

**TANELA HICKS**

*Seeking Justice and  
Love-Short Story*

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*This short story is dedicated to all the people dreaming of love and  
waking up with the courage to grab it.*



Thank you for listening to me even  
when I am a whisper.

-TANELA HICKS



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# Preface



This story is a *strict* work of fiction developed out of the imagination of Tanela Hicks's mind. All characters and people referenced, real or otherwise are intended to be representations of fictional experiences. To the author's knowledge, no event in this story has occurred. This story will not be published in print and will only be available on platforms owned and managed by TanelaWrites.



## *Acknowledgement*



Special thanks to all the writers and authors I have met this year. You really have given me the motivation and advice I needed in this season of my writing career. Publishing is not easy. Often my creativity and imagination move faster than my ability to work. Writing about two people on opposite sides of life really helped me fine-tune the romantic tension in my next novel. This short story started out as a dream, went to a writer's block activity, and morphed into a truly cute story. I hope you enjoy this short story as much as I did imagine it happening. To all my fans, book 3 is coming. Until then, remember you can find love everywhere; just open your heart.

*A Celebrity Story of Justice and Love*



\* \* \*

*A Short Story on Finding Love By Tanela Hicks*

# Chapter 1



**T**he sun was hot but there was a breeze coming in. We had been out there for 4 hours, feet on the ground and signs high in the air. We were all tired but continued the crusade. It was nothing like the feeling of actively making change by gathering together and making the request known.

“Justice and Peace, Peace for All!” The crowd screamed!

Everyone from grandmas to teenagers was at the intersection of Lynell and James Ave in Kynect Park. The central ground for the city of San Andres. Most of the population was white elitists who chose to run from the fast life of San Diego or even Los Angeles, but there was a growing population of strong educated, and cultured African Americans. Over the last 15 years, a sort of unwritten truce existed in the Kynect Park area.

Until recently.

Jonathan Kamal Matthews walked home from basketball practice every day at 7:15pm from his private school in Sonora. He walked to save money on the cost of bus fair and used the time to think and study French. He was very close to becoming

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fluent and his audiobook lessons guided him on his 45-minute walk every day. He was 17 years old and in 4 months would have graduated 3<sup>rd</sup> in his class.

Until the police killed him.

“Justice and Peace, Peace for All!” The crowd screamed!

As Desiraye stood with the coward. Signs that others carried blinded her face from the sun a bit. The tears dried on her face and the heat made her skin hard like cracked clay. She came from the vigil to show support and now stayed because she felt it was where she needed to be in the moment. She often did what felt natural at the moment, which made her extremely emotional at times. When she heard about the Jonathan Matthews killing, she was pulled to his tragedy. Maybe it was because she went to St. Paris like he did. Maybe it was because she was one of the first brown faces that walked that hall. She understood what it was like to be a cliché of blackness in a society that boxed her kind in such negative spaces. A black boy who played basketball but spoke French. A Black girl who was a cheerleader but studied Latin. His story could have been her story, and that is why she was there.

“Justice and Peace, Peace for All!” The crowd screamed!

“Do you know if the family is still here?” a voice said close to Desiraye’s ears.

“No, I’m not sure.” She screamed back a little too loudly.

“That’s too bad, I wanted to shake their hand and give them my condolences,” the man said.

\* \* \*

Most of the crowd had on masks and it was hard to see faces. Desiraye was short standing at 5’4. Typically, she wore heels

## Chapter 1

to elevate her height, but today was a casual day and not about being cute. She threw on her favorite fitted jeans, vintage Chucks, and *Read More Books* tee shirt. Her stature was dwarfed by the man standing next to her. He had to be at least 6'4. The sun blinded his face as well, but Desiraye was sure he was some type of fitness enthusiast. His cut-off black shirt revealed heavy-toned brown muscles and the colorful tribal band wrapped around his forearm had unique and colorful symbols embossed on them. His arm had occasionally rubbed against her shoulder during the vigil, but she hadn't noticed until now.

Desiraye angled her head a little to get a look at the man. There were so many people out and they had gotten a little more active. Someone had a bullhorn and began chanting "Justice from Jonathan." The peaceful demonstration was changing, and it was time for Desiraye to head home. She was sad about his death and wanted to show community support and strength, but she was not a woman built for rioting. The moment she made the decision to leave, someone pushed her from the other side; hard. Desiraye flew into the toned muscle man and then lounged forward. She fell to the ground with one knee hitting the curb. The shouting got louder and suddenly it felt like the crowd of 50 neighborhood families had turned into a crowd of 200 militant blacks ready for war.

Desiraye tried to get up, but someone else pushed her from behind and stepped on her left heel.

"Hey man, be cool. Watch yourself!" She heard the voice shout. Then there was some exchange she didn't hear, and the next thing Desiraye knew was she was up and running.

## Chapter 2



Someone had lifted her from the ground. The hands were strong and rough. It was the man who had been next to her, but she still could not see his face and now she was running. Unsure if it was out of fear, comfort, or necessity; but the rule with her people was if someone starts running, you run.

