

The Monster You Made

I smiled as I cocked the silent revolver and the final bullet pierced through Honorable's head, spilling the remains of his bloody brain out unto the carpeted floor of suite 128. My aim and precision had considerably improved judging as this was my 19th kill. It's all in the wrist.

Like a scene from a movie, he slowly sunk into the now vermilion chaise positioned flush against the chamfered wall of the grand lounge. His bloodshot eyes were lifeless and devoid of emotion as he struggled to fix his gaze on me. Thin, pursed lips quivered as though a moan would escape them at any moment while wrinkly fists were clenched as dendritic green veins began to frantically pulsate before they came to a screeching halt. Terminus.

What a wuss. Even in death, I couldn't stand him. He made me sick to my stomach and I dare say killing him has been the highlight of my life so far. Bastard. I pray you rot in the lowest parts of hell along with other demons of your caliber. I know I'm probably going there too but definitely a lesser one.

Death was a part of the job but this was a pet project of mine. A project I have patiently waited years to carry out and boy did it feel good! The feeling of fulfillment was greater than I had ever imagined it would be. I was on a high. I remembered my first time; I couldn't sleep for weeks afterwards. The lifeless body of the night guard kept replaying in my head like a broken record. I was this close to turning myself in from the crippling guilt but I held on because that's what monsters do; we fight off every sense of morality left in us until our hearts become an empty cavity devoid of empathy. The hefty envelope I received from the Frontman also helped in hastening my healing process.

I needed a cigarette to calm the sudden adrenaline rush. Whoa! One for the road, they say. An ode to the end of tyranny, I cackled hysterically. I have always had a sense of humor and I would definitely be the funny one in any group of friends. Don't you dare think that humor was my compensation for not being much of a looker; I have always been drop dead gorgeous. The full package, if I do say so myself. I know you must be wondering how a seemingly perfect lady ended up as a killer. Well, I'll tell you. Not like I have anything better to do at the moment.

Where is that darn cigarette?

I never knew who my birth parents were as the only home I ever knew was the shelter in a remote town in the North Eastern parts. The caretakers at the home didn't care enough to come up with an origin story for me so I conjured up an imaginary one in my head that my parents were wealthy merchant farmers who would come back for me when I was old enough. As we all know, fairytales are exactly what they claim to be; tales. I watched desolately as my peers in the home got picked up by happy families. I never saw them again. I didn't understand why I never got picked. Was something wrong with me?

Here I was, a five year old, oblivious to the fact that I didn't look like everyone else around me. For one, I was pale-skinned and my hair wasn't the typical afro-kinky type, every other girl around me had. I had wavy, golden brown locks that brushed my lower back. My hair was tamed by Gimbiya who ensured they were always braided into two thick pigtails. "Babyn Roba" she would call me fondly to the snickering whispers of the other children. Looking back now, I'm sure families didn't need an outcast child sticking out like a sore thumb. Well, that was their loss. I learned to love my own company. People came and went like the seasons, so why bother with keeping friends? Big girls didn't need friends.

I need a smoke, dammit! I had to rummage through the mahogany nightstand from Honorable's side of the bed. The bed. I stared at the king-sized bed fitted with luxurious, plush Italian bedding. State of the art shit. There was a certain ostentatious grandeur to the whole setting that just made you know that this lifestyle was definitely funded by national reserves. I'm sure Honorable daydreamed about the things he would get to do to me in this bed; things that I would rather kill than have them done. *Oh wait, been there, done that.* What a wuss. Finally! I felt the box of the complimentary London-made cigars that were provided courtesy of the hotel. I rolled my eyes. Society was rotten; super eager to satisfy the silliest whims of the wealthy while easily trampling on the basic rights of the impoverished. It was hard to believe that the shriveled up figure strewn in front of me once held the reins of an entire nation. Power was indeed transient. I took a long drag from the cig and could slowly feel the nerves dissolve. Okay back to my story.

