

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Shirley Biagi writes, “In this contemporary era the use of mass communication has already become a lifestyle. It is often true at least in this period that to be connected is to be wireless.”¹ New, and emerging technologies allow people to use them anytime, and anywhere. Furthermore, continuous globalization gives almost everyone access to anything, and everything. Through using convenient devices, it is easier for many to download applications or materials that are necessary such as music, documents, games, and books. Free access of devices available results in mass media, and readers becoming “totally mobile.”² Moreover, gadgets seem to be essential to the newer generation.³ For most Filipino adolescents, belongingness is present once a gadget is acquired; it prompts

¹ Shirley Biagi, *Media/Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2005), 5.

² Dawn Julie Ann J. Contreras et. Al. “The ‘Wattyfever’: Constructs of Wattpad Readers on Wattpad’s Role in their Lives” *Journal of Arts and Sciences* 2, no. 1 (September 2015): 308, <https://lpulaguna.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/13.THE-%E2%80%9CWATTYFEVER-%E2%80%9D-CONSTRUCTS-OF-WATTPAD-READERS.pdf>.

³ Jesus Alfonso Datu and Nino Jose Mateo, “Investigating Happiness Through a Psychoanalytic Social Lens” Perspectives from Filipino Adolescents,” *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 1, no. 5 (November 2012): 238. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.457.6619&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

a feeling of connectedness to the world than involving themselves to people around them.⁴

Literature has also entered the digital platform with the rise of media's advancement. There are books, stories, and poems available on the internet today and they are the fastest-growing medium as of around 2015.⁵ Millennials being a computer literate generation compose the most number of people involving digital literature.⁶ Researcher Eliza Dresang noted that digital media have served as a catalyst leading to new styles of printed books with graphics in new forms and formats, nonsequential organization, and multiple layers of meaning.⁷ Evidence of these innovations is the shift of readers from reading traditional books to reading through websites containing different e-books that can be accessed and downloaded for free such as FanFiction (www.fanfiction.net), Fiction Alley (www.fictionalley.org), Internet Archive (www.archive.org), Webnovel (www.webnovel.com), and Wattpad (www.wattpad.com).⁸ The easy access of reader's needs and wants on the digital media considering that they are knowledgeable proves that the internet can indeed be an ecosystem for literary discourse.

⁴ Datu and Mateo conducted an experiment and identified that Filipino youth feels satisfaction with material things; being fixated on the mindset that happiness can be also achieved through the satisfaction of desired materials such as gadgets, and such.

⁵ Xiping Liu and Changxuan Wan, "What Are You Reading: A Big Data Analysis of Online Literary Content," in *Data Mining and Big Data*, ed. Ying Tan and Yuhui Shi (Chiang Mai, TH: Springer, 2019), 24.

⁶ Arlene Nicolas and John Lewis, "Millennial Attitudes Toward Books and E-Books," *Faculty and Staff - Articles & Papers*, 2018, Salve Regina University. https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=fac_staff_pub.

⁷ Dresang studied fundamental changes in literature because of digital format. She wrote several books involving digital media like *Radical Change: Books for Youth in a Digital Age*.

⁸ "Authors: Check Out These 21 Fan Fiction Sites" *The Book Publicist*, October 26, 2014, <https://book-publicist.com/2014/10/26/authors-check-out-these-21-fan-fiction-sites/>.

The advancement the internet world experiences has paved way for aspiring and legitimate writers to publish their works freely. Readers spend increasing amounts of time in conversations with others in this nonlinear, hyperlinked environment.⁹ This active milieu allows not merely conversations among the readers through exchange of reading experiences, and reactions to a certain story but also creation and negotiation of narratives. These exchanges start negotiations in the course of the story in which the writers usually consider to keep engagement of readers to the narrative.

Background/Rationale of the Study

Allen Lau, the co-founder and CEO of Wattpad, describes the online storytelling community as a website where anyone can upload anything and then read it on a mobile phone.¹⁰ In 2002, Lau wants to create a mobile reading application on a cellphone. His co-founder, Ivan Yuen, is ahead of his planning who already created a website. In their collaboration, they create an online storytelling community for readers to read or publish stories. Wattpad offers different genres such as: fan fiction, spiritual, romance, poetry, and more. It deals with thirty-one different display languages and fifty-six diverse story languages; including Filipino. As Lau mentioned, Wattpad has been gaining support in Asia and in the Philippines since 2011. Downloads, ratings, audience use, and time of usage of the platform demonstrate support especially in the Philippines. It has over one hundred million downloads on Android and 4.7 out of five ratings on iOS as of million

⁹ Eliza Dresang, "Radical Change: Books for Youth in a Digital Age," *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* 8, no. 3 (2008): 295. <https://citejournal.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/v8i3seminal2.pdf>.

¹⁰ Sophie Rochester, "Wattpad: Building the world's biggest reader and writer community," *The Literary Platform*, October 2012, <http://theliteraryplatform.com/magazine/2012/10/wattpad-building-the-worlds-biggest-reader-and-writer-community/>.

downloads on Android and more than four out of five ratings on iOS as of November 12, 2018. The platform has over seventy million monthly audience use, thirty-seven minutes average session time spent by a user which makes twenty-two billion minutes spent on the platform.¹¹

In the Philippines, there are young Filipino writers who are into online publishing, writing, and reading and Wattpad is their most used digital narrative platform.¹² Anyone can contribute their work as long as they have internet access since it is offered freely. The popularity of Wattpad indicates the submersion of contemporary influential and innovative writers in the publishing arena.

Wattpad announced in 2018 that it had reached seven million page views in the Philippines every month.¹³ Allen Lau claims that Filipino Wattpadders lead Southeast Asia in mobile reading and writing as Wattpad's second largest market globally. From the massive support of Filipino readers, writers, and entertainment executives understood that true scope of Wattpad is to entertain and connect the world through stories.¹⁴ To date, the Philippines has adapted more Wattpad stories for print, TV, and film than any other country in the world such as "She's Dating the Gangster," and "Talk Back and You're Dead." With all the data presented, it is undeniable that there are a huge number of readers on Wattpad.

¹¹ "Wattpad Platform in numbers," About Wattpad, Wattpad, accessed November 18, 2018, <https://company.wattpad.com/>.