The man grabbed her hand “Come on, let’s go this way.” He led her down a narrow alley that almost immediately turned into another street. It was Broadway. Desiraye was familiar enough with her surroundings to know that he cut away from the park area into Sonora’s version of Rodeo Blvd. This was not necessarily better. The middle ground for black and whites in this area stopped at the park. He had pulled her further into the town that did not want people like us there to begin with.

Stopping in front of a boarded up Tropical Smoothie, Desiraye said “Wait stop, stop her for a minute.”

Her leg was bruised, and jeans torn. There was a rough scrap on her knee, but it wasn’t bleeding. It was her heel that was

## Chapter 2

throbbing. Bending down to check it she chided the stranger, “You must not be from around here; you took us into Sonora. We should have headed back towards San Andres.”

“Are you okay?” His hand touched her ankle. Desiraye frozen. In the heat of the really surrounded by other justice seekers, Desiraye held felt the stranger to her side and back. But the causal brushes had been unintentional. Her brain processed them as you would a stranger brushing by on a busy sidewalk. This touch, this grasp of her ankle felt very intentional and warm. She immediately enjoyed the sensation of this stranger kneading her ankle. It might have been the embarrassment of arousal, or the simple shock of a stranger touching her body, but it was enough to make her finally look up at him.

Some moments in life are frozen in time and memory. You remember what it meant, how it felt, and everything in detail about yourself in that instant. Desiraye B McCullum almost fainted. Fainting would have probably been less revealing. Instead, she just fell back on her butt. He smiled at her. Straight white teeth, and dark brown eyes that had a literal sparkle. The hair on his lip seemed to tickle the heart-shaped crease in a playful yet masculine smile. The best part of his face was his dimples. The famous dimples.

“Hi. I’m Michael” he said coolly.

“Desiraye.” She whispered.

“Desiraye, let me see if your ankle is broken.” He lifted her ankle to get a better look. He quickly slid her Chuck off and gave a light squeeze to the base of her ankle then the ball of her foot. Desiraye winced a bit, then pulled it back. It was at that moment her brain caught up with the moment. Suddenly she realized what was happening and just wanted to get out of there. A little embarrassed and nervous that the crowds would

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be back. And Michael B Jordan was holding her ankle on a lamppost-lined street in Sonora California.



## Chapter 3



**I** think it's okay." Desiraye said and she attempted to stand on two feet. It was sore, but she could walk easily. He withdrew his hands from her foot but replaced them at her back and side to help her up.

"Where's your car?" He asked.

"At home."

"Oh, you live close?"

"No, I live in San Andres." She didn't want to tell him she caught the bus.

"Oh, okay."

They were quiet for a moment as they walked in no direction in particular. He walked with a smooth step alongside her as if he was just a normal citizen out for his constitutional. The noise of the crowd began to sound more and more distant as they walked. Desiraye felt safer the more they walked into Sonora. Finally, after about 8 blocks of silence, he said something.

"I think the vigil was a great idea, but someone must have had other protest plans. I hope no one was hurt, that is the last

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thing we need.”

“The police already think we are violent.”

“But we just want to live like everyone else.”

“Exactly.”

Silence again. Desiraye noticed she was coming to the end of the line. Only two more blocks before the bus line ended. She began looking up at the street signs as they walked. She remembered that the turnaround for bus 14 was at the end of Broadway and Rochester Ave.

“Well, thank you for getting me out of there Michael B. Jordan,” Desiraye said. Then she immediately hung her head.

“I’m sorry, that was weird.”

He laughed.

“Thank you, Michael.”

“Your welcome Desiraye. And it’s okay. It wasn’t too weird. At least you didn’t faint.”

Desiraye slowed her walk and looked over at him. He was faint-worthy for sure. How do you have sexy eyebrows she thought.

“I have to be getting home.” Desiraye was proud of herself for not saying some of the things running through her mind. Michael B Jordan was literally walking beside her after running from a potentially violent protest.

“Okay, I can call us a ride if you have a phone. I left mine with my bodyguard. Something I guarantee he is having a fit about right now.”

As Desiraye reached the bus turnaround, there was no way to make it less awkward, so she decided to roll with it.

“This is me. I ride the bus when I can. It’s easier.”

“Easier than driving? He said with a smirk.”

“Yes, for me. And sorry I left my cell phone at home. I did

### Chapter 3

not intend on being gone long.” He nodded in understanding.

“It’s funny how society thinks all GenXers are attached to their cell phones. I am indifferent to cell phones. It takes my guard or my mother to remind me to carry it.”

“Me too” Desiraye laughed harder than she meant to. “Well, not the bodyguard part obviously.”

\* \* \*

Silenced covered them as they both sat on the blue cast iron bus bench. The benches on this side of town were so much nicer than on hers. She lived in a nice area, but overall San Andres was a significant step down to the Sonora area. Taxes were higher, shops were more exclusive, and the residents were mostly white.