My last day at the home was filled with mixed emotions. It was a rainy day in August. Lightning bolts gashed the grey skies like shattered pieces of glass. Thunderous vibrations roared and rumbled through the thin aluminium roofing sheets of the home, causing the walls to gyrate with each loud clap. I sat by the window, doodling on the foggy glass panes with my fingers as I watched Gimbiya pack up my little bag. I was picked up by a certain lady dressed in black, complete with sunglasses that shielded her eyes. She didn't say much and had a stoic aura; very hard to read from the eyes of a seven year old. We took a three hour drive south until I found myself at the sprawling mansion of the Bellos. Unknown to me then, I would soon become Layla Bello, the second child of the aristocratic bourgeoisie Bello dynasty. The family's influence could be felt immensely in both the political and economic fabric of the country.

A pop-up notification came up on my phone. It was an automated credit alert from HQ. Frontman never failed to pay on time. I loved that man like a father. He took me in over a decade

ago when I was an erratic teenage runaway, hooked on crystal meth and lingering on self-harm. Frontman had put me through a detoxifying program and clinical therapy. He saved my life.

Meeting Frontman was a chance encounter. He visited my dad frequently in the afternoons and they bonded over coffee and scotch in the grand study. I had feigned illness to avoid going to school that particular day. Attending an Ivy League high-school filled with snotty nosed kids of the upper echelon was something a misfit needed occasional breaks from. From his self-assured demeanor and flamboyant security detail, you could tell that he was a very dignified individual. He was a tall man with a large, muscular build and a gait that translated great self-confidence. The type of cockiness that was usually backed by generational wealth. Typical. Frontman and dad would ferociously deliberate loudly on political matters to the point that mother would have to check in to make sure they wouldn't get physical. Friendly banter, it was. Or so it seemed, at the time.

The second time I saw him was months later, when dad was yet to return from Friday prayers. Dad always made a fun fare at the Friday mosque by sharing wads of cash to the worshippers after prayers. Anything for good PR, I guess. Elections were around the corner after all. I was alone with some of the house staff when Frontman came in with his orderly that afternoon. I mumbled a word of greeting from my position on the grand sofa directly opposite the massive flat screen TV. Adults made me uneasy; especially grown men. He sat on the chesterfield sofa across the room, lending a heavy presence to the room. The kitchen staff on duty that day swiftly appeared with a pitcher of freshly squeezed orange juice and sparkling water for him and disappeared after an exaggerated bow. The cable channel was showing a comedy sitcom but I wasn't really paying attention to the screen. I should have been content with my new life. I had it

all; loving parents, a big house with beautiful lawns and courteous staff that waited on me but all I could feel was loneliness. Emptiness. Nothing made sense to me anymore.

“Does he touch you?”

For a moment, I thought I hadn’t heard him correctly. I shifted in my seat, avoiding his gaze. I suddenly needed fresh air. The air conditioning in the room wasn’t cutting it anymore.

“What?” I managed to stutter, my mouth suddenly getting dry.

He casually gulped down his juice and smiled at me.

“Does your father touch you?” he repeated for clarity, his voice rising slightly at the mention of the word ‘touch’. His eyes softened as he stared at me. Something about his tone showed genuine concern. Sympathy?

I quickly got up from my seat and marched out of the living room as fast as my feet could carry me. How dare he? I ran up the grand, marble staircase, my hands leaning on the balustrade for support as I felt sudden weakness in my limbs. I could view the back of Frontman’s head get smaller through the railing as I ascended. He had the audacity to light a cigarette and puff quietly as though he hadn’t just dropped a bombshell on me. My vision soon got blurry as my eyes got filled with tears. I barged into my bedroom and collapsed on my pink, fluffy bedding and for the first time, I allowed myself to cry. I cried big tears. Father had been doing things to me for some time now. I hated it. He told me that he was appreciating my beauty. He told me it was an act of love. It hurt. I hated him. No one knew. No one was supposed to know.

I thought of confiding in mother but decided against it. I recalled the quick flash anger on her face when Father had bought me my first car. She made him return it to the dealer, insisting that

I was too young to own an Audi. Or her placid smile when the teachers at my elementary school had gleefully informed her that I was already catching up with the rest of my class, even though I had gotten a very poor foundation. I didn't want to give her another reason to resent me and frankly, I was ashamed. So I kept it to myself and suffered silently. He desecrated my body. And I let him. Repeatedly.

