl at the thought, but the song is so soothing it brings a slow smile to my face. I even close my eyes and tilt my head upwards.

The hot Botswana summer sun heats my skin and makes my face to prickle. I open my eyes and gaze at the clear bay blue sky. It seems to go on like a depthless blue almost white blanket. I wonder if heaven is above it or under it.

I close my eyes again and a ridiculous grin comes on my face as I begin to think about angels. My imagination is riot.

I slip on my own feet and before I know it I have landed hard on the ground with my bum while the singer in my ears reaches a high pitched note where the song is about to end. It all blends well with the hot sun, my sore bum and the thoughts that come flooding in my mind that very second.

I wince at the discomfort. But I don't hear any roar of laughter. I suppose not many people have witnessed this. Now I have done it—I have created an interesting reputation for myself. Not that I already didn't have one but I just didn't want clumsy to the list.

The moment you are viewed as clumsy, you are a magnet for bullying bad trouble and I will have to change my game plan to stay a loner in this school!

I bite down on my lip as I fix my tote bag on my shoulder before I slowly open my eyes. A shadow looms above me, shielding me from the scorching sun. Now unless a tree walked to give me shade in the middle of the parking lot that can only be a person who is stretching out his hands to me right now.

Grunting under my breath from pain and also embarrassment I wrenched the headsets from my ears and in seconds I have stuffed them in my bag and I'm on my feet. Of course I ignore the person trying to help me up. Just trying to be a gentleman maybe. But I am too infuriated at the fact that I just tripped on nothing and fell just like that and yes I feel like beating the crap out of that nothing.

'Are you okay?' he asks as I am dusting my jeans. At least the oversized t-shirt I am wearing which is equivalent to a dress on me is the one with dust on it not my jeans. I can easily tuck it or something and problem solved. I'm about to do just that when I notice that the person talking to me who hasn't vanished yet is still there waiting for me to say something.

My hands grab fistfuls of my shirt. What should I say? Thank you? Well he didn't do anything except prove that he was a sole witness to my clumsiness. How about go away?

I don't especially feel like being polite today.

I raise my eyes to look at him and they collide with dark brown eyes covered with even darker lashes are looking down at me in wonderment and I only blink in return. Maybe I have been in the sun for too long. I almost slap myself to check whether I am not hallucinating. He is just beautiful. The thought falls in my head and I wonder if I didn't fall and hit my head on the ground.

I close my eyes and give my head a little shake. To clear my head at least. Then I feel warm firm hands grip my arms. Both of them. My eyes fly open and I tense at the same time. A little concerned scowl make lines to appear on his brow, that's when I realise that I do feel a little dizzy.

'I'm fine.' I manage to say finally – more like telling myself. I don't want to go on and think about what could have possibly made me dizzy and had this stranger hold me from falling on my face.

He narrows his eyes, peering at me—leaning closer I think and I catch a delicious warm scent. I actually close my eyes to inhale deeply before I catch myself. Fresh laundry I decide. With a spicy tang and something warm and—

I suddenly snap to reality and kicking the woozy spell away in an instant. What the hell am I doing? Why is he looking at me like that? He doesn't know I was inhaling him does he?

I tag my arms from his hold. He lets go but is still towering over me. Well I'm five feet two and it seems like the rest of the population I come into beat that record and I always have to look up at most people anyway.

I take a backward step and with a little head bow I manage to say, 'thank you!'

Yeah I've watched too many Korean Dramas because I almost do the full bowing thing and dash off. I should leave but my feet seem to not be cooperating

A small smile appears on his lips—just small but oh swoon!

'Are you sure?'

No I am not okay. The administrative department of my mind is running all over the place trying to locate and restore order. My logic, sense, heart, emotions and wild mind are in dire confusion and I can only stare speechlessly at the moment.

So I manage a jerky nod, pressing my lips together before I blurt out one of my running thoughts. Like is that hair afro or curly? Either way it has golden brown highlights under the sun,

my finger actually twitch to touch it. Just to know whether it's silky or coarse. I settle for silky because that would be a more satisfying feeling.

