

INSECURE: AN UNTAMED ENEMY.

A NOVELLA BY

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ONE

SATURDAY,

This weekend felt different, maybe because the new week promised a three-day holiday break, and for someone new to the corporate world or fresh into the labor market, like Nigerians say, an extended weekend is like fresh chilled juice served after a long day spent under Abuja's scorching sun. Today, my best friend, Doubie, and I fixed a spa date, which I was running late for, especially since we were booked for a specific time. Today was a relaxed day through and through because I also didn't feel like driving, so here I was in an Uber and on my way to my appointment. You would think my mind would clock that today was meant to be a chilled day, but nope, it was working overtime like most times. What could I be thinking about, one might wonder? Well, my best friend and I intend to use this spa session as a sort of therapy session for each other, and my mind was doing a relay race by overthinking if I really wanted to do this. Whenever people ask the 'what are you most afraid of/what is your biggest fear' question, of course the normal answer would be the usual - failure, death of a loved one, letting oneself down - because I don't even want anyone to be aware that the real answer is that I'm most scared of being vulnerable, and so you can imagine the kind of panic my 23-year-old mind is thrown into to actually begin the process to enforce some sort of change, however little, but the area I planned to open up on was a good area to start because I was about to self-sabotage something good; I could even say something that could potentially be great. So even if I was panicking internally, I was determined to see that by the end of this spa session I had confronted my biggest fear, and baby steps were totally fine.

My phone's message notification pinged me out of my thoughts. I unlocked my phone and opened the message that was a bank credit alert titled 'spa date.' It was an alert of a hundred thousand naira, and I just knew who it

was from before I opened my chat with him. In the unread messages lay the receipt of the transactions with a 'Have fun. xx.' My eyes slid to the next message that read, 'I'm flying into Abuja tonight; dinner later today?'

'It's so short notice; I won't know what to wear; maybe tomorrow?' I replied, biting my lower lip anxiously.

His typing notification popped up then disappeared, and I kept looking into my phone for over a minute to see if he would continue texting, but nothing. Was that it?

I was about to slide out of his chat when another receipt came in at the same time my phone notified me of yet another bank alert. No, he didn't. I downloaded the receipt, and it was yet another hundred thousand for 'shopping'.

'Tell Doubie to help you pick out an outfit and some accessories after your spa date. If the money isn't enough, let me know, please. Are there any other obstacles?'

'Terseer, I'm not sure I'm ready to have 'the talk.'" I don't know.'

'Fine, Elenda, no talks yet; I just want to see you and spend time with you, so dinner later?'

'Yeah, dinner later.'

'Yessss, I'll text you when I arrive in Abuja, and then we'll see what time would be convenient for me to pick you up.' 'See you later, baby girl.

'See you later, T.'

'I love when you call me that; it lets me know I'm getting somewhere with you.' I blushed but didn't say anything; I only reacted to his message with love.

TWO

"So fill me in real quick: what's holding you back with Terseer? You don't like him?" Doubra asked.

We were in this very huge Jacuzzi that had a side table filled with fruits, food, and drinks.

"Well here goes, I don't know if love is for me. I was reading this book titled 'Yinka, where is your huzband?' by Lizzie Damilola, and I got to a part that said, 'A person who doesn't believe in themselves may think they are not worthy of love', and I resonated so much with that sentence. It's a rinse and repeat process of self-sabotage that I'm convinced that I'm probably meant to just cheerlead love and be okay with never being part of the team. You've hinted so many times that you know I fear being vulnerable, but you don't know half of how my head works. Let's take Terseer for example. If I were to even give us a chance to get to know ourselves, once my head catches on to the fact that I like him, it'll start working overtime, rolling over every little detail, looking for an explanation that would be reason enough why it wouldn't work, so why begin something that I already know how it'll end? I'm tired of breaking my own heart." I hated having to admit that, but baby steps, right?

"I'll like to know about your teenage relationships; you've said some things here and there, but I need you to tell me in full; our teenage formative years are important."

"Well, I had two teenage relationships, and I got burned twice. My first relationship was with a family friend, you know how I tell you I didn't like physical touch as a child, well that stayed with me till I was in senior secondary school, so imagine an introverted 13 years old girl who finally saw someone she liked having around, I unfortunately was not close to my mom so I went with my heart a lot and my head a few, he was 19 years old,

he asked me to be his girlfriend and I accepted, my first kiss was with him and I was okay with just kisses but it wasn't just kisses, he wanted more, he wanted different sexual acts and I just could not, if there was one thing I couldn't be pressured to do, it was having sex when I wasn't ready or even sure of the act I was to engage in because I knew very little on it and asking my mom wasn't an option, she was already suspicious, I knew to end it when he almost forced things one day, he asked to suck my breasts and I refused and he almost did it even after I said no, he was convinced that he could convince me to like it but it was a full house and once I began vehemently saying no loudly, he let me, calling me a small child with a smirk. I broke up with him through a letter and went further into a shell that was already like a cage. I blamed myself for even showing that I liked someone and for dipping my hands into such waters. An overthinker who bottles up their emotions is like a ticking time bomb. The situation got worse when I found out that I was a rebound for him. Guess who he was using me to try to recover from?" I paused my story to ask her.

"Who? You knew the person?"