¹² "Re-fictionalizing Philippine Fiction Writing: Alter(na[rra]tive) Platforms and Counter-Literature" International Writing Program Archive of Residents' Work, October 21, 2016, accessed April 5, 2018, http://ir.uiowa.edu/iwp_archive/941.

¹³ Marjaleen Ramos, "Wattpad achieves new milestone in PH mobile reading and writing," Manila Bulletin, May 05, 2018, <https://business.mb.com.ph/2018/05/05/wattpad-achieves-new-milestone-in-ph-mobile-reading-and-writing/>.

¹⁴ Ramos, "Wattpad."

However, browsing the website, a shortage of Christian literature on the digital platform is seen which was the starting point of this project. A search under the Spiritual section yields nineteen results. Six of those in Islam and only three relate to Christianity. Furthermore, the keywords ‘God,’ ‘Christian,’ and ‘Jesus’ do not give exact results related to Christianity. There are no stories from a Christian Perspective under the result ‘God’, one out of one hundred stories show results relating to Christianity under ‘Christian,’ and two out of one hundred stories on ‘Jesus’ appear to have relation to Christian standpoint. This leads to less than five percent of which are not even exactly a Christian story.

The author’s previous experience as a writer on the platform has led to observations on the permeation of secular stories in an engaging digital community. As argued earlier, the Wattpad readership exposure is mostly angled towards the secular material available. This study explores the possibility for a Christian narrative for this audience given Wattpad’s means for conversation and negotiation.

Theoretical Framework

The production of a Christian narrative for Wattpad readership followed the theoretical contribution of Stewart Hoover, the *Mediation of Meaning*.¹⁵ Hoover developed this as a tool for studying religious communities’ negotiation with new media.¹⁶ This approach looks for the social meaning that the media have for people and turns to the reception side of communication which is “how the various media and

¹⁵ Heidi A. Campbell, “Surveying theoretical approaches within digital religion studies,” *New Media & Society* 18, no. 1 (2017): 20, SAGE Journals.

¹⁶ Campbell, “Surveying theoretical approaches,” 20.

messages that are accessible to individuals in the private sphere are received, understood, and potentially used in other spheres of social and cultural life.”¹⁷ This approach offers rich insight into what meaning people make out of media in various contexts of use. Mediation of meaning assumes that the audience are people of faith and how they influence others changed based upon the media they use. They are active patrons and interpreters of the media content, making sense of the media they use through connecting between the messages represented and their own principles.¹⁸ The media offers a language to the audience for the opportunity of communication within the community where the “mediation of meaning” arises as it presents media as an important resource helping people negotiate and express religious beliefs and values within culture. The framework shifts away from push marketing and toward pull marketing where the consumers go to the market not the market going to the consumers.¹⁹ In this study, as the researcher published the chapters, readers engaged continually following the updates of the book. This project initiated uncoerced engagement of readers therefore, they naturally engaged themselves.

This production thesis however focused on a Christian devotional-influenced narrative in a digital form for a non-descript audience. Comments, messages, and story elements opened the negotiation of the chapters posted. Negotiations were active since these came from audience proficient in the Wattpad platform. Any reaction or engagement they had were influenced by their backgrounds both online or offline.

¹⁷ NA. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell, (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2013), 230.

¹⁸ Campbell, “Surveying,” 19.

¹⁹ Stewart Hoover, “Religion in a Media Age” (lecture, University of Colorado--Boulder, Boulder, CO, 1997).

Negotiations here were shaped by the readers' culture, rather than formed by the digital media used since they react based on what they know. The narrative was merely presented to the platform and the audience engaged themselves in the story and made negotiations when urged, not forcing it on them. As Manuel Castells claimed, power operates in the audience's mind through the process of communication and negotiation.²⁰ Therefore, negotiation happened through the factors that affected the reader's thinking. Furthermore, as engagement through negotiations arose, Hoover's Mediation of Meaning naturally took place. This phase demonstrates Hoover's approach through the expected evident writer-reader exchange of thought.

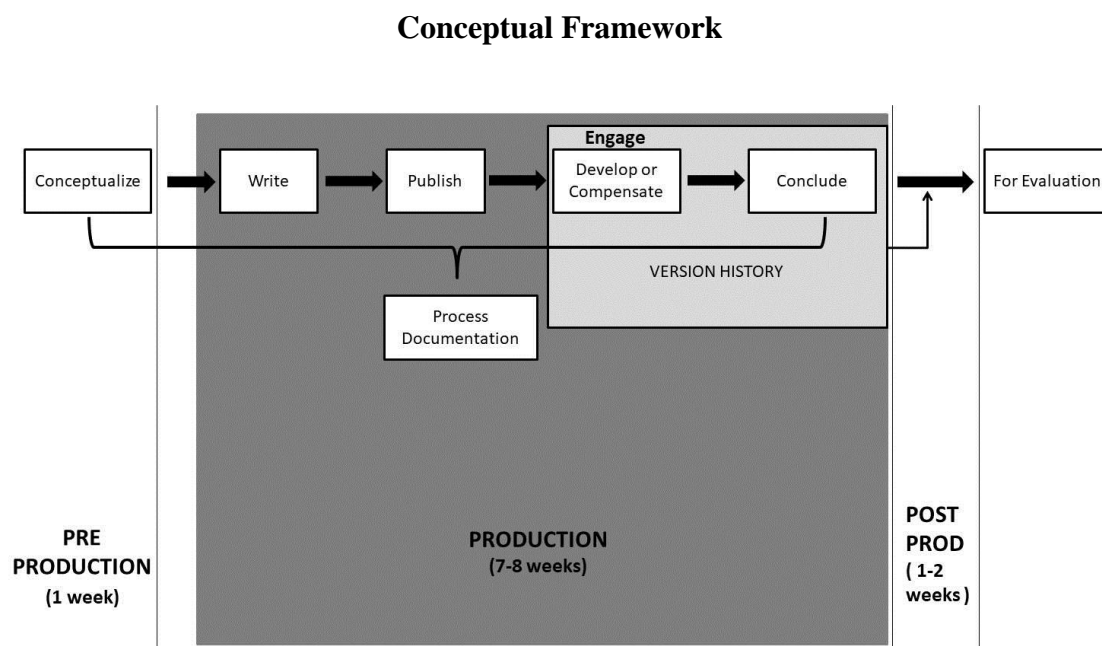


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

²⁰ Stewart M. Hoover and Nabil Echchaibi, "Media Theory and the Third Spaces of Digital Religion," (paper presented at the University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, CO, 2014). Castells attributes power in the digital age and claims that power is something known when expressed and technologically mediated.

