

Beyeni Da

## A light switch goes off

There were many others. There was the one who held him when in a sea of concreteness, he seemed afloat, very much like a waterproof tossed by a breeze. She was light-skinned and fine boned. Her name as exotic as the alien in the midst of mundane. She called herself Quinta and what thrilled him so much about her was the slim thigh ever present in the short plaited skirts and blonde wig. They called her *pom-pom girl*. She was a status symbol. She qualified as the anchor in an educational milieu where no one cared for nobody but were constantly in each other's business, their snouts tossing uncontrollably in the dirt, chewing the cud of rumour such that a news fled at the utmost variation of whisper and engulfed the whole campus in a heat wave. There was no real affinity between them. There couldn't have been. The love was choked by anxiety and depression and a need to protect one another from rumour such that any expression of affection on campus was stymied, expressed only either in secret, or as stolen glances and quick hand-holding.

There was also Yohanna. Yohanna had no need for anybody. She was probably a narcissist. The only reason she even gave a damn was because the boy was the most attractive face to have ever graced school campus. His nose was short and surprisingly sleek. Possessed of a bedroom countenance, his eyes sloped enchantingly at both ends such that even Cleopatra could not boast better cat eyes. They were a tantalizing shade of blue. His lips, oh dear God. His lips were full and soft, and very, very pink. A blood pink that was not quite red. He was handsome in the extreme.

Jessica. His only sweetness. Jessica is the only one who ever loved him. Of all the others. She, only she was bold enough to give herself to him. Dear Jessica. She suffered a heartbreak when he left. He fled in her life. She came to him. They found each other. I shall say nothing of heart ache and I shall say nothing of the long distance, but of love and of the expression of intense sexual attraction, I shall say a few words. Forgive me, I am privy to details but I have no idea if you know what I am talking about. Jessica was a beauty queen that was for damn straight. She loved him with a sweet, delicate love. She loved to listen to him talk, she soothed him with her mouth, she kissed his tummy. She danced for him, she stripped for him, she was brazen in conduct for him. With him, there was little restriction. She took him on emotional roller coasters. He did things with her that he never would have done, never had done since then till now.

Her scent was strangely erotic. He was his true self with her and Oh Lord the beauty of her backside deserves at least 50 pages and that is for her back side only but let us not get stuck describing obscenities.

Jessica loved him abundantly such that the love spilled from her to her cousins and all her family such that the boy was a guest of honour in the midst of them, and nothing was ever held back from his majesty. He visited often; in the nights, throughout the day. They received him regularly, Jessica and her family did. She said she preferred to be called Pragma. The boy conceded. He could have done anything for Jessica...for Pragma. You could see electric shafts in connection with their gazes every time they met. It was a love that would last forever, Jessica swore. They could never tire of each other, Jessica declared.

In came Jessica's elder cousin from Paris. Have I mentioned already the city they lived in? No matter.

The cousin was Laets. She was more sophisticated and she spoke French with an accent that was upper class Parisian. Now, I shall recount the tale of how the boy came to know Jessica Pragma. In the beginning it happened thus:

The boy was not a pauper. He was connected with royalty. He lived in a mansion with extended family. After tiring of routine living with both Quinta and Yohanna, he registered on social media 'to extend his acquaintances with socially exposed people. I like the way they express things.' In less than a month, he had amassed a great crowd online. His beauty made him 'the catch.' Jessica contacted him online, they begun talking. Jessica came to visit. She was undone with the beauty in his stare and his composure when he looked

at you, a composure that might have been intimidating only that it was tampered by a wry, playful smile... 'a delicious smile that offered' is the way she put it dreamily to her cousins. In time, when he had associated with her deep enough, she introduced him to her cousins living in Paris. Life was good.

When Laets got into the country, Jessica took her to see the boy. They hired a taxi for the whole day, cruising the city, looking at mountains, exchanging stares, loving life. This was routine. Two days binge cruising, one day's rest, then repeat. Like clock-work.

On the final day of her stay in the country, they invited him to the mansion. Laets laid siege to him. It was normal. She was leaving soon, she would not see him again and oh, how she would miss his laugh and his eyes as they crinkled, and the strength in his arms when she pretended to fall so that he would grab her and she would pretend to fall even further and the heroic boy would grab her tighter. Whether Jessica saw all this, nobody knows... Now Laets was crying.

"I will miss you very, very much bébé," sobbed she. She loved to call him *bébé* or *chéri* in true francophone fashion. The boy said nothing. There was nothing to say. It was all ephemeral. Things came around. He tried to explain to her about laws of motion.

"What goes around comes back around," said he, but she would have none of that.

She flew to the bathroom in a hurry, leaving the other guests to their own care, not that they cared. Drinks were free as was the food, and both were in free fall, abundant. The boy flew with her to the bathroom! He was a hero! He met her staring into the mirror, her mascara a mess. He approached slowly and placed his palm on her left shoulder.

*"Mon chéri tu vas beaucoup, beaucoup me manquer."*

*"It is nothing. The night is still young."*

Suddenly, Laets felt a headache. "I need to lie down."

The boy guided her to a bedroom. She pulled him in and shut the lights. The key turned twice in the lock. They were absent for the rest of the party.