“Where do you live?” Michael asked.

“San Andres, right on the outside end of Kynect Park.”

“How many buses did you take to get here.”

“Just one. How did you get here?”

“Drove, well I was driven.” He smiled. He fidgeted nervously in the seat next to her. He was trying to smooth a black tee shirt that was molded to his body. This only drew Desiraye’s eyes to his massive chest and toned arms. She was trying hard not to stare, but feared she was failing.

“Aww, okay.”

“Can I ride the bus with you?” Michael asked.

Desiraye looked over at him. He smiled shyly as if she would say no and break his heart. He looked at her with eyes of submission. She liked it. There was no earthly reason why she should like it, but she definitely did.

“Yea sure, I guess.”

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“I don’t have any money with me. How much does it cost?”  
He asked.

Desiraye chuckled. “Michael B Jordan needs money for the bus. The newspapers are going to have a field day you know.

“Naw, I’m not worried. It’s not that crowded out here and I have one of those faces.”

“So, you have done this before then.” Desiraye teased as she dug in her small purse for enough change for both of them to ride route 14 to the safety and familiarity of San Andres.

“Not exactly, but I break away often to just be a normal guy. When I do, I go to a neighborhood that mostly will not recognize me and when they do, I tell them I’m his stunt double.”

“Really,” Desiraye said and handed his 3 quarters. “And that works?”

“Every time. It’s California. Especially if I don’t smile”  
Michael said.

“That’s unfortunate”

“What unfortunate?”

“That you must force yourself not to smile. It seems like you like to smile.”

“I do, especially in good company,” Michael said. Desiraye wasn’t certain, but that comment seemed to be a little flirtatious. She was nervous and tucked her hands into her jean’s pockets.

“It is a gorgeous smile.” She said mostly to herself. She wasn’t sure if he heard her, the blush on his face said maybe he did.

As they waited for the bus Desiraye remained quiet. Unsure of herself and a little freaked out. She was waiting for a bus on the white side of town with one of the most well-known black actors in the world. She wasn’t the celebrity following type, but she loved movies and stayed well-informed on film news. Growing up in California you had no real choice. Personally,

### *Chapter 3*

Desiraye preferred to read. She usually read on the bus and wondered if Michel would think it rude if she pulled out a book. Just as she was debating this detail the bus roared forward.

“Just follow my lead normal guy,” Desiree said. She shook her head because she was still flirting and had no inkling of where that nerve came from.

They both got up and walked up the stairs. Desiraye put her coins in first and took the ticket. Michael did the same. The bus driver gave him a long stare but didn’t say anything. There was only one other person on the bus. A young Latina woman. She was sitting closer to the back and her mouth fell open almost immediately. Desiraye mouthed “Stunt double, relax.”

Michael and Desiraye ducked in a seat together closer to the front and on the same side as the woman. That was strategic to prevent side glances. As they sat in the small seat, he was suddenly very close to her. She had been standing next to him for most of the afternoon and walked with him for more than an hour, but somehow now was too close.

“That was easy.” He whispered.

“Most people think so.” She smiled and reached for his ticket. He handed it to her, and their hands slightly touched during the exchange. Both Desiraye and Michael blushed, just like normal people would on the bus.

## Chapter 4



**T**he two casually chatted on the bus about everything from the best shoe brand to types of food that were overrated. Michael expressed his dislike and confusion over guacamole, while Desiraye expressed how she would never understand why people dipped perfectly fine vegetables in cream cheese. He asked her a few light-hearted questions, while she tried to hide her nerdiness. After about 20 minutes she said, “My stop is coming up.” She was nervous because she had no clue what his intentions were. He didn’t have a phone on him, presumably he didn’t have car keys. How was he going to get to his destination?

“I can drive you home if you’d like.” Desiraye said.

“So, you do have a car, just don’t like to drive?”

“Yea, like I said easier.” She shrugged. “Do you need a ride?”

“Naw, if I can just use your cell phone to call my driver that would be good.”

She laughed and he laughed loudly like friends from high school. Desiraye couldn’t help but think about much they had

## Chapter 4

in common. Yet they obviously lead such different lifestyles. He was charismatic and funny. He did not take himself too seriously despite being one of the most beautiful men in the world. Despite all that, he was just a normal guy.

Desiraye was a bookworm with a growing introvert personality. Most of her activities and her life experiences happened solo. She did not have close friends or family. No one really took the right time and effort to get to know her. This made most of her interactions with people painfully awkward.

Desiraye could not help but notice their similar corky behavior. Somehow their awkwardness had turned into familiarity with one bus ride. She reached across him to pull the stop cord. His eyes followed her reach and then the cord. There was some awe in his eyes, but he tried to act normal.

“The cord pulls a bell at the front letting the driver know you want to get off. He let us off at the next stop.” She smiled casually. Until her breast slightly grazed his arm. Desiraye quickly shifted over as close as possible to the end of the seat. Suddenly she wished he had a jacket on. Instead, she folded her arms across her chest and tried to pretend her nipples were not hard as rock pebbles in the creek.

