

## ADRIANS' LANE...

**'I can live with being afraid for you but I'd appreciate it if you took my fear seriously' ...** she said that and, in that moment, he knew she was cut from a different stone from the rest. She was here to stay and he had to get my head straight and be the guy she sees in him. In that moment his mind flashed back to the last few months and the events that had led them to this point. He was going to get deployed soon, she was antsy because he was leaving and she couldn't deal with the thought.

They had met at a bar on the first night of his return from his first deployment with his new team. It was about 11:23 pm when he walked in with his boys (and they had all been on his case reason being he was the only single guy on the team and they never let him breathe without a reminder). After settling in they had gone three rounds of shots and the six of them felt tipsy enough to drift into the night. Adrian decided to rush home wasn't the best idea so he sat by the counter and requested a red wine; something to help him kill time he thought. *'It's bad manners to ignore a lady you know'*; those words took him out of his thoughts and he looked to his left and this lady with a cute voice addressed him. *'I'm sorry, you said?'* he asked and she repeated *'It's bad manners to ignore a lady'*. He smiled; he hadn't smiled like that in a while. So began a two-hour long conversation and at about 2:00 am they realized how far time had gone. There was no getting back into town that night so the best option was getting a room at the nearby motel. They'd both agreed so they walked down and getting there he was making a request for two rooms when she interjected and said they needed just one and then she whispered in his ear *'Afraid that I'll bite soldier?'*. That sent shivers down his spine for a reason he couldn't explain. This girl was trouble and he could tell but the allure of her danger was one too good for him to resist and so began the first of many nights spent sharing the same bed for Adrian and Bernice.

Over the next three months, they spent a whole lot of time together; everyone at the station knew they were an item; but things began to change when on a fine Thursday afternoon, he and his team members got called in for an emergency briefing. Getting to the base he was among the last set of guys to come into the briefing room. The commander walked in an unusually somber mood to deliver the news that the replacement team that had deployed to take over from them had all been killed in the crossfire with enemy combatants. They were taken out by an IED placed in a house where an alleged target was passing the night. The news struck a cold into the hearts of everyone in the room; they were to redeploy in two weeks.

Within that time things began to go sideways between him and Bernice. She had grown twitchy ever since the news broke. A week to deployment and she grew even more nervous and she woke him up in the middle of the night to talk – a part of him was happy about her finally wanting to talk while another part of him was pissed about her waking him up from one of the last couples of peaceful, full nights rest he was going to enjoy in a while but the last part of him was genuinely concerned and afraid concerning her wellbeing and what she wanted to talk about so bad that it couldn't wait till morning – she began to talk and the brunt of her words was that she was scared for his safety because of the recent deaths and she didn't want him to go. All he could mutter was “Babe don't worry about it I'll be fine and safe and I will return home to you safe”. Then he turned around to try to get some more sleep when she screamed *‘I can live with being afraid for you but I'd appreciate it if you took my fear seriously’* and she backed him and slept off. He was afraid too but this was the job; he chose this part of service and there was no turning back now because he had worked too hard and sacrificed too much to give it all up now. She didn't know he had recently taken out a prescription for sleep pills to help him cope with the angst he had been feeling since the incident. He knew she was having a hard time dealing so he didn't want to compound her worries with his mental health.

Deployment morning; she seemed in a better mood – the previous night was the first happy night they'd had since the incident; they talked, laughed, danced, sang hell even the sex was mind-blowing. It was like their love had caught a new fire – he knew this deployment would be shorter; 3-months tops and he had made up his mind to marry her upon his return. Bernice was a keeper and Adrian intended to keep her forever. She drove him down to the airstrip at the base and watched him unload his things, then she asked him back into the car, and with tears in her eyes, she said *“I love you so much it breaking my heart”*. She said *“I love you but I won't be here when you return”*; he tried to find words but it was time to go. In that moment all the fun, joy, love, and happiness of the last few months was gone and he was back to just being on his own. As he took his seat on the airliner Adrian said the one prayer he and Bernice usually said together, saying *“Lord grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can change; and the wisdom to know the difference...”*

*‘...we had a deal; we had a freaking deal Adi, you dimwit and you dying on me is not a part of that deal so you better wake up before I smack the life out of you...’.*

Bernice was distraught; this was the love of her life lying in front of her on life support in a hospital bed and there was nothing she could do to fix it. She was angry,

exhausted, confused, perplexed, sad, tired. She was feeling so many different emotions all at once. It was too much to take it. She wished she hadn't ended things the way she did on the day of his departure, she wished she had told him how much she loved him, she wished she had called him when she found out she was pregnant. So caught up in her thoughts she hit him hard shouting BIGHEAD WAKE-UP! At that point, a nurse ran in and had to escort her out. After taking her vitals and ensuring she and her baby were okay, she was sleep.