The initial phase of this project covered the story conceptualization where the characters, plot, story title, and digital story cover were developed and identified. The concepts in this phase were reinforced from the writer's previous thoughts, experiences, and reading which happened months before the production of the thesis. The narrative is a romance story based on a Christian devotional that revolved around sexual touch boundaries of a couple. After deciding the story's working structure, the main phase of production started. This incorporated the writing, publishing, development, and conclusion of the story. The researcher entered the community as a ghostwriter in the writing process. This was necessary since the researcher is known as a writer on Wattpad. The story gained readership through the tags used by the researcher. These tags optimized the story to appear in the search suggestions. Consequently, engagement was initiated by the writer with the readers through the author's note to attain story development and compensation. This development was based on the negotiations made by the readers which are messages that introduced suggestions, changes, and comments that affected the plot of the narrative.

While negotiations were made, a record of version history was kept. Version history was kept specifically for technical review. A day after conclusion, the writer identified herself as a researcher to the readers and released the chapter version history. This commenced the post-production of this thesis. The production no longer became accessible for changes when the researcher revealed herself. This act indicates the completion of the production.

As soon as the writer identified herself as a researcher, the project was ready for evaluation. Three elements were assessed: plot, writing, and audience response. The plot

was evaluated by a select trio of readers whereas the researcher assessed the writing and audience response. Three materials were produced at the end of the project namely, story published on Wattpad, version history log, and process documentation; the last two were preserved as word document files.

Thesis Statement

This project was designed to write a Christian narrative on Wattpad. The story was based, restricted, and instituted on a devotional about romantic relationship from YouVersion The Bible App, “The Sexual Touch Boundaries & Scripture.” The study included the initiation of audience engagement. Although the story was open for Wattpad Readership, it was promoted exclusively on Taytay First Church of the Nazarene Generation Congregation to guarantee readers. Furthermore, the project was intended to document the production process considering this study a baseline for future research.

Significance of the Study

This thesis presents a meaningful opportunity to produce a creative way of sharing the Gospel to the readers through writing a Wattpad narrative based on a Christian devotional. With the study’s potential to initiate similar writings in a secular platform, the metrics provided in this study would be a baseline for assessment of other similar works in the genre. Lastly, the process documentation would preserve a replicable system that could be adapted beyond the Wattpad platform.

Definition of Terms

The following terms have been explained and defined as used in the research to provide a better understanding of this study.

- 1) Christian Devotional—Christian devotional refers to a booklet or publication, including online or digital that provides a specific reading for each day. They are used during daily meditation which help focus thoughts, and guides prayers.²¹ The study’s concept was from a Christian devotional on YouVersion The Bible App.²² The narrative was bounded from The Sexual Touch Boundaries & Scripture,²³ a devotional on romantic relationships.
- 2) Sexual Touch Boundaries—The study codifies the sexual touch boundaries with its limits to the following, holding hands and hug as a greeting. At the other end, private organ touches and premarital sex are a breach of the boundary.
- 3) Negotiation—Suggestions, changes, and comments from the readers that affected the plot of the narrative.

²¹ “What is a Devotional and Why Is it Important?” Christianity, Learn Religions, February 08, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, <https://www.learnreligions.com/what-is-a-devotional-and-why-is-it-important-712556>.

²² YouVersion’s The Bible App offers free Bible experience for gadgets allowing users to access online Bible and devotionals.

²³ <https://my.bible.com/reading-plans/2678-sexual-touch-boundaries-scripture>, accessed November 30, 2018.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The story was only posted on Wattpad. The story was solely composed of prologue, epilogue, and twenty chapters wherein only one to three chapters, depending on the reader's requests, were posted every week for three consecutive months. Finally, the incorporation of the message was exclusively from a Christian devotional.

The respondents were readership of Wattpad although Taytay First Church of the Nazarene Generation Congregation (GenCon) was the starter respondent group of this project. Age, gender, and similar demographics were excluded as these classifications required a more expansive approach beyond the reach of this study.

The researcher used English as the language in writing the story. Thus, only readers who comprehend English on Wattpad were the respondents of this production. The whole production was completed in eighteen weeks.

CHAPTER TWO

SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE, STUDIES, AND WORKS

This chapter reviews related literature as divided into five sections: elements of story and writing, media in Christian perspective, digital audience's community, and audience engagement and their motivation to respond.

Elements of the Story

The effectiveness of oral or written communication is based on how the message is delivered to the audience.²⁴ There are certain techniques implemented to effectively deliver the message to the receivers focus on the importance of attaining clarity, increasing emotional power, enhancing credibility, and improving sender-receiver rapport as what Wayne Thompson discusses.²⁵ Gustav Freytag argued that every story has the following parts, exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, and denouement.²⁶ Freytag diagrammed a story's plot using a pyramid shown in Figure 2.

²⁴ Wayne N. Thompson, *Responsible and Effective Communication* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 261-262.

²⁵ Thompson, *Communication*, 1978. Thompson focused on these four major things that should be given attention to achieve oral communication effectiveness.

²⁶ NA, "Freytag's Dramatic Structure (Plot) Pyramid" (handout, University of Ohio, Washington, OH, n.d.). Freytag was a German novelist who saw common patterns in the plots of stories and novels and developed a diagram to analyze them.