“Aw, see I knew that much.” Michael was looking straight ahead like he knew exactly what just happened. But a small grin had appeared. “I was just looking at how beautiful your dimples are.”

And now they were both blushing.

\* \* \*

The bus stop was very close to her townhouse. Only 2 short blocks. Desiraye never had people over, but always kept an

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orderly home. She was more nervous about a neighbor seeing Michael enter her house than she was about having him in her home. Furthermore, she did not know where her cell phone was in her house. Thankfully his smooth voice broke her from her panicky thoughts.

“What do you do Desiraye, like for a living?” He asked.

“Oh, well, I’m a librarian” she responded.

“Wow, really.” He said genuinely surprised.

“Yea, I have been for about 6 years now. Big difference right. I mean in comparison to acting. It is not as exciting as acting, but just as creative I think.”

“You look nothing like what I picture as a librarian.”

“Glasses on a string and long skirts?” She joked.

“Old and ugly”

“With a beehive right.” She laughed. She had heard this a million times and had never been amused by the stereotype. Somehow his acknowledging the stereotype was cute.

“Yeah, I guess.” He was quiet for a moment then said, “You are beautiful Desiraye.”

Butterflies were suddenly everywhere. Her stomach was doing flips and flops all over the place. She didn’t know what to say to that. He obviously had been a million beautiful women in his world. How he thought she was anything other than basic baffled her.



## Chapter 5



**M**ichael and Desiraye reached the teal door to her brownstone. She inherited the property in San Andres before it was gentrified. Thankfully the changes to the neighborhood benefited her and with inherited property, her cost of living was very low. This allowed her to make aesthetic changes to the inside and the outside of her home. She added a railing and a new double-panel window. Last year she painted the brick a nice whitewash giving the red brick a shadowy look. Desiraye loved her home instead and out.

As they entered the small foyer, Desiraye paused to look back at Michael. A little nervous but not self-cautious. The last man that was year was her ex-fiancé, Reginald. Thankfully with much effort, Desiraye had erased his presence from her home. That was almost 6 months ago. Desiraye had repainted and changed some accent pieces. In the height of her relationship grief, she had even tried to install a fan in the dining room. Her failed attempt and stared Michael right in the face.

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“Just ignore that. Home improvement project.” she said, coolly. She immediately went to the doorway of her kitchen to look for the phone.

“Wow!” Michael said loudly. Desiraye darted back to the dining room and saw that Michael found her reading nook. The room was technically the third bedroom in her home. She followed him through the threshold and smiled.

“Yea, I love books. It’s not just a career, it’s a passion.” The room was painted a shimmer teal and gold. The armchair in front of the window was Victorian-style yet comfortable. The large cushion couch stretched out across the long wall directly under a painting given to her by her father. And then the shelves ran along the rest of the walls. The shelves were tall, and custom-made for heavy books. They went from floor to ceiling. There was a victrola by the entrance. It was not functioning but worked well as a place to set her wine glasses and coffee.

“How many books do you have?” Michael said browsing her shelves.

“Umm, over 4 hundred.” She answered. Michael looked from side to side.

“I have another set of shelves in my bedroom.” He glanced at her and nodded still in surprise.

Having him in her reading room was intimidating. Reginald seldom came into this room. He said it reminded him of her father. They never got along. Even after her father’s death, Reginald wouldn’t give him an inch or respect. Maybe that is why the relationship was doomed.

“Here you go.” She said, handing him the cordless home line.

“No cell, huh.” He said with a laugh.

“You can use my home line, it’s okay.”

## Chapter 5

“Tell the truth, you can’t find your cell phone, can you?” He smiled. That sincere beautifully charming smile.

“I shall not admit anything to you, Mr. Jordan.” She smiled and went back to the kitchen.

\* \* \*

Desiraye gave him a moment of privacy and grabbed some water from the fridge. Now away from the haze, she finally felt the very real pain in her ankle. It was throbbing. She took off her shoes and then her socks to inspect the damage. It was definitely twisted and swollen. So, ice and elevation and it would be okay, but for now, it hurt to walk on it. She limped back to the reading room with the water.

“No man, I am alright.” She heard him say.

Pause. “I know. I will try next time.”

Desiraye handed the water bottle to Michael, which he took, and then watched her limp away. He immediately sat the water down and moved to help her sit down in the big, winged-back chair. He carefully slid his free hand around her middle. Desiraye tried not to lean into his body, his frame, but it felt comforting. It felt warm and hard.

“Alright Alex, lecture over. Send a car to pick me up at...” Michael stalled.

“625 Dreamquest Ave, San Andres,” Desiraye said loud enough for whomever to hear.

“Yea.” Desiraye could not tell what the other man was saying, but Michael’s face definitely had an annoyed yet apologetic look to it. Until he looked up at her again nodding his head. He was bent down on his knees next to her chair. He gave her a small shy grin and then looked at her ankle with a small frown.