I mentally slap myself. What the hell? I need to get out of here.

'Come, we'll get you some water.' His voice breaks into my reverie again, 'the heat wave is extreme today.'

Heat wave? Oh yeah the global warming thing and damaged ozone layer climatic issues.

My feet finally start to move and I'm about to decline his water offer and make a run for it when I dizzy spell hits me again. I stagger sideways and I reach out my hands to find something to steady myself with. Of course the only stable thing around is the poor guy whose skin I am now clawing my fingers into as the dizziness tapper off slowly giving a minor introduction to an incoming head ache.

'Steady there, I got you.'

I look up suddenly because his voice is so close. And yes of course I am the one holding his arms now after having forced myself into his embrace. Right now I am captivated by his moving lips. They look so soft. I wonder if--

I shake my head and I try to draw away from him but he holds me still.

'Come—my car is just here—you need to get out of the sun.'

He moves me to god knows where as I am still trying to locate back my senses and equilibrium. It when I see him open the car door and easing me inside that I begin to get myself a little.

I close my eyes at rest my head against the car seat as he close the door and comes to sit on the driver's seat.

'Here!' I feel something cool in my hands. I sit up straight and I open my eyes. It's a water bottle and he has opened it for me. I bring the bottle to my mouth and I feel myself relax a little as the water enters my system. Gee I had no idea that I was this dehydrated.

I can't help by sigh contentedly because a small container of water has just kicked away my sudden sickness.

'Feeling better?'

I glance at him with a smile, 'yes,' my sanity has returned now, 'thank you.'

'Don't mention it.' He smiles back, 'I'm Taylor.'

My brain companions scribble the name down furiously for future reference while I do the only thing that a not so normal person like me does. I look at his hand like it could be dangerous for my existence. I am serious about my mission to be invisible so much that I have become a loner and I don't remember how to navigate a handshake.

That theory is proven because I accept his handshake with a polite smile and sealed lips. He chuckles under his breath

'What do they call you?'

My heart skips. He just wants to put a name to my face. Yeah the clumsiest girl he has ever seen? Oh for Pete's sake it's just a normal introduction procedure. He gave you his name and you should give him yours. My sensible-self rolls her eyes at me.

'Heather!' I stammer, 'and thank you again.'

That is my mental signature to leave right this moment. But I just stare at him as he takes a sip of his water. Why is that fascinating? I bite down on my lip. What happened to my life

motto of invisibility? It doesn't help anything that I am here admiring the person right now. He closes the cap back on his bottle and he turns to meet my gaze before I have time to talk myself out of staring.

A small smile tugs at the corners of his lips and I feel heat going to my face under that steady gaze. And it happens again. My mind goes into confusion.

I clear my throat, 'uhmn—I—I have to go.' I manage in a low choky voice, 'I have classes.'

He glances at his wrist watch, 'classes don't start in thirty minutes. You can sit here until then.'

I shake my head, 'I have a thing before classes.'

He narrows his eyes, 'you want to go back out there after the heat wave effect you just had?'

I do still feel a little fuzzy but I'd rather sit in a room somewhere where I am able to put two coherent thoughts together.

'I feel fine,' at least I'm no longer stammering. 'Thanks to you.'

'It was my pleasure.'

I just flash a smile pushing my glasses over my nose and he follows that movement with his eyes before they settle back on my mouth. The impact of that look makes me bite down on my lip preparing to dash out and his lips fall open a little while his eyes rise to meet mine.

My heart is thudding loud in my chest bordering towards breathing problems I think because my breathing hitches and I take a deep breath to catch myself just as he slowly looks away with a ghostly smile on his lips.

What is wrong with me all of a sudden?

I finally get to action. My shaky hand opens the door and I think I mumble another thank you before I jump out of his car and almost do a victory dance when I'm out. I place a hand over my thudding heart. That person cannot be healthy for my existence. So I do the only thing I can. I walk as far from his car as possible towards the school building.

