

The tree in the distance shook violently in the wind, rather it tremored. Crispen sat by the window and watched it. Of course he couldn't hear the wind howling; the windows and walls being too thick, or the rustling of the trees; the tree was just too far off but he could guess at it. He was mesmerized, staring intently as if it was Moses' burning bush speaking to him. There wasn't anything particularly special about the tree, it was more what the tree symbolized. How he interpreted the scene in his mind.

Crispen's mind was telling him it was time for a shake up, a change in his life had to come. If he was to live a life without fear or feeling ashamed all the time he had to buck up and change. Face things head on just like the tree was facing the wind. If things changed drastically, or the life he had built up crumbled all around him, he would remember this tree being ravaged by the wind losing its leaves and branches but still standing. He didn't know where to start though. He'd done so much wrong it seemed impossible to know where to start trying to fix it.

But this was a coward's way of thinking and he was glaringly aware of it. A wave of shame washed over him and he felt himself shrink from it, from himself. He knew where to start and with one more contemplating look at the tree in the distance, he was more resolute in his next steps. He swam through the shame and picked his phone and went to dial a number he knew by heart. He brought the phone to his ear but on the third ring he felt himself drowning so he canceled the call. He wrote a text message instead,

"Hi, there's things that can't be said over the phone(not that she would answer anyway and he knew this as he typed but forge on anyway) that need me to look you in the eye and come clean. Come clean is a outrageous thing to say because we both know what I did, it's no secret. I want to face it. To face you. Please meet me at our place so we can talk over coffee. 10am tomorrow. I'll be waiting."

He hit send and in this he felt he was pushing back the shame that had always made him cower. He wasn't to know this, but when Tahila received his message she felt a hot fury flash through her. The number wasn't saved so she had been forced to read it in its entirety to make sense of what was happening. Even without referring to himself in the text she knew who the text was from. She was so repulsed she through the phone at the wall shattering to pieces. Despite her revulsion, she would go to see Crispen the following day.

Standing on the threshold of the coffee shop Tahila felt nauseous. Her hands were clammy and the light breeze chilled her to the bone. Everything had a slightly unfocused look to it. She took a step and pushed open the door. She gave the place a once over; high ceiling with warm fluorescent lights, people under the lights with an ephemeral glow and their smiles almost wider than faces mocking her. She took a deep breath and whilst the smell of burnt coffee and butter assaulted her nose she scanned each table looking for Crispen. She was already moving when she saw him sitting at a table for two in the corner. Time seemed to slow down as she walked to the table. To her it was almost as if she was wading through waist deep waters when in actual fact it had taken her all of ten seconds to get to the table and take a seat.

Sitting there she looked at him, his blond hair buzzed short, his fair skin pockmarked with razor bumps but not at his eyes. She saw his hands on the table, finger interlaced and thumbs twiddling nervously. But she would not look at his eyes. Not a word had been said in this time by either so when Crispen mumbled a hello she cringed back as if the words had slapped her. She was affronted as looked in his beady blue eyes and the memories came flooding back.

Memories of the day they were last in this very coffee shop. Memories of when she was still a barrista and he the last customer. Memories of him pushing her to the floor. Memories of him on top of her. Memories of a violation so egregious it demanded a justice that never came. She left back from the table like a wounded animal, knocking the chair back.

"Wait!" Crispen jumped up from the table his palms out facing Tahila, "I need to talk to you." And for Crispen this is where his shame had begun. In his twisted mind he called it a lapse in judgment, a blackout moment. He knew he'd done wrong but deep down he wanted to make himself the victim. "No," Tahila mouthed weakly.

"Please," he begged.

"You raped me!" Tahila screamed. The buzz of conversation in the coffee shop died an instant death as all eyes went to their altercation.

"Please," was all he could say. Tahila left and no one would blame her. It wasn't good for her to be there with him. All silent eyes following her swift exit.

Crispen sat back down and thought about the horrors he'd done. He remembered his mother calling later that night he had hurt Tahila. He wondered if she knew what he had done but he knew that wasn't possible. He answered the phone and heard her tell him hysterically that a cousin he never knew he had had been hurt bad and was in hospital. He remembered walking through the hospital annoyed he was coming to see a person he didn't know. He remembered open the door and seeing Tahila on the hospital bed.