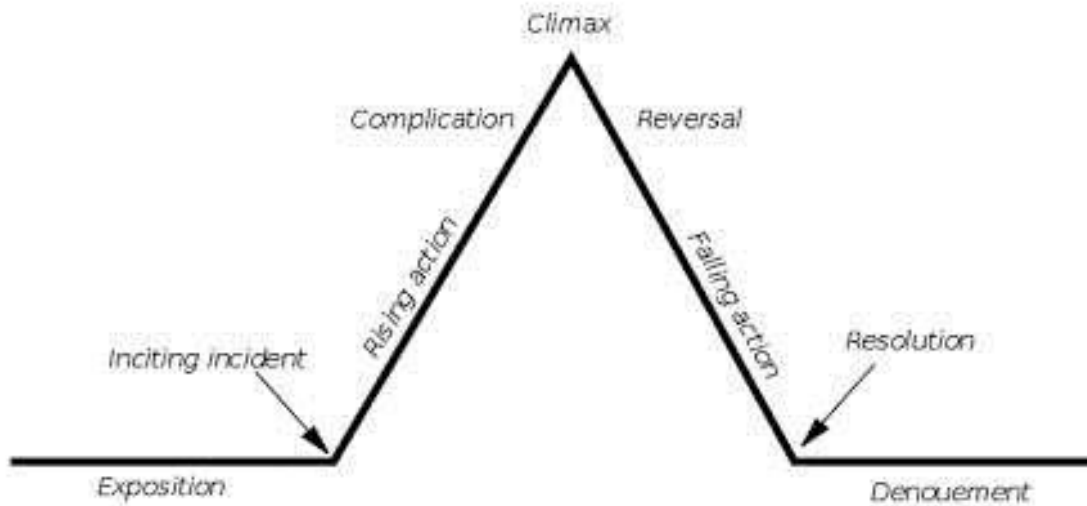


Figure 2: Freytag's Pyramid (source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Freytags-Pyramid-illustrating-the-dramatic-structure-of-a-narrative_fig1_315705503)

Exposition is where the fundamental information needed in the narrative is revealed.²⁷ This phase allows the readers to comprehend the information such as main character, setting, and so forth. The writer creates a description that would build the story and invite the readers to imagine the scenario. Inciting incident marks the end of exposition. It invokes what is known as dramatic question that will eventually be answered in the climax.²⁸ Freytag discussed that this phase ends with inciting moment which sets the rest of the story in motion.

Rising action follows as obstacles that frustrate the main character's attempt to reach their goal appears.²⁹ These events and actions contribute to the building of the suspense and tension to the plot. This is traditionally seen as the character arc when

²⁷ NA, "Freytag's Dramatic Structure."

²⁸ D William Landsborough, "Freytag's Pyramid and the Three-Act Plot Structure," *D William Landsborough* (blog), July 11, 2017, <http://www.dlandsborough.com/blog/2017/7/11/freytags-pyramid-and-the-three-act-plot-structure>. Landsborough stated that inciting incident should invoke the dramatic question: What do the protagonists have to do to solve the problem they face?

²⁹ "Freytag's Pyramid," Dr. Wheeler's Website, accessed November 17, 2018, <https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/freytag.html>.

protagonists learn about themselves and the abilities that they might not know they have.³⁰

The greatest tension in a story happens in climax. Often the most exciting and most suspenseful part of the plot, it is also the peak of the action and the turning point in the story. Things will have gone badly for the main character up to this point; now, things will begin to go well for the heroine.³¹ The turning point for the protagonist's character happens after the hindrances that came along the way.

Falling action transpires when events happen as a result of the climax and there is an indication of conclusion. In his blog, Landsborough clarifies that climax might contain a moment of final suspense.³² Landsborough also explains that during this, the conflict unravels with the main character either winning or losing. Falling action includes the resolution which answers the dramatic question raised in the exposition.³³

The plot ends with denouement. Landsborough mentions that this stage is for "tying up of loose ends." Any remaining secrets, questions or mysteries which remain after the resolution are solved by the characters or explained by the author. The readers start to realize their takeaway from the story due to the evident growth of the main character shown. Protagonists gain a new sense of self in this stage of the pyramid.

³⁰ Landsborough, "Freytag's Pyramid and the Three-Act Pilot Structure." An important aspect to the rising action is the notion that the protagonistst cannot grow individually, but should be aided by companions.

³¹ Landsborough, "Freytag's Pyramid and the Three-Act Pilot Structure."

³² "Freytag's Pyramid" Dr. Wheeler's Website.

³³ "Freytag's Pyramid," Dr. Wheeler's Website.

Though this is not the only structure of writing a plot, Freytag's pyramid can be traced back to Aristotle and his concept of beginning, middle, and end.³⁴ It is a classic way of telling stories. Hence, using these elements in writing a Christian narrative is great contribution in building a concrete foundation and structure for the wholeness of the story.³⁵

Writing Elements

The writing process of the story entails different techniques that would initiate maximum engagement of the audience to the Christian narrative in the Wattpad platform.

Consistent Writing Style

Being a reader demands gaining a large share of their information about, and their understanding of the world from the written word.³⁶ This gives writers great responsibility to implement consistency in their works. Consistency is either uniform or harmonious depending on whether a set of linked elements is divisible or indivisible into subsets.³⁷ It helps readers follow the plot easier and what better way to achieve it than consistent writing. To deal successfully with consistency problems, patterns that are

³⁴ Richard McKeon, eds., *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1941), 1462. Aristotle considers the proper construction of plot since it was the most important thing in Tragedy. He explained a beginning does not have anything before and has something else after it. Middle has after one thing and another after it. The end has usual with nothing else after it.

³⁶ Mortimer J. Adler, Davi and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 6.

³⁷ David K. Farkas, "The Concept of Consistency in Writing and Editing," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 15, no. 4 (October 1985): 55. <https://doi.org/10.2190/T6EM-UTTO-EL6J-59N9>.

logical, evident, functional, resource efficient, and stable should be established.³⁸

Similarly with technical communication, the concept of consistency is also recognized to be elemental with creative writing.

Language

“God-terms” and “devil-terms”³⁹ of Richard Weaver contribute to the proper use of language.⁴⁰ Some words evoke favorable ideas and pleasant associations whereas the effects of others are the opposite. It was argued that god-term is a word referring to progress; such as fact, modern, and efficient, while prejudice, reactionary, and aggressor were examples of devil-terms.⁴¹ Mikhail Bakhtin,⁴² one of the earliest contemporary European thinkers to turn attention to problems of discourse in cultural contexts, claimed that using language is to engage in the construction of information and what is created in people’s minds is how they see the world.⁴³

Vocabulary

Thompson argues that clarity is affected when a person uses a vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the receiver and the employment of a term whose context is unclear. This is

³⁸ Farkas, “The Concept of Consistency in Writing and Editing,” 55.