The day drags on as usual. Lectures, on-line classes. Boring slides and teachers with attitudes. Lunch then arrives and I sit under a huge thorn tree with music blasting in my ears. I am munching an apple. It's Friday, and the thought of facing the weekend steals my appetite like it always does. I hate Saturdays. Okay maybe let me clear the injustice of unreasonable hate for a day that I never commanded to exist. Saturdays at my house is a nightmare. Everyone is around. Like they don't have weekend plans or something. With so much people living at home I feel like I am running a restaurant doing all the cooking and serving. And don't even get me started on the number of visitors that drop by as if they have nothing to do with themselves in their own homes on a week end.

By the time the final class for Business Ethics arrives I am severely depressed about Saturday. I sit in my usual spot in the back- invisible to the whole class population, pushing my fake glasses over the bridge of my nose and gaze absently at the front of the class.

Our business ethics lecturer recently took a leave, some unplanned pregnancy. And no she didn't announce it to the whole world, I just figured it out. I sometimes wonder whether I

was one of those babies that popped out of nowhere and turn all life plans around. It sure as hell feels like it sometimes.

The door opens and in strides a tall gentleman with his back to the class he picks up a whiteboard marker and inscribes his name on the white board

‘Mr. Phatshimo’

‘Oh my gosh.’ One girl in front of me whispers to the other, ‘that’s him,

‘Are you sure?’

‘Wait till he turns around—we are so lucky to have business ethics this semester—too bad he is only a temporary lecturer.’

Okay so the new ‘Mr. Phatshimo’ already has a five stars among the female population. This is going to be an interesting six months, or however long the professor makes her leave.

Then he turns to face the class and I am not the only one who gasps. But not for the same reasons.

Wild faints on the floor with her hand on her forehead. How will the universe explain to me why the man I supposedly y ran away from and hoped to never see again was my new business ethics lecturer?

‘Alright!’ he says loud enough to silence the hushed whispers that were echoing in the class.

Good grief- if I’d known that he was a teacher I would have been a little bit civil with him earlier. And it’s not as if I can just hope he won’t recognize me I am very much easy to pick out in a crowd.

I duck my head, stared at the uninteresting desk where my hands are neatly folded. I go over the conversation and interaction I had with him. I cringe at everything. Crap!

I probably just assumed that he was hitting on me. Small brained that I am. Why would he hit on me, the man was simply beautiful, alluring. The picture of any girl’s best fantasies. I am just me and my small uninteresting self with glasses and a strain of clumsiness.

I snap back to the present when people chuckle all around.

‘most of our classes are going to be group work because this module requires a lot of analysis and discussion and on a more personal note because it makes my life easier than to have to deal with all of you individually.’

Either he is a slave to making bad jokes or he is a serious addict to bluntness.

‘Now look at the person next to you.’

I looked at the window before I turn to my fellow back seat neighbor, he is the loquacious dreadlocks guy who probably believes he got the whole Rasta culture figured out. At least he decided against keeping a beard.

He tried vogueish moves on me the first days when he assumed that I could be a fellow rebel. Not that I knew for a fact that he was a rebel but I could somehow smell it on him. He even tried bullying and gave up when I showed him my best don’t you mess with me attitude.

When our eyes meet his face twists into a cheesy grin, I give him my most menacing glare and look away.

‘That will be your partner for the first assignment.’ Mr. Phatshimo finishes and my jaw drops open. Are you freaking kidding me?

The guy, what his name by the way anyway? Looks horrified, mirroring my expression.

‘Can’t we choose our own partners?’ a girl almost wails and I want to wail along with her
‘no- the idea is to create teamwork and teamwork is usually with people you naturally don’t pick for yourselves, you better all take this exercise seriously because it’s going to add up on your end of semester results.’ He continues to announce smoothly as he moves through the desk aisle placing sheets of paper on each table after he assesses who is partnered to who.

Teamwork? Wild scoffs with an unlady like sneer on her face, I hate teamwork, I like me alone work in fact I work better alone. And if I did have to endure teamwork why did it have to be with Rastafarian?

As if that is not enough, Mr. Phatshimo places the paper on Rastafarian’s desk and moves on as if he just didn’t ruin my entire school life.