How did we get here? Two months after Adrian left on deployment; Bernice had a hard time getting back to her routines. Life moved on; until she missed her period. She wasn't pregnant, she couldn't be pregnant but then how could she explain the way she had been feeling lately, nausea in the mornings, the extra cravings, and her abnormal eating levels? This was a disaster. She stopped by the clinic on her way to work and had the most grueling of days waiting for the end of work to go pick up her test result. Getting to the hospital and rushing in to see her consultant, the look on his face said it all. SHE WAS PREGNANT. Reality hit; she was pregnant for the man she just broke up with and he was gone for God knows how long. This was not the plan. SHE WAS GOING TO RAISE A CHILD ALONE. What would she tell her friends and her family? That would be a problem for then but for now, she was going to be a single mom; those thoughts ran through her mind as she lay back down to sleep.

Thousands of miles away another individual was going through problems of his own. Every day for the last two months Adrian had suffered the same torture in his sleep; all he kept hearing repeatedly was *'I can live with being afraid for you but I'd appreciate it if you took my fear seriously'* and he would jerk out of his sleep.

They had spent the past months doing recon work, the main focus was on AMIR KAZRI ALMIRI. The man behind the i.e.d attack, that took out the members of Platoon 6. They had been at his tail for about 5 years now. One day after a routine patrol, they were called in for an impromptu briefing; there was intel on where Amir was going to be in three days. It was a capture-or-kill mission, the next three days were spent making preparations and perfecting infill and evac plans. So went 72 hours, they had a 1-hour trip to the target location, a trip that had to be done in the odd hours of the day so as not to attract attention and be in position before the arrival of Amir call time was 02:00 hours. It was about 23:00 hours when he called for his team meeting as was his tradition before every mission, he gave his pep talk, advised the boys to reach out to their partners and families before bed, and then ended the meeting with immaculate words of Lucky Dube *"As I go to bed to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep; if I should die before I wake, I pray the lord my soul to take"*.

Another night same dream for Adrian, he awoke at exactly 01:40 hrs.; and muttered his two favorite prayers in quick succession “... *as I go to bed to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep; if I should die before I wake, I pray the lord my soul to take*”

*“Lord grants me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can change; and the wisdom to know the difference”.*

Departure time, they were split into two helicopters of four team members each and just before they left, he spoke to the team again with the quote “... *in the immortal words of Jayz; whatever deity may guide my life, Lord do not let me die tonight nor allow the devil snuff out my light, but if I shall, before I wake, my fate I doth accept and take*”. The events of the last couple of months flashed through his mind and he was yanked back into reality when the pilot called out that they were 10 minutes away from the infill point. From the infill point came a 15-minute hike to the target location, then the wait for the crack of dawn. They successfully neutralized the guards on target and got to Amir before anyone could raise an alarm. Adrian was first into the room and found him seated at his table about to eat. As they got to him, he heard the subtle sound of a pin drop, his eyes unconsciously scanned the room for the origin of the sound; that was when he saw it; the pin of a hand grenade. Split seconds had him scanning the room and he caught it by the corner of his eye, it was strapped to the bottom of the chair, the long robe Amir had on concealed it all this while; by reflex, he shouted GRENADE! And he managed to dive for the door just as he heard the VERY LOUD BANG! That was the last he heard or saw. Everything became oblivion.

Back to the present, Bernie just woke up feeling all shades of fuzzy and as she made her way to Adi’s room, she remembered the events of the afternoon and felt guilty; she owed him an apology, she needed to apologize to him for losing her cool like that. As she got in, she sat by the head bed and held his hand saying she was sorry for flipping like she did. As she did this, tears flowed down her cheeks in the heat of this she felt his hands move and as she jumped in fright cries of doctor! Doctor! followed. He was moving, after weeks of being in a coma, he was here moving at least. The doctor proceeded to do routine tests after which, they were finally left alone in the room and all he could mutter was...HOW? She put her hands over his lips as she kissed and she managed to slip his hand into her tummy and said “Forget about the how; we are having a baby”.

The shock, the elation, and all of the other thousand-and-one emotions he felt at that moment were nothing he could put into words. In a flash he saw Bernie on one knee with tears in her eyes and a cracked voice she said “I know things haven’t been good between us lately and I know I am to blame but living without you these past

months and all I've realized something important, I don't know how else to put this but I guess all I'm trying to say is; consider this my way of *saying I WOULD LIKE TO SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE WITH YOU AS A REMINDER OF THE FACT THAT I CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT YOU*". With a subtle nod of the head and a muffled "I'd like that", he said yes. They both slept off squeezed together on the tiny bed. They were both asleep when the noise of voices laughing woke them both up. It was the boys and their spouses, who managed to convince the doctors to let them in early before official visiting hours. Banter and jokes followed up until Raymond his second in command managed to recount how he ended up back at the service hospital; apparently, his dive managed to get him far enough from the epicenter of the blast for him not to be blown to pieces. He ended up with a busted hip, a concussion, three broken ribs, and a fractured skull. They exfilled in time, got him medical attention on the base, and were flown back home as soon as he was stable enough. Having listed Bennie as his emergency contact before deployment, she was called as soon as they arrived.