³⁹ Richard Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, Co., 1953), 211.

⁴⁰ Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 211.

⁴¹ Wayne Thompson, “The Medium: Using Language,” in *Responsible and Effective Communication* (Boston, MS: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 265.

⁴² Jeff Shires, “Mikhail Bakhtin,” in *Dialogue Theories II*, ed. Omer Sener, Frances Sleaf and Paul Weller, (London: Dialogue Society, 2016), 31.

⁴³ James Herrick, “Contemporary Rhetoric II: Context, Story, Display” in *The History and Theory of Rhetoric* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 218.

an effective way to engage not only traditional readers but also virtual ones. To attain clarity, basic words, short sentences, and near-synonym discretion are used.⁴⁴ It is important to consider the intellectual capacity of the audience. As Thompson mentions, clarity depend on the familiarity of words, context, similarity in the background, level of abstraction, and the firmness of sentence structure.⁴⁵

Updates

A recent study by Wattpad showed that the biggest influx in site activity occurs on Friday night and Saturday morning. Lydia Hephzibah is a Wattpad user who gained a Wattpad Star,⁴⁶ has seven works or stories, and has thirty-one thousand followers in the platform, published a digital book entitled, *How to Survive Wattpad*. She claims that several factors must be considered when updating a story. She advised to post chapters regularly and preferably with some kind of schedule to gain faith from readers.⁴⁷

Wattpad recommends updates once or twice a week. However, as updating is a strategy, authors must attain an overall feel of their audience. In the extreme, long interval posts are discouraged.

Another Wattpad recommendation advised chapters' threshold at two thousand words only. Hephzibah explained that chapters should be composed of around two

⁴⁴ Thompson, *Communication*, 261-262.

⁴⁵ Thompson, *Communication*, 261-262.

⁴⁶ Wattpad Stars represent the most influential and aspirational writers on the platform who understand how to craft stories that drive mass engagement.

⁴⁷ "Updates: When and How Long," *How to Survive Wattpad*, Wattpad, March 2016, <https://www.wattpad.com/227274817-how-to-survive-wattpad-12-updates-when-and-how>.

thousand words to give space and meat into the chapter without making the readers exhausted.⁴⁸

Long chapters are not prohibited but readers must always be taken in consideration. Updating regularly is crucial to avoid losing the interest of readers. It is necessary to give importance to gathering reader feedbacks to know what to modify and improve in the narrative.

Media in Christian Perspective

The continuous modernization the world is undergoing gives a great opportunity for Christians to reach the nonbelievers in a creative contemporary way. As Melba Maggay claimed:

The church needs to break out from the linear, abstract, and analytical culture and embrace the non-linear, image-laden, interactive and sensory media culture by shifting from its heavily left-brained orientation—expository sermons, inductive bible study, abstract theological discourse, to a mostly right-brained mode of presentation that puts emphasis on story rather than exposition, imagination rather than cognition.⁴⁹

As modern society performs various evident methods of imparting information, the church still chooses to prefer traditional ways. As the world embraces the changes, the church must finally embrace the realm of creative narratives. The incessant change must be an advantage rather than seeing it as the church's competitor. If the church continues to choose indifference and detachment to these modifications, the powerful

⁴⁸ Wattpad, "Updates: When and How Long."

⁴⁹ Melba Maggay, "Beyond Globalization: Finding our Way Into the Future," Patmos, September 2001, 27.

medium will become a monopoly of non-Christians.⁵⁰ The challenge for Christians to counter is greater. There are some initial steps taken with a number of Christian practitioners in the field. One popular writer is David H. Roper⁵¹ who writes for the “Our Daily Bread” application.⁵² Several Christian contributors also upload their sermons, sermon series, preaching articles, and devotionals on Sermon Central,⁵³ and Accordance.⁵⁴ The study shares this contemporary publishing environment.

Christian Media Works

There are communicators who used the virtual ecosystem to promote Christian media works differently. Evidence is the literary and non-literary Christian works on different platforms available for access internationally and in the Philippines. The pages She Writes for Jesus,⁵⁵ Christian Thoughts PH,⁵⁶ and Christian Today⁵⁷ are Facebook pages that post encouragement through quotations, verses, and advices which are shared by the audiences in that platform. In video platform, there are YouTube channels that

⁵⁰ Lina-Bautista-Baldemor, “Drama As A Tool for Christian Communication” (Master’s thesis, Asian Theological Seminary, 1987), 15.

⁵¹ Roper served as a pastor for years, an author of thirteen books and is regular and popular writer for Our Daily Bread with over a million of his books published.

⁵² <https://odb.org/>, accessed January 20, 2020.

⁵³ <https://www.sermoncentral.com/>, accessed January 10, 2019.

⁵⁴ <https://www.accordancebible.com/>, accessed January 10, 2019.

⁵⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/WriteforJesus/>, accessed November 28, 2018.

⁵⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/CthoughtsPH/>, accessed November 28, 2018.

⁵⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/ChristianTodayInternational/>, accessed November 28, 2018.

post videos of motivation and inspiration such as “Lion of Judah”.⁵⁸ In literary platforms, blogs, and short stories are posted in few websites such as Christianity Today.⁵⁹ These literary and non-literary Christian media works are of the limited works present in the virtual platform.

Becky Wade, a Christian author of inspirational romance, wrote *My Stubborn Heart*⁶⁰ published in print. The book is a romance novel that revolves on a compelling spiritual journey of one woman’s choice to listen to God and wait on Him for her apropos eros love.⁶¹ Eventually, the book became available digitally through Kindle. This novel is one of the Christian works that shifted from print to digital. This shift is similar to Christian magazines and newspapers such as “The Christian Science Monitor,”⁶² “Christianity Today,”⁶³ and “Relevant Magazine”.⁶⁴

A Christian devotional accessible online was used as a basis of the Wattpad narrative. The devotional *The Sexual Touch Boundaries & Scripture* (<https://my.bible.com/reading-plans/2678-sexual-touch-boundaries-scripture>) written by

⁵⁸ https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvcMkIT_affIV1VKDmIwupw/featured?disable_polymer=1. Accessed November 28, 2018. Lion of Judah , a Youtube channel which was created on January 19, 2017 with 446, 577 subscribers and more than 130 videos as of November 28, 2018.