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“Yea, man that should work. Alright, bye.”

“Everything alright. Did they send the TMZ reporters looking for you?” Desiraye asked jokingly.

“Naw, just got fussed at about not having my cell phone with me.”

“And you’re the boss right.”

“That is what I have been saying for years now, nobody listens to me.”

They laughed. And were silent for a moment. Then he looked at her ankle.

“Are you sure you don’t need to see a doctor?”

“No, I’m okay. I will ice it and keep it up tonight. It will be fine in the morning.”

He nodded but decided to persist.

“Can I at least get the ice for you?” Michael pleaded.

“You, just want to snoop around my place. See how us normal people live.”

“No, I just want to see how you live. And make sure your ankle is okay.” His hand gently caressed her foot. He didn’t know her at all, yet he was caressing her foot like a familiar lover.

“Fine” Desiraye breathe out. “The ice is in the freezer in the kitchen.”

“Really! Get out of here, that is where I keep my ice.” Michael said as he got to his feet and headed to the kitchen.

Desiraye gave him a long side glance. She was trying to cool her reactions to his touch, but her nipples were doing their own thing again, and she could not for the life of her control her body. If she can just get him to his driver, then the whole day’s experience will be over. She can file it away in the *best day ever* category.

## Chapter 5

“There is a small closet in the hallway at the bottom of the stairs, I have an ice bag in there.” She heard him rustling around and was trying to mentally catalog all the things in her kitchen that would embarrass her.

“You have books in your kitchen too” Michael shouted.

“I like to read about cooking.” She responded.

“Do you cook?”

“Occasionally.”

“So, these are cookbooks?”

Desiraye laughed. “No mainly books about food. Food history, background, uses, etc.”

“Of course,” Michael said coming back into the room. He pulled one of the small ottomans towards her and lifted her leg to rest on it.

“So, Desiraye the librarian. Do you...” Michael was hesitant. He seemed to be mulling over exactly how to say something. He took longer than necessary arranging the pillows under her foot and then rolling up the bottom of her jeans.

“Do you live here alone?” Desiraye could tell that was not the question. It made her smile that he seemed genuinely nervous. A man who could control a stage or a movie screen. A man that was tall and beautiful toned with dimples that would melt the meanest crone; was nervously approaching the most basic man-and-woman interaction.

“Yes, I do. I have lived here for a while.”

“And you are sure there’s no one I can call for you? You know to help you walk around.”

Silence. She watched him carefully place the ice pack on the heel of her foot and then used an armband to secure it in place.

“No, no one?” She whispered. “Isn’t there some beautiful A-lister looking for you.?”

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He chuckled. “No, one other than my annoying security team and my manager. He, Alex my guard said the car would be here soon, but he said the traffic was thick.”

“Oh okay.”

Silence

“Desiraye...” Michael said looking down in at her ankle.

“Yea Michael”

“You single?”

“Yes, at the moment.”

“Okay cool.” He tried to play it nonchalantly. And failed. He knew it and grinned. Then moved to the end of the couch across from here.

“Thank you. It is starting to feel better.”

“Good.” When he reached for his bottle of water on the table, he noticed the books inside the ottoman.

“Wow, you have books in the ottoman, too.”

“Yea, that’s me. I loved to be engulfed in a story. He takes me away from life and helps me see other perspectives. It’s like seeing the world’s creativity over and over again.”

“That’s pretty cool, I am surprised you didn’t read on the bus. I see people doing that all the time. On the train and on planes.”

“Well, I wanted to, but I didn’t want to be rude.” Desiraye smiled.

“Are you saying my company is not charming enough?”

“It’s charming alright...And I enjoy it.” She tried to hide her smile in the water bottle as she drank a large amount of water. He was turning his water bottle over and over in his hands.

Two normal nervous people, making life-altering decisions about the direction of this conversation. One direction can keep this conversation interesting but a small chat safe. Another direction would mean something different.

## *Chapter 5*

“Well meeting you has made my day, so I guess we are in agreement.” He finally said.

## Chapter 6



**M**ichael had to decide if he was going to try and ask her out. He didn't want to leave her presence. His driver had asked him if he needed to rush. Being an actor did afford him the ability to break through some traffic created by protests in the area, but he told Alex to take his time. This was mainly because he thought Desiraye was interesting and just peaceful. When he set out on his regular guy mission, the choice to go to the peaceful vigil was last minute. He picked up a mask to wear and discreetly entered the crowded park. It was to his benefit that everyone had tall signs and seemed otherwise focused on the purpose of the gathering. He remembered hearing about Jonathan Matthews. Like so many other stories of overzealous cops, a life was lost simply because of the color of his skin.