"Yes, it was my sister; they had apparently dated, and she broke up with him when she got together with her university boyfriend."

"What?"

"I think he mistook my number for my sister's because I had her as my WhatsApp profile picture, and so he spilled it all whilst begging her to come back to him. He said he had tried to use other girls to replace her, but he hadn't been successful. He was saying so much trying to get her to accept him back that I had to let him know that he was chatting with the wrong person. When I tell you that I could feel how stunned he was that he had made such a mistake, he tried to play it off, but I wasn't having it or even going to entertain it. I told him off and went about my day, but something in me died a little. I was happy to have been the one to have called it off,

but the thought that I could have been naive and given in to his demands tormented me for way too long."

"Wow, at age 13, that must have crushed your confidence." Double commented, her mouth barely closing.

"It did. It hit hard because that was the first time I had literally followed my heart, like they always say."

THREE

"Do you think that was the start of the battle between your head and heart?"

Her question left me a little bit stunned because I didn't expect her to be spot-on.

"It might not have been the start, but it definitely was a defining moment." I said as I popped a fork full of fruit into my mouth.

"My second relationship was in SS2, and to be frank, there were barely any emotions from my end; that was the only form of peer pressure I fell into. I liked him, but it should have ended at friendship, but I was the designated love letter writer for my class set, and I felt left out. I even had a nickname; I was called 'the ice queen' because for the longest time I seemed unfeeling, so I hoped to prove people wrong, and that landed me a kiss and tell boyfriend. He used our first kiss to gain ground with his boys; our breakup was cemented when I found out that he had been double dating and even leaked the girl's nudes, which was why I found out about the girl in the first place. He and his set of boys had this group chat they used to roast themselves and release girls nudes in their possession. Someone amongst them had added one of my classmates unknowingly; she laid low on the group chat and reported back to us. They had used me to roast him, saying that he was dating someone that could be mistaken for his mother because of our weight difference, and he had leaked a twerk dance video I had sent to him. I was dressed in the video, but I was deeply embarrassed because my heart hadn't even been involved this time, but I still got burned. I ended things and moved on."

"You had such an eventful teenage life, and you didn't confide in anyone, did you?"

"I didn't."

We had spent over 30 minutes in the jacuzzi, so we got out and were on our way to the sauna.

"The problem is that I can't help it; my inability to be vulnerable is a coping mechanism at this point. I don't know if I can trust anyone to love me well enough; I'm the strongest, most fragile person I know. It took me years to uncanceled slim or lean guys because I became insecure. I don't know how to not be in control; it makes me feel naked, and that's why I don't do love or relationships. In this situation with Terseer, I should be happy that he is backing his words with actions, like I would expect any person to move on with how reluctant I obviously am, but he's still there, and that should count as a good thing, but for me, it's almost sending me into panic mode. I'm twisting and turning his actions and looking for motives, maybe because I can tell that I could really start liking him, and liking someone would mean becoming soft and open and facing my fears, but I truly don't know if I can. If I try and I can't, we'll get hurt, and I more so, because there is nothing as painful as watching yourself self-sabotage whilst your soul seeks something else."

We got into the sauna and took a seat beside each other.

"How do you feel about Terseer?" Doubie asked, and I opened my mouth to answer but didn't know how to, and she saw that.

"This is a safe space, El; you're safe with me; give me the most unfiltered answer you can; you wouldn't want to talk about this if a part of you didn't want to fight for the chance in front of you."

FOUR

"I do and I know my body and heart does too, I try to hide how giddy my heart gets when I see his text, try to stop my imagination from running wild by making up scenarios where I actually have a shot at love and companionship, I like his attention, I like his patience, I like how he want to spoil me, 6 months of knowing him and he hasn't ever veered into uncomfortable sexual conversation and you know I'm big on that, we flirt here and there but I never feel uncomfortable, I really want to give this a chance and win, I do not even admit that to myself but I want to be chosen by love, I have so much love to give but I just think that if I take one more hit, I'll break in such a way that I wouldn't know how to salvage."

I didn't realize I had broken into tears until Doubie cupped my chin and wiped a tear off before saying,

"So what if you don't break? What if this heals you instead and helps to soothe the trauma? What if this is right for you? You've spewed so much negativity, but where is the positive?"

"I don't know. It's so hard and draining to have your mind as an enemy. I mean, if it were a person, you could take them out of your life, but how does one fight themselves?"

"By not fighting, you soothe, you heal, you make peace, you compromise; you've run from confronting your mind for so long. I think it's time for you to try a different approach. Your experiences in university were hardly experiences since you were literally attracted to either emotionally unavailable people or persons who didn't like you romantically. I dare say this is the first person that is loud in his attraction to you in both words and actions. I guess you didn't think of that right?"

"Honestly, I've been avoiding processing thoughts about him."

"Well, that's what I'm here for. I'm the light to your darkness till you find your own light, okay?"

"I love you," I said, teary-eyed.

"News flash, it can't be more than I love you, my babe. When we go shopping, we'll discuss ways to approach your fears, but you see, Terseer, that man adores you; my guts are hardly wrong about vibes you know, and you'll see with time, but for now, baby steps, right?"

"Right." I said, smiling as I pulled her into a long, sweaty hug, thinking this girl was definitely my platonic soul mate...