The class ends and all people begin to file out. Rastafarian grabs the sheet and marches out of the classroom.

Urgh!—I lift my tote bag and March after him. The guy walks in such impressive long strides for his possibly five feet two height.

‘Collins!’ I suddenly remember his name. He glances behind him and stop. An impish smile spreads across his face. The devil himself in a small body.

‘Heather! He drawls my name in a slow sultry smug way like the stupid devil that he is

‘You seem to be in some kind of hurry and I need to see the assignment you just took off with you.’

He arcs an eyebrow upward, ‘you actually think I’m going to work with you?’

Of course not, who works with the devil knowingly in broad day light?

‘no.’ I reply calmly, ‘but we have to make it seem like we worked together—so can I see the assignment?’

A lopsided grin follows- hyena- the word quickly falls into my head and wild nods in approval. Maybe he is the reason why we still have to study evolution and the Stone Age, since he seem to have in some way inherited the genes.

Okay. I am losing it—I am getting annoyed.

‘How badly do you want it?’

I narrow my eyes at him, ‘excuse me?’

‘Tell me how badly you want it.’

Is he trying to pull off the confident control freak attitude with me?

‘Just give me the paper Collin!’

‘Just like that?’ he scoffs, ‘you have to be kidding.’

The stupid teamwork assignment just gave this idiot some power to tease me with, if that teacher didn’t have a lesson planned why didn’t he just say his name and leave the class?

‘But I can give you.’ He breaks into my angry reverie, ‘we can go out and work on it together maybe over a candle light dinner and slow music.’ He bites his lip.

Oh my gosh shoot me now

‘What?’ I mutter slowly with a dangerously low voice.

‘Don’t you get the picture? I want us to go out.’

I clench my fists and glare at him, ‘are you mad? You think I am desperate for that stupid group assignment?’

You are! Wild raises an eyebrow at me

‘don’t push me Collin or I will pull those dread locks one by one before I shove them down your throat,’ I growl, ‘now hand it over.’

Collin nods slowly, either he is terrified, like I hope he is because if he is seeing me like a funny small angry girl I don’t have a plan B. He pulls the folded paper from his pocket and hands it to me. I snatch the paper from his hand and March on in long angry strides. I probably look like Tom from the Tom and Jerry cartoon and I don’t care,

Even tiny mice hold their own sometimes. My annoyance subsides slowly as I reach the parking lot. I sigh, of all the things that the freak could have teased with – I would have even said please if he had suggested it but date? Oh boy he poked the wrong beehive.

‘Heather.’

Who else knows me in this school to call me in the middle of the parking lot? He couldn’t have followed me did he? Doesn’t he have anything else to do? Wash his dreads maybe!

I raise my head and meet dark brown eyes, a dazzling smile and that wonderful smell. Fresh laundry! I blink to clear my head and—did I just run into him again?

What is he? The next episode of my worst days ever?

‘Hop in I will give you a ride.’

I blink at him again, ‘huh?—uh – oh no thank you Mr. Phatshimo.’

‘I insist!’

I push my glasses over the bridge of my nose, ‘no its okay I live close by.’

‘Mogoditshane is that close by?’

How did he—?

I blink again. ‘No of course not,’ getting annoyed, ‘I don’t want you to give me a lift.’ Seriously wasn’t he supposed to be my teacher or something?

‘Why not.’

I raise my eyebrows, ‘well first of all you are a stranger and secondly I don’t want inappropriate rumors with my face on it.’

‘alright, then I suppose we have to know each other a little better and as for your second concern no one cares here.’

‘I do and that mean somebody does—have a good day.’ I brush past him

‘It’s Taylor!’ he calls out after me

Chapter Two

Betrayal is like a virus. It can be tamed and silenced but it has no cure. The youth pastor keep telling us that God can cure anything. I’ve seen firsthand the cure he spoke of, deadly diseases, broken bones, and people changing instantly. Seriously something massive is going on in that church that God I assume doesn’t want me to be a part of. Because despite seeing and hearing all these things, I still can’t believe enough that God wants anything to do with my life story.

