

DIVINE REVERIE

by

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I have always been one of those people who had the “new phase excitement” syndrome, but for the first time I could not muster up any form of excitement for this new phase — the National Youth Service Corps program.

“Can’t I just skip it? There are a lot of successful people who never did it” I would say whenever the topic came up, but my parents were adamant.

“We will help work out your redeployment, just enter Abuja on the portal and you would be brought back to the city” my dad always reassured me.

The day my call up letter came, was easily the one of the most annoying days of my life.

“Tamara! Problem don land o” Kevwe tone left no room for doubt. I assumed my call up letter was due the next day, but Kevwe’s expression screamed “problem”. I stood up quickly and snatched my phone from Kevwe, only to see a heart wrenching text.

Mr. Manuel: *Sorry madam, the most I could do for you is Anambra. Abuja and Lagos are already full.*

“Fuck!” My thoughts ran wild. None of us knew anyone in Anambra.

“Calm down babe, it might not be that bad.” Kevwe was doing her best to calm me down but going down to the east was nothing to be calm about.

For the next few days, we had to prepare for camp and I was grumpy throughout the whole experience. What even annoyed me more was the fact that she felt the need to carry me to camp like a 9-year-old.

“We need to get to Anambra a few days before camp. I called my friend, Mrs. Balami and she said she knew someone in Anambra and could help you get a very lovely PPA in the state. We would need to meet that her friend before camp so that she would have you in mind” Mom narrated; this got me even more pissed.

It’s just one year, you can do it. I encouraged myself as I went to bed that night.

Church was not something I was ever excited about. The last time I had gone for mass was in my third year and that was to beg God to save me from Mr. Olawale and his habitual 'F' dishing but when Renny asked that I joined her, I had to oblige.

" In Nomine Patris et Filis et Spiritus Sancti"

These words floated around my ears but all I could see was him. His dove shaped eyes and puppy face drew me in. He was the perfect blend of fair and dark...chocolate; not the dark Toblerone chocolate but the caramel Milky Way type. His light beards sat perfectly on his well chiseled face just the way I liked it. *Oh, what I would give to be that rosary dangling from his neck!*

" Tamara!" an aggressive whisper snapped me back to reality "Kneel down."

"Oh" I gasped. The prayer that required kneeling had started but here I was, being distracted by a man.

I shut my eyes tight and asked for forgiveness for my wild thoughts. Also, church might not be such a bad idea.

" Babe, what's going on? You want me to buy you a new rosary and you want to start attending evening mass every day?" Renny asked in absolute shock. With the look on her face, a stranger could have easily assumed that I told her that I had committed murder.

"Yes, what's so surprising about that?"

"Everything dear, I have been begging you for 3 months to attend mass, now all of a sudden, you want to do what?"

"Look, I realized that I had missed church. I'll probably get bored with time, anyway."

"Hmm, ok o".

Days had turned to months and somehow, I had not been able to catch his attention but today was going to be the end of all the attempts, if he could not see me, then that would be it.

"You guys should give me a minute, I'd be back soon" I signaled Renny and two other friends of ours.

"Where are you...." they simultaneously asked as their voices trailed off.

This was my chance.

" Good evening, Father Fabian" I greeted shyly.

"Good evening, dear sister, do you want me to bless your rosary?" He gestured towards my obviously new and dangling rosary.

"Yes Father, I would also like to join catechism class."

"OK, let's start with the rosary" He took the rosary from my hand and blessed it. As he returned it, he looked into my eyes as if to say, 'Is this really why you're here?'

In that moment, all I could think of was *"Dear God! How is my crush and love interest, a Reverend father"?*

I quickly said my penance in advance forgiveness because I had no intention of stopping or changing.

"About the catechism class..." He filled me in on the days for classes and basically everything I needed to know about the classes.

If my mother were here, she would be the happiest woman on earth because I had always been disinterested in any religious activity but here I was, deep in crush and in church. A win-win situation for the both of us—right?

"Tamara, have you finished that report for manager?" Kayla asked as she entered the office.

"Almost through o, madam" I rolled my eyes as she passed by my table. I was one of the few corps members who were lucky enough to not be assigned to a school as their PPA. I had been assigned to a construction company and Kayla was a full-time staff. I couldn't tell why she could not stand me but she could not.

"Don't be snarky with me. You know that if you don't finish it, it will fall back on me." She hissed and sat down.

Ping! Ping!

My phone notification for social media went off.

I checked it and squealed internally.

@Fr. Fabian just accepted your friendship request.

@Fr. Fabian just posted a reel.

I had asked Renny if Father Fabian was on any social media platform.

"How am I supposed to know? Why do you want to know, anyway?" She asked. She was already suspicious of my sudden interest in church, so I decided to just tell her.

"I have a crush on Father and no I'm not going to tempt the man of God it's just a crush." She obviously did not buy it but just said her customary "OK o"

I quickly finished my report then dived into his social media page and started scrolling through. It was only when another notification sound went off that I noticed what I had been doing.

@Fr. Fabian replied to your comment

OH...MY...GOD. I had liked all his posts and even commented on an old one.

"Jesus" I squealed and turned to see Kayla glaring at me.

'Sorry', I mouthed.

"Babe, I'm not comfortable with this your friendship with Father, he's a priest for goodness's sake" Renny complained after I had told her about my new friendship with Father Fabian, an exaggerated version of course.

Father Fabian and I had been having discussions which were mostly based on the Catholic faith, but these little discussions meant the world to me.

"Let me ask you a question" Renny started and adjusted her glasses. "What is your aim here? Do you want to cause him to sin or are you delusional enough to think that he would leave priesthood for you?"

I was pissed at Renny, but these were important questions. I had not thought that far, right now I was having fun but what if I started developing real feelings? What if he developed feelings? Good God! That would be too crazy for words.