⁵⁹ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/blogs/>. Accessed November 28, 2018. Christianity Today advocates for church, shapes evangelical conversation, brings important issues to the forefront, and provides practical solutions for church leaders.

⁶⁰ Becky Wade, *My Stubborn Heart* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2012). *My Stubborn Heart* is a 2012 RITA Award Finalist.

⁶¹ “My Stubborn Heart,” Becky Wade, n.a., accessed January 15, 2019, <https://beckywade.com/home/my-stubborn-heart/>.

⁶² <https://www.csmonitor.com/>, accessed January 15, 2019.

⁶³ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/>, accessed January 15, 2019.

⁶⁴ <https://relevantmagazine.com/>, accessed January 15, 2019.

Duke Jeyraj⁶⁵ was taken from YouVersion The Bible App. It discusses the biblical principles on maintaining sexual touch boundaries of a couple. In the study's narrative, the focus was on the thresholds of the sexual touch boundaries in which holding hands was the lightest form and premarital sex was the deepest form.

Digital Audience's Community

Charles Kraft emphasized that since communication is not static but dynamic, understanding the medium and the audience of communication is crucial in order to successfully convey the message.⁶⁶ Familiarity with the digital audience is fundamental to adapt with them as they are principally consumers present in a virtual world. Their avatars serve as their identity in this virtual world.

These digital audiences come to existence because of the internet's available platforms and the tools it inherently provides. The technological openness and flexibility of the Internet would allow individuals unique opportunities to collaborate outside of traditional frameworks towards the creation of new world.⁶⁷ The existence and convenience of these materials initiate the engagement of the readers resulting to virtual ecosystems.

Along with the existence of digital audience is the manifestation of digital communities. These are people of same interest, ideas, and beliefs in a particular group

⁶⁵ Duke Jeyraj is a Doctor of Ministry graduate, writer, editor, counsellor, missionary and founder of Grabbing the Google Generation which focuses on presenting the unchanging gospel truths in a creative way.

⁶⁶ Charles Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness*, rev. ed. (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 139.

⁶⁷ Kraft, "Communication Theory," 139.

that rely on digital technologies such as cellular phones, and Internet to communicate, network and disseminate information.⁶⁸

In this study, Wattpad is the digital community in which the readers converge sharing the same interest of reading a certain Wattpad story.

Online Publishing

The huge difference of digital books to traditional books is the way they are published. Publishers, a necessary third party, play an important role in the production of traditional books. After a book is written, the writer submits the work to the publisher and it will be proofread.⁶⁹ The writer then receives feedbacks and changes that should be made.⁷⁰ The manuscript of the book must be completely edited before it is ready for public distribution.⁷¹ In the case of Wattpad, the story is posted on the digital platform immediately once the writer thinks it is ready for posting. As the readership go through the story, feedback is received through interactions such as views, comments, and messages.

⁶⁸ “What is Digital Communities?” Dictionary Search, n.d., accessed January 15, 2019, <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/creating-analytical-lens-understanding-digital/7583>.

⁶⁹ “Publishing Roles,” Advice, Writers & Artists: The Insider Guide to the Media, n.d., accessed November 28, 2018, <https://www.writersandartists.co.uk/writers/advice/1232/preparing-for-submission/what-does-a-publisher-do/>.

⁷⁰ Advice, Writers & Artists: The Insider Guide to the Media, “Publishing Roles.”

⁷¹ The Insider Guide to the Media, “Publishing Roles.”

Engagement

The escalation of “gadgetization”⁷² in the society opens a new engagement culture in the internet world. This allows for the idea of unique engagement among the audiences specifically between the writers and readers on Wattpad. Ina Pruegel claims that digital engagement stretches across the whole visitor experience.⁷³ Virtual engagement entails consideration of audience’s needs and interests from the beginning of the project.⁷⁴ It is vital to analyze and prioritize audience’s voice to enable effectiveness in engagement as these result to any changes in the narrative.

Engagement needs to be embedded, following a continuous process of exploration, testing and development, involving the audience and creating a joined-up experience, and visitor-journey.⁷⁵ Writers automatically open engagement once the material is exposed to the readership—uploading indicates this. Following is experimenting through starting rapid and small, reviewing, learning, implementing, and scaling.⁷⁶ Writers then start to determine the precise approach to produce the material. A well-written story initiates engagement. Nevertheless, engagement does not end with audience’s responses. Writers have to evaluate; not assuming rather providing evidences

⁷² Gadgetization came from the word gadget which was coined by Rudyard Kipling. Gadgetization refers to dealing, providing or treating with gadgets.

⁷³ Pruegel is a digital engagement specialist in University of Cambridge Museums. She developed and embedded strategic digital processes, skills, and frameworks, and delivered immersive and engaging digital learning experiences.

⁷⁴ Ina Pruegel, “What is Digital Engagement?,” Digital Projects Museum (blog), University of Cambridge Museums & Botanic Garden, July 02, 2017, accessed November 28, 2018, <https://www.museums.cam.ac.uk/blog/2017/02/07/what-is-digital-engagement/>.

⁷⁵ Pruegel, “What is Digital Engagement?”

⁷⁶ Pruegel, “What is Digital Engagement?”

that prove engagements.⁷⁷ Writers give importance to engagement thus they reply to comments to communicate. They collaborate and communicate to build good relationship with the audience.⁷⁸

What Compels People to Respond

Today's rising digital platforms differ from the classic theorists in that, although not all the time, usually the response of the readers transpires face to face. Modernization allows the audience to completely reply in forms of emojis, toggles of affirmation, votes, comments, and messages. These responses are made because of certain factors in a story. Audience startle when the topic discussed gives an impact to them.⁷⁹ This impact leads them to thinking that the story is applicable to them. Furthermore, they continue to engage expecting more from the story since they relate to what is discussed. Readers start to suggest and raise questions or corrections when they feel that their opinions matter.⁸⁰ The readers are encouraged to respond or communicate to reciprocate acknowledgement. Moreover, a dramatic action that unfolds magically for the audience give them the illusion of taking part or controlling the events.⁸¹ As the audience relate to the hero, they

⁷⁷ Pruegel, "What is Digital Engagement?"