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Now, there was nobody. Jessica had found out. Laets sustained a pang of conscience and blew the affair out of the water. The boy was still handsome but he had developed a reputation. He was older now, less exuberant, more in control. He had finished school. He had held jobs. Presently, he had a job as marketing manager but despite all this...despite all this, there was still an old wound like a bruise that wouldn't heal.

What if he had blown the opportunity at true love with all the girls in the past? That was his foremost question. It pricked him. It ate at him. He avoided forming new relationships. He broke it off before it even got anywhere. He had few friends, mostly male. He preferred to hang out with the older guys and talk shop, then go gaming with few contemporaries. There was never a girl in his life. Not even a single one. Every night he went to sleep, chronicling the day in his mind. It was always perfect, always picturesque. You never got the sense of anything wrong. His phone rang less and less. There were no early morning texts nor late night discussions reaching far into the night.

“What if I have blown all my opportunities of finding real love in the past?”

The question drove him. It beat down on him. It rained in his subconscious in torrents, like in the time of the flood. Soon, he was restless from it. He tried denial, he tried projection. He tried sublimation. The sublimation worked but it only served to occupy him in the meantime. The next moment he met a girl in passing or was introduced to one by friends and family, he froze. There was no way past the first few weeks in his head. He knew how it would play out. They would talk for a week, then go out on 'outings' where they would decide compatibility, then they would cohabit and then...what? He always drew a blank. Always, always! There seemed no point to interaction and he retreated even further into his shell, becoming a shadow of he who had been.

The girls flooded him though. Some overtly, others not as overtly though they always showed him they could be interested.

His career skyrocketed and he became the immediate centre of attention soon as he walked in a room. Soon, he cut down on his circle of male friends, choosing only one or two very close with whom he had special

interests. He turned to a recluse. Nothing interested him anymore. Sleep eluded him. God, it seemed, had abandoned him to his own fate; of loneliness, despite being a great beauty and very eligible. He was very wealthy and the older women loved to taunt him:

“I will give you to my eldest daughter. She is studying medicine in Canada. This is her final year.”

“Fine gentleman like this, why is he not yet hooked!”

“The girls these days they are only interested in their own selves.”

“Are you sure he is not...you know, like in a society or something?”

“Maybe he is a eunuch.”

He avoided them. He made his own food and ate it himself. He presided over boards of directors and coming home, he turned in with a glass of hot drink and put on CNN. He donated to charity. He helped fund establishments. He became a household name. Many times, he met his old friends from school. They pretended like they did not see him. He loved to look at them for the longest time until they looked towards him and then he looked away. Sublimation helped. He took up kick-boxing and tai-chi. He learned chess. He played golf.

Recently, he was in a chauffeur driven Mercedes. A little girl was standing next to his parking space. Toot, toot, hooted the chauffeur. The little girl started, evidently in a panic which he struggled to suppress. In a flash, the boy was out of the back door. He reached her in four strides. Strides that were a trot. He knelt on one knee, regardless of his expensive slacks that most people could only google online. Her legs were shaking and there were tear streaks on her chubby face. Her hair was messy and there was chocolate on her cheek.

“Look at me baby,” he said cupping her face in his palms and lifting her eyes to meet his, his heart reaching out to her. She smiled a toothy smile and he laughed.

“Where is your mother?” he asked gently, inhaling the fragrance of her hair. “Where is she?” The little girl looked around, seeming lost. “Let’s get to your mother okay?”

He took her hand and started walking to the ice cream shop in the parking lot, a tall, light-skinned adonis in expensive garb and a little fairy princess in a light pink gown. They were a sight.

Out of nowhere, a voice raised in anger, a yell, strident, very loud. “LET GO OF MY DAUGHTER YOU CREEP!”

“My name...I did not do...I simply,” he tried to explain with pressurized speech.

“I don’t care,” yelled back the woman looking into his face fully. She was very angry. The little girl started to cry. She took away her daughter and stalked away. The little girl spared back a glance and waved once and bounced along with her mother who was juggling bags on her arms while answering a phone call and pressing another phone.

He watched the scene for a minute then doubled over in acute agony as though a blow had landed on his mid-section. Dejected, he took out his phone. There were still some numbers in his call log. Eligible women he had worked together with. Surely, he could suggest food and drinks and perhaps they might be up for it? The little girl had triggered something in him. A better late than never.

He placed a call. A warm feminine voice answered at the other end.

“How long has it been! My God, what a pleasant surprise!”

He smiled. “I was just going through my call log and saw your number and I was wondering if you might be busy...”

The voice grew quiet, then spoke again with maturity. “Where are you?”

He told her.

“Good,” said she. “I am fifteen minutes away with my girlfriends. I can see you after we finish here.”

He stammered a little. “L-like, like right away?”

“If you’d prefer. I am very much on the move so you can catch me if you really want to.”

“Sounds fine,” he said. “I’ll text you when i’m there.”

“Good.”

The Mercedes was waiting. So was the chauffeur. He got in and whispered a location. The chauffeur touched his cap and swung out of the parking lot.

The boy smiled. His name was Koyena and this was to be his first date in four years.