

## Unrequited

The speech was a resounding success. Hundreds of people in the dimly lit banquet hall stood up from their chairs and tables to applaud the senator's impassioned plea for change. The ovation and loud cheers spilled out of the banquet area with the senator and his wife as the doors were opened for them and they exited through to the main lobby. Two aids flanked each side of the senator and his wife, competing for his attention as they made their way to the front entrance of the hotel. The rain was pouring down outside and the most ambitious of the two aids sprinted out into the evening's downpour, without an umbrella, to hail a cab for the couple.

They waited inside, the senator shaking hands and accepting congratulations while his wife stood passively by, smiling and nodding in an agreeable, affirming manner whenever someone happened to look her way. A cab arrived and the aids made umbrellas magically appear out of nowhere as they escorted the couple across the hotel entrance's red carpet and swiftly into the cab. She had been spared the insult of being harassed by the falling drops of water thanks to the extreme diligence of the senator's aids. She entered the cab first, as dry as she had been when nearly falling asleep in the banquet room during her husband's rousing speech.

"To the Alex Hotel!" ordered the senator.

The cab slowly pulled away from the curb, rolling through a deep pool of water that threatened to enter the car as it carefully merged into traffic.

"What did you think of my speech?"

"It was wonderful dear, possibly your best to date," she responded.

She always answered that question with the exact same phrase and in the exact same tone whenever he asked. He never noticed. The senator's cell phone began ringing.

"I have to take this!"

Every call was an urgent one that needed to be answered. She nodded her well-rehearsed affirming nod, and turn to stare out of the window of the cab into the city's darkness.

"Tell that asshole if he doesn't vote for the appropriations like he said he would I'll make sure he regrets it!"

The senator's voice faded into a mist of sounds partially drowned out by the rain pelting the roof of the car and partially by the music playing on the cab driver was playing.

"First time in New York ma'am?"

The cab driver was speaking to her. No one ever spoke to her. She regained the fraction of composure she had lost staring out into the night and answered him. He had a thick Cameroonian accent. She loved foreign accents, they reminded her of her years in college when she met much more interesting people than she was meeting as a senator's wife.

"No, I grew up here. This used to be my home," she answered, still thoughtlessly staring out of the window into a rapidly passing obscurity.

"Well my father used to always tell me that home is anywhere your heart is," spoke the driver.

A sudden, intense blend of heightened anticipation and hopeful exhilaration wash over her entire body. There was something familiar about the cab driver's voice. She quickly turned away from the window and looked into the cabs rearview mirror. Instinctively she drew her hand to her chest as her heart began an unmeasured, frenetic pulsing. Her breathing became very shallow as she recognized the pair of dark eyes looking back at her in the rearview mirror. The senator continued with his phone conversation.

“Call Congressman Bradley and tell him that this offer has a short shelf life.”

She was gripped by an inability to speak. She struggled to catch her breath.

“Do you believe that ma’am?” asked the cab driver.

In the haze of confusion whirling around in her head, she could barely manage to say a single word.

“What?” was her barely audible murmur, but the cab driver heard her.

“Do you believe that home is wherever the heart finds itself?”

There was no mistaking the identity of the pair of beautiful ebony hued eyes returning her gaze in the rearview mirror. His name was Marcel. They had met in college, shared a love of insatiable desire and then, later, after graduating, they parted ways in a manner that left many questions unanswered between them.

“I don’t care if the subcommittee is dragging its’ heels on this, we need a decision by next week!”

As Marcel attempted to navigate the tumult of the stormy night, turning corners, slowing and stopping at barely visible lights, his eyes faithfully returned to her at unpredictable intervals in the rearview mirror.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t hear your answer ma’am,” he said.

“Yes,” she whispered, almost to herself, somewhat incoherently.

She struggled for something smart to say, something to alleviate the awkward stress of the moment. She desperately wanted to speak but no words would come from her mouth. She was lost in a confusion that was as surprisingly pleasant as it was discomfoting.

“Some say that there is more said in silence than with words spoken aloud,” said the Marcel. “Do you think this is true?”