⁷⁸ "Engagement," Advice From Writers, Wattpad, n.d., accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.wattpad.com/535716354-advice-from-writers-engagement>.

⁷⁹ "Connect with your audience from the start," Audience Energizers, Mentimeter, June 16, 2017, <https://www.mentimeter.com/blog/audience-energizers/connect-with-your-audience-from-the-start>.

⁸⁰ Rebecca Sky, "How to Write for Online Engagement—Lesson Ten: Creative Strategies," Wattpad, January 05, 2016, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6NMyeLj7b8&list=PLAIUgO-wewZjAltW7OBFTql84Ma9dj9fv&index=10>.

⁸¹ "Audience, part 1," Blood, Melanie Blood's homepage for course materials, n.d., accessed November 28, 2018, <https://www.geneseo.edu/~blood/Aud1.html>.

are affected when the character is threatened and feel power when the protagonist defeats the enemy.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter presents the design of this project thesis. It covers the objectives, techniques, procedures, locations, equipment, personnel, and strategy of this research. This study followed online ethnography as a research methodology since the researcher was immersed in a virtual community.⁸² Online ethnography involves studying online communities, treating them as both cultural artifacts and sites of culture.⁸³ Christine Hine explains that this methodology allows researcher access to underrepresented groups, bypassing physical gender segregation and geographic boundaries. Three different practices are observed in online ethnography: cultural encounter, participant observation, and gift giving.⁸⁴

The writer joined the online community as a ghostwriter to avoid biases from peers on the platform. The obscurity of the author was necessary since she is known as a writer on Wattpad. Exposing herself could have led readers to read the narrative because of the writer's established reputation and not the story itself. A journal was maintained after every published chapter starting with the posting of chapter two. The journal functions as documentation while interacting with the community. The metrics were

⁸² Jorgen Skageby, ed., *Online Ethnographic Methods: Towards Qualitative Understanding of Virtual Community Practices* (Sweden: Linkoping University), 411.

⁸³ Christine Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday* (Bloomsbury, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 89.

⁸⁴ Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet*, 89.

functional data as indicators of engagement. In courtesy, the researcher provided an addendum to her published work revealing her identity as a researcher to the community. This signalled the end of the production.

Objectives

The general objective of this production thesis was to write a fiction romance story following Biblical parameters regarding relationships for the Wattpad audience. It aimed to initiate audience engagement thus creating a cycle of negotiation leading to adjustments in the story. Finally, process documentation was done to preserve the systems and steps in the course of the development of the story as used in this study. This provides a working template for future researches.

Techniques

The production of this research underwent different phases as discussed in conceptual framework. The story was not conceptualized in a fixed period of time but was adapted from Duke Jeyaraj's devotional prior to study commencement.⁸⁵ The adaptation of the story from a devotional served as the content frame of the narrative. Concept of the plot was reinforced from the previous thoughts, experiences, and readings which helped the writer establish the story. Gustav Freytag's approach in writing the story was applied in drafting the Wattpad narrative.

⁸⁵ Duke Jeyaraj is a Doctor of Ministry graduate and a writer of Truths from the Bible to the Google Generation. He is the founder of Grabbing the Google Generation from Gehenna Mission.

The readership engaged through writing a fiction romance following Biblical parameters. In the process of publishing the story concurrent with engaging Wattpad audience these techniques were applied:

- a) Consistent writing style
- b) Language
- c) Vocabulary
- d) Updates

Once the readers were already engaged, the researcher entertained negotiations. These negotiations led to changes in the plot of the narrative.

Documentation of the production was through note-taking. It was used for the version history as an accurate record of changes affected by the negotiations. Version history is a recognized standard practice in the IT industry to document complex processes.⁸⁶ For this production, tracking a version history was necessary to distinguish the development of the chapters.

Online ethnography was the research tool of this production thesis as Wattpad is a virtual community. This methodology is also used in similar studies specifically in online analysis and audience engagement such as social network security,⁸⁷ Twitter marketplace design,⁸⁸ and imagined audiences in social literacy.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ “Version Control,” University of Leicester, NA, <https://www2.le.ac.uk/services/research-data/organise-data/version-control>. Version control started in 1872 when Marc Rochkind couldn’t deal with the recurring production softwares that gave tough access to previous versions.

⁸⁷ Donghai Liu, “Cybersecurity and Safety Analysis in Online Social Networks” (Thesis, Deakin University, Australia, 2016).

⁸⁸ Ambika M. Krishnamachar, “Design and analysis of an online marketplace for retweets” (Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, 2016).

Procedures

Pre-Production

The pre-production phase encompassed the conceptualization of the story involving the identification, structuring and development of plot, characters, story title, and digital story cover. Consequently, the name of characters, places, story title, and digital story cover were finalized. Only a basic synopsis was needed as the nature of Wattpad encourages story changes as the chapters get published. A digital book cover and a thumbnail for the story were taken from www.pexels.com⁹⁰ and edited using the Adobe Photoshop (CC). The cover picture required authenticity and appeal to initiate engagement and interest to the readers. Moreover, it was aesthetically logical to consider that the cover picture be completely complementary to what the story is all about. This phase was completed in two weeks.

Production

The researcher generated a Wattpad account as a ghost writer. A specific book for the story was then created; this included writing the description and necessary information of the story.

Writing in a free online community, proper media ethics must also be observed. It is necessary to avoid misleading readers to exploit their “curiosity gap,”⁹¹ by creating

⁸⁹ Maria Maurumaa-Mengel, “Managing Imagined Audiences Online: Audience Awareness as a Part of Social Media Literacies” (Thesis, University of Tartu, Estonia, 2017), 20.

⁹⁰ Pexels is a website for free stock photos and videos.

⁹¹ “What is Clickbait?,” Lifewire, May 04, 2018, accessed September 14, 2018, <https://www.lifewire.com/the-dark-side-of-clickbait-2487506>.

clickbait⁹² as this is unethical practice.⁹³ There was a strict observance of accuracy and truthfulness in the study.

The writing of the narrative adapted a negotiated approach based on Philippine and international television's technique done by certain TV networks. Metrics are used to assess a show's performance.⁹⁴ Ratings are the deciding factor regarding the pacing of a program. This technique is apparent in Philippine 'teleseryes' specifically the action drama, *FPJ's Ang Probinsyano*⁹⁵ and American television sitcom, *The Big Bang Theory*.⁹⁶ Similarly in this production, the narrative adjusted to the negotiations of the readership.