Bad memories do not have a cure. To be more precise, my memories do not have a cure.

‘You should come to the hike this weekend.’ Judith says as she pushed my books aside to sit with me on the bed, ‘all the church youth will be there and pastor Luke says that it’s a spiritual journey.

I don’t want to go for the hike- though I do like hiking. No I fantasize it on my better days. But I don’t want to physically do it. The last time I was in a jungle all hell broke loose.

‘I have weekend classes.’

‘Oh come on.’ Judith rolls her eyes, ‘all college and no fun makes you a dull person.’

‘That’s not how the saying goes,’ I arc an eyebrow upwards, ‘and besides you know I can’t get away on Saturdays—I run a diner here.’

‘You are the one who worries that all these people will starve to death without you.

Like she ever lived here before, wild mutters grudgingly

And I’d rather survive the Saturday craziness than hike. If only Judith knew- she would stop pressing the issue on me. And the spiritual journey? Wild scoffs loudly folding her arms— why bother?

‘Please!’ Judith does the puppy face

I groan, no it’s not cute it looks terrifying, ‘I will think about it.’

She grins triumphantly, ‘still better than a no. so when you decide- you text me and I will come and get you okay?’

I nod with a taut smile. Sometimes I wonder where Judith get all that energy from, I felt tired just by the thought of facing another day. I don’t know why she is still my friend. Well maybe friend is a little bit exaggerated—Pastor Luke put us together as prayer partners.

When Judith leaves I start on the business ethics group assignment. I remember the look on Collin’s face when I threatened him and I laugh mirthlessly to myself. The freak had it coming!

It is said that two work better than one—yeah even though the end result is disastrous, but I still like working alone the best. And there is no way in heaven am I going to work with Collin. Normally I would try to appeal to his better nature and get this work done. But not anymore—maybe there is no better side to naturally evil people. I had decided long time ago

Father is the typical traditional type of person. Sometimes I wildly believe that he may have accidentally teleported from the 1800s. He still believes the whole women had different roles than men thing and that it is a waste of energy to send a girl child to school. So I guess he grudgingly educated me my whole life, not that I am complaining.

Mother and aunt had to negotiate for half of their lives-well I suppose- before they could try to find ways to earn money for themselves or something like that. They asked father and uncle’s opinions before doing anything. It still does make any sense to me. Or perhaps they all teleported from historic ear together where women only had children and satisfied their husbands.

In my point of view, marriage is a prison under lock and key. It almost seemed like being owned by someone ordering you around just because you are female.

My aunt often tells me that I am twisted by the TV and books I read. Maybe she is right and I can’t deny that I have thought problems or that my point of view differs from that of every other human being on planet earth!

The topic is a lot of dilemma to conclude so I drew out my own safe conclusion that could save me from the expected slavery

Don't get married! Period.

When I walk into the dining room on Saturday morning, father and older brother are having breakfast. Father has that look on his face. I was too farm illia with a look to know that he is about to make another painful announcement.

I greeted them and I sit down.

'Are you still going for the hike?' Father asks, mildly interested, I doubt the man ever hiked his whole life unless it was absolutely necessary because he was shocked I think when I explained that hiking is a hobby.

'Yes.' I reply.

'When will you be back?'

'Midday!'

'That's good.' His faces twists into a wide smile, 'we have a guest who will be with us tonight.' He turns to older brother, 'is Charles still coming?'

'Yes father, just as planned. 'Brother answered flashing a smile at me.

Who was Charles? Probably another relative, the weekend never passes without them. In fact there are so many I gave up keeping up with them.

'Great,' father beams, 'go and have fun, and we will all see you when you get back.'

My eyebrows nearly shoot up at my father. I've known father my whole life to understand that such level of enthusiasm means that he probably found another way to make very one's lives more complicated and miserable than they already are. Okay, maybe not literally but close enough.

Why did I agree to this again?

I'd pictured this outing a little differently, fresh air, hill top scenarios I wanted to act out like the scene I put in my head last night of my lovely self on the hilltop looking so lovely under the sun.