“Yes!” she quickly answered, loudly and without hesitation, brimming with an enthusiasm that startled her husband.

“Are you alright dear?” asked the senator as he cupped his hand over the receiver of his cell phone.

“Yes, I’m fine.”

The senator had already returned to his call before she could complete her answer.

She could see that Marcel was smiling a wide smile. He always smiled. This was what had made her fall in love with him in college, his smile, his eyes. He held up an old cassette between his thumb and forefinger, showing it to her as he continued looking ahead, driving. Marcel put a cassette in the cassette deck of his cab and turned up the volume. He still used cassettes! She smiled from somewhere deep within. He had always been quirky that way. In college he still had an 8-track while everyone else had moved on to cassettes and now, here in the digital age here was playing a cassette while everyone else had moved on to iPods. Marcel began singing the song from the cassette he had chosen, an old Bob Marley standard, “No, woman, no cry.”

“Please!” shouted the senator, “I’m trying to conduct business back here!”

Marcel continued secret serenade, boldly ignoring the senator’s plea for quiet.

Good friends we have, oh, good friends we have lost along the way, yeah!

She couldn't control the involuntary smile rising up from within her. The deep resonance of Marcel's voice made her body shudder in a very pleasant way she thought lost with age. She exhaled slightly as her body began to recall the passion of their shared moments.

Marcel sang out even louder, "Little darlin don't shed no tear."

Her heart pushed back at his singing in inebriated, uneven palpitations. She waited each second for him to return his eyes to her from the road in front of him. It was almost as if an eternity of time elapsed each time the road forced him to look away before he would eventually return her gaze in the rearview mirror.

Subconsciously, she began singing the song with him, but in a very low inaudible, respectful voice. Marcel grinned, as he was able to catch glimpses of her lips moving in sync with his in mirror.

No, woman, no cry:

No, woman, no cry. Eh, yeah!

A little darlin', don't shed no tears:

No, woman, no cry. Eh!

Irritated by the driver's display of impertinence, the senator forcefully interrupted the chorus once again but no one heard him. His wife's eyes were transfixed on the rearview mirror awaiting Marcel's gaze to return from the road. Lost in his own world, the senator was unable to see what was happening in his presence. He returned to his call.

"Just another crazy New York night Stan, tell Joshua to return that call tonight, don't wait until tomorrow!"

The duo's singing got louder as they approached the Alex hotel.

Everything's gonna be all right-a!

Everything's gonna be all right!

Everything's gonna be all right, yeah!

Everything's gonna be all right!

As the cab pulled over to the submerged curb, other aids dashed from the hotel with umbrellas and opened the doors. Throngs of reporters, cameramen and writers were standing in the pouring rain outside of the hotel, waiting to elicit just a few words from the senator. The senator jumped out of the cab and stood up fully erect, reaching one of his hands back into the cab to help his wife exit. She didn't emerge.

Everything's gonna be all right! they sang

Now Marcel's gaze wasn't distracted any longer by his having to drive. She possessed his full attention. While Marcel sang, he made sure to punctuate each word that held special meaning with heavy annunciating.

O little darlin...

A joy she had not felt in years was filling her to the brim as she began singing louder.

No, woman - no, woman - no, woman, no cry:

"Honey, we're here!" shouted the senator.

His voice was angry, which startled her but she remained euphorically defiant. The song was finished. There was something in her that wanted, no needed, to finish singing this song. She ignored her husband and continued singing, loudly.

No, woman, no cry:

No, woman, no cry. Eh, yeah!

A little darlin', don't shed no tears:

No, woman, no cry. Eh!

He had never encountered this sort of behavior from his wife. The senator ducked his head down into the cab just as the song was finishing, grabbing his wife's hand. She scooted across the seat from her side maintaining eye contact. Just as she was about to exit the car she reached back inside to retrieve one of the business cards stuck in the divider separating the driver from his passengers.

The senator's aids slammed the cab door closed and escorted the couple through the mob of press. The cab slowly pulled away from the curb and then stopped. She turned and watched. The cab then finally pulled away, driving off into the evening's downpour.

The End