At some point Michael took his face covering off to breathe a little. He quietly bowed his head to wipe his eyes from tears that could have been saved. Jonathan's life could have easily been Michael's. Yes, he was a world-famous actor, and yes, he had a



## *Chapter 6*

bodyguard that took his job too seriously. But at the end of the day, he was a black man in America. Walking around Sonoma with Desiraye proved that. He was briefly recognized, but when it came down to it, he faced the same dangers. Jonathan was walking around a white neighborhood, listening to his French lessons, and headed home to continue preparing for his future. In a way, Michael was doing the same thing. He was a year off from a horrible relationship, and riding the city bus with Desiraye was the first time he began considering the type of woman he wanted in his life for the long haul.

Desiraye was not a celebrity. She wasn't even Hollywood adjacent. She was a sexy as hell librarian. He had no idea what to do with that, but he liked her. Michael had not spent this much time willingly with any woman in over a year. He got on a city bus! His mother would laugh hard over that one. Desiraye's face was beautiful. She had the cheeks of a glowing pregnant woman, although it was obvious she was not. Her hair looked soft and hung in long twists down to her shoulders. Her skin looked so smooth and soft like the caramel satin. He felt a little of that silky skin when she brushed against him on the bus. He had to remember he was in public as thoughts of her bare breast invaded his thoughts for about 5 minutes.

She had a beautiful full face with dimples. Her green eyes gave her an exotic look that most women have to force. And her lips were sensual and plump but in a natural way. They had just a shadow of gloss to the point where he could not tell if it was natural juiciness or if she had some type of product on them. Looking around her home he could see she was the more holistic type. Enjoyed fresh juices and recycled. Her look was earthy, but her melon-smooth skin was definitely sun-kissed which told him she did get outside. All his past relationships

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were with women who could not stand being outdoors longer than 15 minutes, let alone walk blocks on a bum foot.

He just wanted more of this.

\* \* \*

“What were you reading, Desiraye.” After frantically thinking in his head for what felt like an hour. He had no idea how to really flirt or keep a conversation going. He was so used to the model wanna-be filling his space was noise. Plus, he wanted to test her name out again. He wanted to see how it sounded on his tongue. It was melodic. He liked it, and from the way, she grinned; he felt she did as well. She motioned for her purse on the table, and he handed it to her. It was small but big enough for a book. As were all her purses. She pulled out a book and handed it to him.

“*A Court of Thorne and Roses.*” He said quietly. “Looks like a *Game of Thrones* type of story. What’s it about?” He asked. Desiraye gave him a summary of the characters and the happenings thus far. She loved fantasy books and had more than she could count.

“I was just getting to the part where she is in Tamlin’s home and he is trying to make her feel welcome, but he is a grumpy old man type.” She said flipping the pages to her bookmark.

“Will don’t let me stop you. Please read.”

She sighed, “Sorry I don’t have a tv in this room.”

“It’s okay, I like the quiet of your house. Please read, let’s see if this Tamlin dude gets some manners.”

“You want me to read out loud?” Desiraye exclaimed.

“Yeah, sure why not. I want to know what happens.”

Desiraye smiled at his seemingly genuine interest. Reginald

## Chapter 6

read a lot, but they never read things together. He was rooted more in reality and the madness of life, whereas Desiraye always daydreamed about beautiful worlds and unique people and creatures.

“Plus, I like your voice,” Michael said. He leaned back into her couch cushions and got comfortable, throwing his hands behind his head. He patiently waited as she seemed to second guess herself but only briefly.

Desiraye began reading. The character was trying to buy her things to make her feel comfortable, and it was only mildly working. She was scared for her family back home. The book definitely had a Beauty and the Beast theme going on. The sun had just about fully crested, and it was twilight. Michael could tell the late evening hour had approached. And he most definitely had places he should be. However, as she continued to read Michael found Desiraye’s voice soothing. He wanted more but was scared if he asked her out, she would say no.

After talking to her and now listening to her read, she definitely had the personality of an introvert, but somehow, she was still a little outspoken. She had gotten a little stronger in her tone when Feyre finally decided to speak up about what she wasn’t going to do in this fae creature’s home, which Michael learn was like an alien, but not quite. The phone loudly broke their spell.

“That is probably my mother, she is the only one that calls my landline,” Desiraye said.

Michael got up to grab the phone from where he left it in her massive reading nook. He definitely saw her checking him out as he walked across her elevated leg. Once he retrieved the cordless phone, he was tempted to answer it. How was this woman single!

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“Hello,” her soft voice said. Michael was sure to sit closer on the couch when he sat back down.

Desiraye didn't miss how he changed seating positions. While reading he had been opposite her on the long couch. Now he was seated right next to her, almost touching.

“Oh, yeah here he is,” Desiraye said handing him the phone.

“It is for you; it is your assistant.”

## Chapter 7



“Sara? What’s up.” He spoke into the phone. Michael’s tone lost its warmth, velvety feel to it. He was all business. He was nodding and frowning. He leaned forward to check the ice pack on her foot and gave her a slight grin back as he leaned back into the cushion.

“Sara, I heard all this already from Alex, whom I assumed could manage picking me up on his own without calling you,” Michael said. Desiraye felt mildly uncomfortable sitting so close and listening to him have a conversation he obviously wanted no part of.