A stab of disappointment hit me when I observed reality. My face is itchy and sweaty, I'm not sure which part of my body is aching at the moment. Pastor Luke decides to draw a sermon and decides that sitting under the hot sun was the best way to deliver it.

'There is nothing that you are going through that no one has ever globe through—you are not alone. We endure knowing that at His appointed time God will come to our rescue.'

Why do I feel like he has been on this point for the past decade? What am I even doing here? I never hiked anymore since—my chest tightens as the memory threatens to come into my mind. I push it away. Thinking about that day here in the woods would do no good for me or for anyone.

Twenty four months was enough for me get over it wasn't it?

Screams, the ripple of the river

Raucous laughter

My name being called

A body floating in the river

My hands in my hair I scream, sinking to my knees

The cell door closing before my eyes and that dark triumphant evil smile.

I inhale sharply to snap out of my horror reverie only to see Pastor Luke gazing at me with concern on his face.

‘Heather are you okay?’

‘I’m fine,’ I reply quickly as I am still trying to recover myself but I can’t because I suddenly have trouble breathing. I need to calm down. The last thing I need is to end up on a counselling session with some stranger I don’t know trying to make me tell them my life story.

Of course they say that confession brought deliverance, I don’t think that would work for me. Not all proposed solutions work for the entire human race.

‘I get dizzy when I sit in the sun for too long.’ I lie.

Pastor Low nods and smiles weakly, ‘you need some water and a shade.’

‘Here’s water.’ Someone offers. The bottle is passed until it reaches me. I see everyone king of relax as I gulp in water and look more relaxed.

But I still notice a little worry and doubt on the pastor’s face. Thought he is diverting everyone’s attention from my predicament he obviously doesn’t believe that I have a rare sickness that requires me to stay out of the sun

It’s not as if I were a vampire.

‘Seriously are you okay?’ Judith asks me for the millionth time. I want to hide somewhere, almost all people from the group have already come to ask if I was okay? I wonder if they mean presently or my whole screwed up life.

‘I’m fine,’ I say as I relax into my seat.

‘I’m just worried,’ Judith sighs. ‘You looked like you were about to die back there.’

Crap, I guess I did look that bad. My bad memories are indeed horrifying and wasn’t it convenient that they had to show up during that time

‘I’m so tired,’ I mumble as I lean my head against my seat and close my eyes. Oh how I long for a slow soul song.

‘Heather.’ Judith taps me on the shoulder.

‘What?’ I say in a lazy do-not-disturb-me voice

‘Look who is here!’ she gasps.

‘Who?’ I just want to go home, I don’t care if angel Gabriel slipped off the grand heaven stairway and fell on earth with a thud,

‘It’s Evangelist Abiwu’s son.’

I want to roll my eyes. I don’t even know who that it. Between Christians and non-Christians, their trend of celebrities was a fine line between entertainment famous faces and prominent preachers. I still don’t get what the fuss is all about.

‘Evangelist who?’ I open my eyes to scowl at her

‘The Ghanaian evangelist who visited our church once.’

‘When was that?’

Judith looks so giddy. ‘Two years ago—but his son remained with our church for a time—I guess he’s still in Botswana after all.’

‘Oh, so what did he do?’

‘he was in the praise and worship team but left after his mother died--- we all thought he returned to live with his father in Ghana,’

‘Are you going to go and say hello?’ I raise an eyebrow at her

‘No, that would be awkward and I don’t want people to assume that I have carnal interests in him or something.’

I chuckle, ‘oh my god!’

I turn my head to look out the window. Just to see him so that I can remember him if Judith ever speak of him again. His back is at the minivan. He is talking with Pastor Luke who look very fond of him. Pastor Luke is fond of everyone. Pastor Luke seems a little confrontational and the man is laughing and nodding his head.

He’s definitely not here for a hike, I study his dark jeans and orange t-shirt. The orange color makes his light skin very appealing or it’s just that I have a weakness for that skin which reminds me of someone.

Some other guy from the choir comes out of the minivan and walks up to Ghananian with grin.

