

0845

Tapiwa walked into the restaurant slowly, almost timidly, eyes darting everywhere, sweat trickling down his back. He walked to a vacant booth at the back and settled down. He was a full fifteen minutes early and he'd done it on purpose. He needed to get his nerves in check and not make a fool of himself. He scratched his clean shaved chin and tapped his waist subconsciously. The latter made him feel good and he suddenly calmed down. As if on cue, the door opened, jingling the little bell overhead. Tapiwa's head shot up and he saw her, scanning the room. She looked beautiful, good enough to eat even. Her hair flowed down to smooth shoulders that were exposed through a strapless blouse like a cascading waterfall of sparkling black, cupping her face and accentuating the subtle make up she wore. He beamed and waved, catching her eye. She smiled, walking over in quick assured strides and slipped into the booth opposite him. Her scent was intoxicating, she smelled of all the good things, lavender, strawberries, honey.

He extended a hand over the table, "Hy, I'm Tapiwa."

She gave a smile and took his hand, "I'm Jazmine. It's nice to meet you."

They settled into an awkward silence then, each unsure of what to say next. A waiter, his tag said George, came by and they both poured coffees from the pot he held. It tasted good.

Tapiwa set his cup down, "Whoever knew beautiful women still used dating apps?"

0730

Jazmine looked at herself in the mirror and smiled, flashing sparkling white teeth and dancing almond eyes. She brought a hand to the crow's feet that were slowly marking up the corners of her eyes and sighed with resignation. She was an attractive woman but she was getting old. At forty-five, she had achieved everything, with the possibility of more. First female and youngest ever DA by thirty-five, an aggressive public prosecutor preceding that and now a clear pathway to the provincial office. Despite the achievements, the money, the power, she was empty. A nasty divorce in her early twenties, a string of dismal relationships and basically no social life meant she was married to her work. And she resented it. She wanted to be loved, to love. She wasn't getting any younger and the nights were definitely getting colder with each subsequent year. That's why she was doing it, it was against all her principles, she was more of an optimist, a believer in "if it's meant to be it'll be" but she'd realized she was waiting on a train that would never come.

Her phone rang.

"Morning ma'am. We still haven't found him but we're working around the clock. I'd feel better about this whole thing if you had that security detail we offered ."

Jazmine sighed, "Thank you commissioner, but I think there's nothing to be afraid of."

0910

At the waiters' station, George spoke to another waiter, "I'm sure man, I can't be wrong. Go check if you think I'm lying."

The waiter shrugged, "I don't think it's him man, I saw the mugshot on TV."

George swore under his breath and took out his phone, "I'm still doing this just to be safe."

He dialed 911 and put the phone to his ear.

"911, what's your emergency?"

0930

Jazmine was having the time of her life. She was glad she'd come. Tapiwa was an absolute charmer, he made her laugh genuinely and could hold an actual conversation and keep her intrigued. But there was something a bit off about him, the smile didn't quite reach his eyes, they were dead eyes, cold and devoid of life. And he looked strangely familiar too. Her maternal instincts figured he was a kindred spirit, lost and alone, starved of love and care. All she wanted to do was pull him to her bosom and tell him they'd found each other.

Tapiwa sat forward and entwined his fingers on the table, "So you don't recognize me?"

Jazmine sat back and shrugged politely, "Well, I don't know..."

Tapiwa smiled again, that dead smile of his and sat back, taking his hands off the table.

"Last time you saw me I had a full beard and my hands were in irons."

Everything suddenly fell into place, Jazmine knew why Tapiwa looked so familiar. She'd been lead prosecutor on his murder case ten years before. The turning point in her career. And he wasn't called Tapiwa, his name was Robert Banda and he'd escaped from Chikurubi maximum two weeks prior. Jazmine opened her mouth to scream but something cold, hard and metallic poked into her rib under the table shutting her up immediately.

Robert grinned, and took a swig of coffee with his free hand, "I could fire that gun you know."

Jazmine tried to speak but her thoughts were so jumbled she couldn't form the words.

Robert pressed the gun harder into Jazmine, drawing a whimper, "I never killed that guy you know."

Jazmine started muttering under her breath, sweat trickling down her forehead in nauseating sheets, "I'm sorry Robert. I promise I'll reevaluate your case and I'll..."

"Shut up!"

Jazmine clammed up, recoiling against her seat as the gun poked harder into her rib. Here and there a few diners were casting curious glances their way. George the waiter walked up to their booth, visibly nervous.

"Everything okay ma'am?"

Jazmine kept quiet, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Beat it pal," Robert growled.

George moved closer to Jazmine and spotted the gun, "Oh my God!"

Robert whipped his hands from under the table and fired smack into the young man's face, sending him reeling into a table, dismantled face splattering blood and grey brain matter everywhere. Jazmine screamed amidst the commotion in the restaurant and tried to make a run for it. Robert raised his hand calmly and aimed at her back. Then the bullet tore through the window and ripped through Robert's shoulder, bringing with it shards of sharp glass that embedded into his face.