More nodding and eye-rolling.

“Sara, please just put me through to Alex, thank you.” His tone was friendly but final.

“Alex, dude, you called Sara. You know how she is.”

For the next several minutes Desiraye could not hear or discern anything from the conversation. Michael was grinning and chuckling a little more so she could tell that he and Alex had a lot better repertoire than his assistant Sara. Desiraye

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briefly wondered if Sara was fully serviced. For some reason, the thought made her annoyed.

“Okay. Just me a few minutes and I will be down.”

Michael pressed the red button on the cordless phone and sat it down. Desiraye saw the end to the random fantasy in sight and began to maneuver herself to stand.

“No, no please stay right there. You look so wonderfully comfortable.” His hands rested on her shoulder and thigh as he settled her back into her position. Because the tee shirt she had on was a thin summer shirt, she could feel every pulse and calluses on his hand. Her body was beginning to throb all over. She leaned back into the cushion just to give her body support.

“Desiraye...” He started and then paused.

“Michael?” She said unsure of his next words. He just hung his head a bit. Desiraye thought this was that awkward goodbye moment and wished she could fast-forward past it.

He rubbed his hand together in front of him as he sat down next to her. With a huge sigh he said, “Desiraye, I like the way you say my name.”

“Uhh,” she was thoroughly confused now.

“Let me finish.” He chuckled.

She was silent. She watched his eyes and hands as he clapped them together in the middle of his bulky frame. His legs were open so far apart now that his thigh was flushed against her leg.

“I like talking to you. I have not felt the need to be around another woman for an extended period of time for over a year. I do not want to leave right now.” He paused and peeked over at her. Desiraye had a look of surprise, and it wasn’t a disgusting surprise.

“Would you mind if I stayed a while? I would like to hear more about Tamlin and Feyre.” He blushed and continued. “I

## *Chapter 7*

would love to know more about you, and I would like you to know more about me. There, finished.”

## Chapter 8



**D**esiraye thought this over. She had no idea why he found her interesting. Maybe it was the regular life curiosity. Perhaps he was really lonely and trying to connect with anyone. She was an odd fantasy reader, no cell phone using, short basic librarian. What in the world could she have to offer Michael B Jordan.

She didn't know the answer to those questions, but she felt he had good intentions, and he was hilarious to be around. So far, he made her laugh, cared for her safety, and really listened when she talked. He had done more in 3 short hours than her fiancé did in 4 years combined. Taking a chance she said, "Sure you can stay awhile."

Michael jumped up so fast she almost missed it. "Alright cool." His smile was so big and bold. This must be the smile he was walking about that everyone recognized him with. It was genuine, almost like a laugh in motion caught at the picture moment in a photo.



## Chapter 8

"I'll be right back okay. Don't go anywhere." Desiraye simply nodded with a goofy grin of her own.

He walked towards the door leaving it ajar enough to where she could see outside but could not tell what direction he went.

Desiraye was nosey and moved to get up and go to the door. She got to her foyer and saw Michael bounding back up the few stairs of her brownstone. When he opened the screen door he immediately frowned.

"I thought you were staying put?"

"Changed my mind. What are you doing, getting a stunt double?"

He laughed and came close into her space. Desiraye was using the small hallway table as a balance relieving her returning throbbing foot.

"No, Mamm. I just came back to ask you two questions."

"Okay shoot"

"What's your favorite quick meal?"

Curious, but connecting the dots easily on the question. "Tacos of course."

"Okay, perfect. Next, what is your last name."

"My last name?" It was not a secret. The man had been in her home, in her space for hours now. He was presently very much in her space. He had bent down a little to her eye level and was so close, their breaths were mingling. His full lips seem to reach out a little to her. Or perhaps Desiraye imagined that part. "Why, who wants to know my last name, Michael?"

He closed his eyes and gave a small sigh. "Well, I just asked my driver to go get us food."

"Got that part."

"And then I told me driver I like you and I was going to ask you out."

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“Ohh, okay”

“This is the part where I cannot be a regular guy even when I try. My driver/bodyguard asked me for your last name because he is probably going to run a security check on you. I told him if you said yes to a date, I was going to make you, my girlfriend.” Michael explained and shoved his hands in his pockets and just watched her for what felt like minutes.

“McCullum,” Desiraye responded quietly. She was nervous but confident this was a good move.

“McCullum?” He repeated, grinning ear to ear.

“Yes, Desiraye B McCullum, born and raised right here in California.”

Michael clapped his hands in front of him with an energetic laugh. “Perfect!” Then to her surprise, he dotted a small light peck to her lips.

\* \* \*

Desiraye was so surprised she reached her free hand behind her to grip the other side of the small table. She needed all the support she could get. Michael had taken the stoop stairs in 2 bounds reaching the window of a black sedan in the blink of an eye. He had a brief conversation with whom she assumed was Alex. Alex tried to hand Michael a phone, but he shook his head no. That made her smile. Time and devotion are something she always longed for but never had. Now, she seemingly would have it from one of the most famous actors in the world. But today he was just Michael.