"I don't have one. It's just a crush plus our conversations have been only on the Catholic faith." I blurted after a few minutes.

"Here's my phone if you still don't believe" I tossed my phone at her. She knew my password and she opened the phone to check. After minutes of scrolling, she tossed back my phone and said "*Sha* be careful. This is a dangerous game you're playing. "

And it was indeed dangerous.

My phone had been buzzing loudly; so loudly that Renny who was a deep sleeper, had to wake up and wake me up.

I checked my phone; I had 4 missed calls from Kayla.

Why was she calling me today, was today not Thursday? I wondered in irritation and turned to my calendar. Lo and behold, it was Wednesday, and I was late for work.

I quickly dialed her number to apologize.

Me: Hello, Ms. Kayla, I'm so sorry I'm this late, something came up but I'm on my way.

She just hissed and cut the call without another word. That was code for, 'if I don't see you in 30 minutes, you're finished'. My office was one hour away if I walk and 45 minutes with public transport, mostly because of the extra time it took to fill the vehicle.

"Bye, babes" I said to Renny as I hurriedly left the house.

They say God works in mysterious ways and what was before my eyes immediately I got to the street of my house, made me believe.

"Father Fabian!" I screamed immediately I sighted his car.

"Tamara! How are you? Do you live around here?"

"Yes, Father. Please, I'm going down the street. Can I join you?" I politely asked. It was a stretch, but I had to take chances. Thank goodness that I was decently dressed.

"Okay, hop in" He replied while looking around as though he was trying to make sure no one saw us. I got in and in less than 30 minutes I arrived at my office.

It had been a month since Father Fabian gave me a lift and the past month had been surprisingly fun. We had been having more frequent conversations, we went from general bible discussions to books to the Nigerian government. I had moved from crush to full blown love. Our personalities blended perfectly; he was the calm to my storm. In one of our conversations, I could not believe how calm one person could be so graceful.

Me: My direct supervisor is very annoying. It's almost as if she looks for ways to pick on me and henceforth, I would be giving her problems.

Fr Fabian♥: The Bible says that we should live peaceably with all men. How about you pray for her heart.

Me: LOL

There were many things that fascinated me about Father, I sometimes couldn't tell if his amazing behavior was because of his office as a Reverend father or because he was just such a great person. I also, could not understand how he was never distracted by my sitting in front during mass. Especially in the mornings after we had had an interesting discussion the night before.

"Wake up, birthday big head!" Renny announced as she jumped on my bed.

"You want to give me a headache on my own birthday? *Abeg* leave me *jare*"

Birthdays were never a big deal to me. I was never lucky to have people excited about the day, also, the day always served as a reminder of how I was getting old without any tangible win.

"Nope, not headache but toothache because I was up all-night, baking."

When she said that, I didn't know when tears started rolling down my cheeks.

"Don't be a drama queen" she said and hugged me. The rest of the day went beautifully. We were home all day, and my phone did not stop buzzing but the day became more interesting at 3pm when a dispatch rider knocked a few minutes after Renny stepped out to buy water.

"Break the door o" I replied sarcastically after the knock because I assumed it was Renny.

"Good....Good afternoon. Who are...are you?" I stuttered upon seeing a delivery man.

"You have a package ma, please sign here."

I hurriedly signed the paper and took the package inside; the sender left a note. Thank God Renny was out.

The card read;

Happy Birthday dearest Tamara. The heavenly hosts are singing because you were born. Your mere existence is a blessing to many, especially me. May the heavens bless you all year round.

Happy Birthday Beauty.

***Yours,
Father Fabian.***

I could not believe my eyes. After a few minutes of shock, I quickly went to hide the letter before Renny returned.

Things got weird between I and Father Fabian after my birthday. He had called to personally wish me 'happy birthday' and then confessed his feelings. We were now fully aware of our feelings for each other. I tried my best to avoid him since then but after mass on Saturday, he requested that I stay back and clean the sacristy.

"You've been avoiding me" his voice filled the small room after everyone had left.

"No Father" I whispered.

"Fabian, it's Fabian to you, when we are alone" he said softly.

I could not believe my ears. I wanted to turn and hug him and maybe even kiss him.

"What do we have to discuss?"

"Our love. I know you're worried because I'm a Reverend Father and I honestly don't want to defile you." He said as he took my hands and raised my chin, causing me to look into his eyes.

"I want to marry you, Tamara. I'd give up priesthood for you. That's how much I love you." He said tenderly.

I would give up anything for you too! I thought.

"I love you too, Fabian" I replied and in a flash his lips crashed into my expectant lips.

"Wake up! Sleepy head" I heard mom say.

My sister walked into the room and said, "You've been sleeping like a log of wood since yesterday."

It was all a dream.

"Where am I?" I asked in panic.

"A hotel in Anambra, we arrived yesterday.

"It was all a dream...Phew!"

What an intense dream.

"What happened?"

"I had the weirdest dream."

"Hmm, your dreams are always weird, so I don't know why this one is weirder. Anyway, mom found a church close by and said we should all go for mass this evening so that she can pray for you at Mary's grotto" my sister rattled. I was yet to recover from the shock, but I had to prepare for church. My mother happens to be a very religious woman but is also short fused.

St, Mary's Church in Awka could easily be counted as one of the grandest cathedrals I have ever seen.

“You both should walk quickly; we are almost late” Mom urged us on. With the way she hurried, you would not believe that it was the lengthy prayer she offered at the grotto that caused our lateness.

We got into the Cathedral and a prayer welcomed us.

“In Nomine Patris et Filis et Spiritus Sanctum”

I could recognize that voice anywhere but what were the odds of it being the voice I knew.

I looked up and there he was, as perfect as I remember—Father Fabian.