He swats Ghananian’s arm in a cheery greeting. Pastor Luke grins and Ghananian turns to the choir guy whose name I don’t remember at the moment with a ridiculous grin on his face. His brows shoot up his face in recognition and the two share a brief hug.

Wild appears and we both gap, dumbstruck. No way. No freaking way. Please tell me he has a twin brother or it just so happens that his exact look alike also lives in Botswana.

‘Is that him?’ I ask Judith beside me.

Judith turns to look at me than past me out the window,

‘Yes.’ She looks at me, ‘you know him?’

‘no.’ I lie. ‘He doesn’t look Ghanaian.’

‘His mother is a Motswana but he is a carbon copy of his father, except the light complexion, his mother was half white.’

Choir boy and Ghanaian are talking animatedly—displaying old friendship. I could already picture his life story. His mother dies, his father returns to his home Country and he leaves the church.

From the whispers that erupts inside the minivan, he was a beloved person and old friend.

‘Oh my God, he is coming here!’ Judith gasps

I snap out of my thoughts and my eyes looks out just his last foot is entering the minivan.

Everyone greeted him animatedly as soon as he steps inside. Even Judith stood and walked to give him a long lecture like greeting. I remain in my seat and I take out my phone just to maintain my sanity and half hoping that he won’t even native my existence.

‘Join us for lunch!’ pastor Luke insists

NO!

‘Sure.’ ‘Great, you can have this seat here.’

Either my peripheral vision is playing tricks on me or is Pastor Luke pointing at the empty seat beside me? Where on earth did Judith vanish to?

I want to keep staring at my phone because my heart is suddenly doing somersaults inside me. A lump comes to my throat and my palms start to sweat.

He comes to sink in the seat beside me

Crap!

He turns to look at me the same time I decide to stop pretending to poke at my phone. My eyes meet dark brown gaze and my heart starts to pump faster than it necessary. I can't help myself and he is this close. There is a brief moment when it feel like the world has paused and has matched the pace of my beating heart. He is surprised to see me then his face smoothens to a neutral expression

'Heather!' the way his eyes sweeps me makes me very self-conscious and I feel heat going to my face. Maybe he is the weird person because I don't feel like this when any other person looks at me. And also now I know why his voice is nice. He is a singer

'Taylor.' I say kicking my wild thoughts away with a taut smile. My wild mind grimaces in disappointment.

'It's good you decided to drop the formalities.'

I purse my lips, - I am annoyed, his existence is ruining my mental health. Wild nods in agreement.

'We are not in school.' I mumble and gaze out the window. I can feel his eyes on me. That makes me even more annoyed because I am dusty, sweaty and almost insane and he is sitting there all dashing and smelling like fresh laundry.

'You are a church girl!'

I turn to look at him with raised eyebrows, what does that even mean.

'Excuse me?'

'That explains your behavior the last time we met, but not quite.'

I blink at him, 'are you always this straight forward?'

'Yes.' He answers simply

I press my lips together depreciatively, 'why is that a thing?' I mumble to myself

He narrows his eyes at me. 'Do I annoy you or are you basically just annoyed with everyone?'

Everyone? Well I wouldn't know. I am anti-social to some degree and as for him, I can't describe my present predicament as annoyance but I do want to run from him like he was the plague.

'Yes.' I say breathing out. Because it's suddenly so hot in here. Did someone forget to turn on the air conditioning? And can't he look elsewhere other than my face

'You don't even know me.'

'Neither do you!'

'I am willing to try.'

I meet his gaze, 'why?'

'Because I think you are attractive and I know you think I am as well.'

I blink and I'm not sure whether to laugh or to scoff. So I just lift my phone and start to poke at the screen in order to ignore him. So he is hitting on me after all, has he gone mad? Doesn't he have eyes? Oh he does—dark captive brown.

He chuckles under his breath before he takes my phone from my hands and start to navigate it as if it was his.

'What are you doing?' I ask as if I haven't figured out that he is saving a number in my phone. I should keep a security pattern on the thing but father was hell bend on invading my privacy like it was his favorite past time in the world.

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