## Chapter 9



A few minutes passed and Desiraye was about to go back to the couch and sit down. Michael turned and began walking back up the stoop. She tried to stand a little taller, but it did not matter. He was body dwarf hers entirely. He opened the door and slowly walked back in.

“Tacos should be here in about 30 minutes.”

“Okay” nodded. “No guacamole I guess.”

He smiled, “I am so glad you are listening and learning.”

His smile changed. Before it was boyish and exciting. Now, it was sultry and sexy. Desiraye’s heart started beating in all directions as he again took over her space in the foyer.

“I’m glad you let me stay a while.”

“I am glad you want to stay. Although I am not sure about something.”

“Yea, what’s that Desiraye.” He took his hand and moved a few of her twists that were covering her face. His light touch smoothed the hair behind her neck a little. When he brought his

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hand back down it brushed her collarbone, which gave Desiraye a warm zing of electricity that thrummed through her entire body.

“Why me? Why hang out with me out of all people? You can probably be with anyone you want on any given day. What’s so special about me?”

“Desiraye you are beautiful and intelligent. Your conversation rings true and honest. I like that a lot. I feel I can talk to you about anything. While you do have a shy side that I think is adorable; I feel like you know how to speak your mind when required. You are hot a hell and I am baffled as to why you are single.” He paused and gave her a long once-over.

“You do not seem impressed with who I am, and that also means a lot to me. Plus, I think we have a lot in common.”

Desiraye didn’t know what to say. She had never had anyone describe how that felt so clearly and transparently. He was even closer now. Her body was bowed out like a ballet dancer waiting to be swept away in an elegant lift. It was like there was a magnet pushing them together and neither one could stop the attraction.

“Alright, Michael. I am glad you chose me. And I hope you do get to asking me out part. If you keep talking like this, I might just have to say yes.” She chuckled lightly to herself as she cast her eyes down to her swollen feet. She could feel his hooded gaze on her, and she was afraid to look up and break his spell.

“I hope you do.”

Michael slid his left hand around Desiraye’s waist. He drew her close to his chest. The force caused her to extend up a few inches. He was her support now. He tilted her face to his with a slight touch to the back of her neck. With one last search for permission, he kissed her. At first slowly, holding the softness

## Chapter 9

of his lips to hers. It felt like something in their bodies locked into place. Their lips started moving of their own accord and Desiraye parted hers slightly giving him permission to seek her tongue out with his. When she felt the tender glide of his tongue against her lips, she removed her hands from the table that she no longer needed and placed them on his solid arms.

Desiraye spread her hands on his chest possessively as if it was now her chest. Solid was not the word. They are like cement centerpieces and she loved them. He somehow had begun to carry her. This kiss was very different from the first chased kiss he gave her. His first kiss was so fast as if the control he had momentarily slipped, and his brain did exactly what it wanted to do at that moment. This kiss was serious, intense, lustful, and yearning. His lips were moving fast now, and their tongues were fully engaged in each other's space. He carried her back to the couch and slowed. Desiraye was panting. It had been an exceptionally long time since she had been kissed, and she had never been kissed so thoroughly by anyone. He peppered her dimples and neck with soft wet kisses. When he got to her collarbone a small moan escaped her mouth.

Michael gently removed his hands which had made it into her shirt, which was previously neatly tucked in her jeans. He smoothed her clothing a bit with a laugh. But remained close.

"Your lips are just as I have been imagining."

"Oh really, and how long has that been sir."

"Since the bus ride"

"Oh well, glad to please"

## Chapter 10



**H**e placed her back in her spot and started resetting her makeshift footrest.

“Oh, you are not going to let me be the only awkward one, are you?”

Desiraye laughed, “No, I’m not, but if I tell you what I was thinking on the bus, you may never find out what happen to Tamlin and Feyre.” Desiraye reached for the book and started looking for her place. She really needed something to do with her hands. Without the book, she was sure to pull him down on the couch and never let go.

“I think I’ll believe you.” He put another pillow on her back. “Because I saw you check my butt out when I got your phone.”

She covered her blush with her hands. She had been caught. That was a little embarrassing and she prayed she didn’t drool or make googly eyes at his butt.

He moved her hands. And gave her a sexy wink.

“Don’t ever be embarrassed with me. Just remember every day that I am just Michael.”

## *Chapter 10*

“Just Michael” she repeated. He kissed her softly one last time and then sat in his seat on the other side of the sofa. She felt the distance instantly and missed him being close.

“Now Ms. McCullum, I am going to sit over here for a moment, because well... I think that is the right thing to do at the juncture.”

His knowing glance and her flushed face and peeking nipples were all the explanations she needed. She opened the book.

“Where were we then.”

“He was trying to express her with some paints or something. Let’s see if she will be properly convinced by his charmed.”

“Let’s see what happens together, Michael.”

***THE END***