Weeks later, I received a parcel. I examined the writing on it and saw that it was addressed to me. Strange. I had never received an anonymous gift. No one came to mind, as I didn't really have friends. I took the package up to my room and impatiently tore through the brown paper wrapping. It was a book: "In Cold Blood" by Truman Capote. I wasn't even a fan of fiction. The book cover had illustrated designs of blood splashes all over. Dark. I flipped through the pages and got engulfed by the tantalizing new book smell. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a cream coloured complimentary card peeking out from one of the middle pages. Boldly written in emerald green font were the words "Alhaji S. M. Maina" with two mobile contacts and an email address. I flipped the card and written in the finest calligraphy I had ever seen was: "The enemy of my enemy is my friend, call me Laylah." I could feel bile rising in my throat as I made a beeline for the bathroom sink. I threw up the lunch I had managed to eat earlier on. I felt so humiliated. What did the ambiguous message even mean? I was super creeped out. I hoped he wasn't seeing me as a pet project. A pitiable figure; the helpless orphan girl that was being molested by her dad. The thought alone made me sick. Months later, I would make the call that would change my life forever.

The putrid smell emanating from the body in front of me made me look up. I couldn't let them find him in this state. No. He deserved better. I needed to do something nice for him; a little send forth. My token of appreciation. I picked his cap from the dresser and propped it on his cold,

bloody head. It was a beautiful brown cap; an original custom-made *Zanna Bukar* in coffee brown with beige embroidery, befitting of someone of his importance. It went perfectly well with the white kaftan he had on. I smoothed my hand over the smattering of grey hairs on his temple. His skin felt eerily cold. You're dead now sir, I giggled. This is where the story gets a little riveting. Who was Frontman?

He was the leader of an underground crime syndicate. Politicking was only his day job. They carried out well orchestrated crimes, targeting top government officials and financial agencies. Money was also being laundered by the billions and my dad was one of his favorite patrons. It was an open secret; the law agencies were well aware of his vices but their silence had been heavily paid for. In my country, when you are rich and mighty, even the most revered laws bend to accommodate your excesses.

With time, I slowly got warped into the underworld. Father was bedridden with a chronic illness and mother had cut me off financially so it was safe to say I needed the money. I started out with petty snooping around for him. Overhearing conversations, stealing contacts, gathering evidence; anything to get back at the man who had defiled me. After a few months, we had him behind bars on foreign shores. I was elated! It gave me a sense of closure to know that he would somehow be paying for his evil. I should have known when to stop but I couldn't. I was already in too deep. I had developed a growing thirst for blood. Frontman loved my tenacity and I soon moved up in the hierarchy. I never thought I'd get the huge satisfaction I did from watching a human being die. The helplessness in their eyes just before they take their last breath was priceless. Refreshing. A feeling I soon got accustomed to as I delved deeper into the mob. I was on a high! But as we all know, high tides ebb and wane, then we are just left with forlorn, dark seas.

My long manicured nail hit the send button on my screen. Typing everything out took longer than I expected. The world deserved to hear the truth about the cabal and who better to tell it than an insider? I had single-handedly taken them down. I should be a national hero. My name should be taught in schools, I thought proudly. I poured myself a glass of juice; the zesty nectar trickling down my parched throat.

I stood up from the couch and strolled round the deluxe suite. The Parisian balcony of the main lounge overlooked the beautiful skyline of Ras al Khaimah. From the 35th floor, the view was indeed breathtaking. Top tier. Life was funny. In the three decades of my existence, I have lived three totally different realities. Fancy Hamrat; the Yemeni orphaned girl that grew up in a dirty home on the outskirts of a remote town now in the most expensive suite of a five star hotel in Dubai. Life was indeed full of surprises. I looked back at the motionless body and smiled. Even in death, Frontman looked very much in control of the situation. His fists were still clenched as they always were when he used to march around giving orders. Arrogant bastard. I am the monster you made. I smiled. Wonderfully, *brutally made*. And with that daunting realization, I plunged myself off the railing - Free falling into the dark oblivion...