After user account tolls were set in Wattpad, the drafting of characters started. In the process of publishing all chapters, version history was maintained. One to three chapters was posted every week until prologue, epilogue, and all twenty chapters were completed. This phase covered fourteen weeks of the production.

⁹² Kumar et al., "Identifying Clickbait," 1225.

⁹³ Kumar et al., "Identifying Clickbait," 1225.

⁹⁴ James Patrick Anarcon, "ANATOMY OF A TELESERYE: How do ABS-CBN and GMA-7 produce their teleseryes? (Part 1)," *Guide, Pep.ph*, March 31, 2018, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.pep.ph/guide/tv/27713/anatomy-of-a-teleserye-how-do-abs-cbn-and-gma-7-produce-their-teleseryes-part-1>.

⁹⁵ *FPJ's Ang Probinsyano* is an on-going Philippine action drama television series. It premiered on September 28, 2015 and is continually airing because of the massive response it receives from the audience.

⁹⁶ *The Big Bang Theory* received mixed reviews and criticisms throughout its first season until it reached eleven seasons taking number one spot within the top ten of the final television season ratings. CBS passed on the original pilot but liked the show that resulted to production of the second one.

Post-Production

The production formally ended once the researcher revealed herself to the Wattpad readers one day after conclusion or epilogue. Evaluation proceeded right after.

The evaluation was conducted into three parts, interview schedule or survey, thematic analysis, and content analysis. The thematic analysis and content analysis were performed by the researcher. The interview schedule recipients are composed of trio of various readers from hereon, they are identified as the expert, the hobbyist and the reader. The expert is a published literary writer from Baguio City. Aside from the interest in reading, the hobbyist was affirmed to have the capability to objectively evaluate the narrative because of her familiarity of the literary industry. Finally, the reader is a Wattpad reader who engaged in the story *Love, Moves*. The reader negotiated through comments and votes.

One week after the conclusion was posted the chapter version history was released where the developments of script and story structure are visible. This phase covers three weeks and two days of the entire project.

Locations

The development of the story was done in Baguio City. Excluding the physical locations where the audience read the published posts, the production was done exclusively on the Wattpad site. There are several ways to arrive at Wattpad. Aside from typing www.wattpad.com on the search engine of a browser, inputting the search phrases 'online stories and 'free stories' also brings a user to Wattpad. Searching these words display a number of suggestions that indicates Wattpad in that list. When a user goes to

Wattpad via Google, by means of typing ‘online stories,’ Wattpad appears among the top four recommendations. Similarly, the words ‘free stories’ place Wattpad in the same ranking of suggestions. Ad pages, as recommendations, from other users allow direct access as well. For a discussion of the GUI (Graphic User Interface) and GUX (Graphic User Experience) of the site, check Appendix J.

Reading a Story

The story cover and story title followed by the author’s username visible just below the permanent banner. It drops down the chronological arrangement of the chapters which consents the readers to choose which chapter to read. Opposite to it is a box with a plus sign. Clicking this indicates adding the story in the reading list of the reader. The vote beside it represents like; tapping the vote sign allows the reader to like the story. The title of the chapter has the largest font and is bolded in when reading. Below it are small emblems followed by a number. Moreover these are an eye, star, and thought bubble, chronologically. They indicate the reads, votes, and comments of that certain chapter. The story starts just right after the title and emblems.

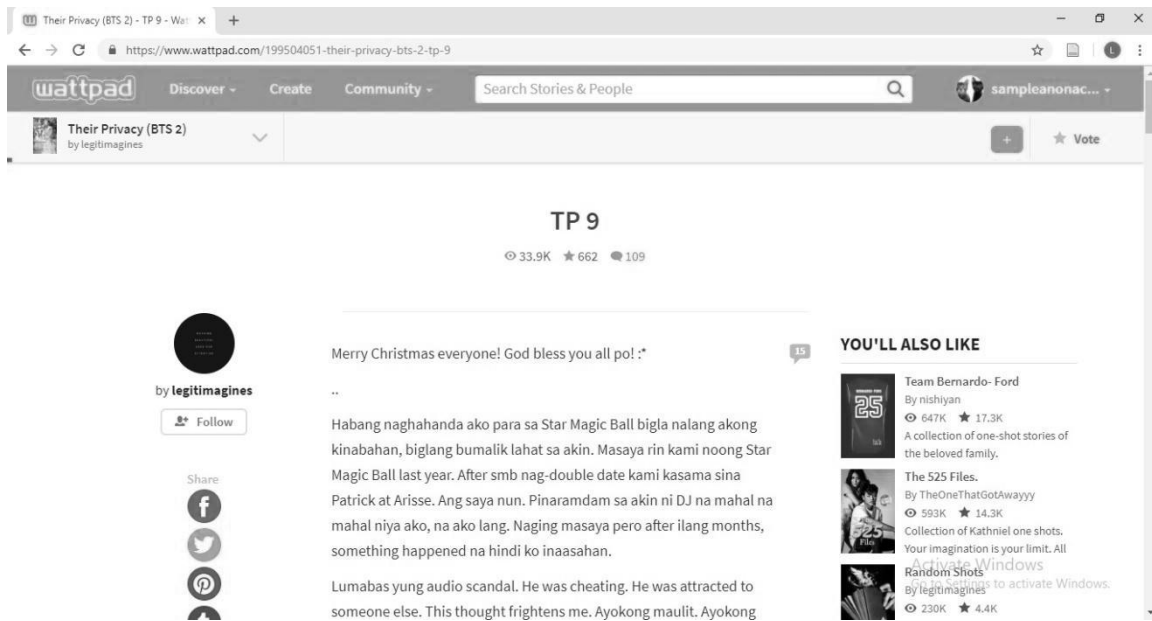


Figure 3: Screenshot of Wattpad Page when reading a story



Figure 4: Screenshot of Wattpad Page when reading a story showing the chapters of a story

A comment section follows the whole chapter. In this section, reader-author interaction happens. The readers express their points, opinions, and various reactions on the posted chapter.

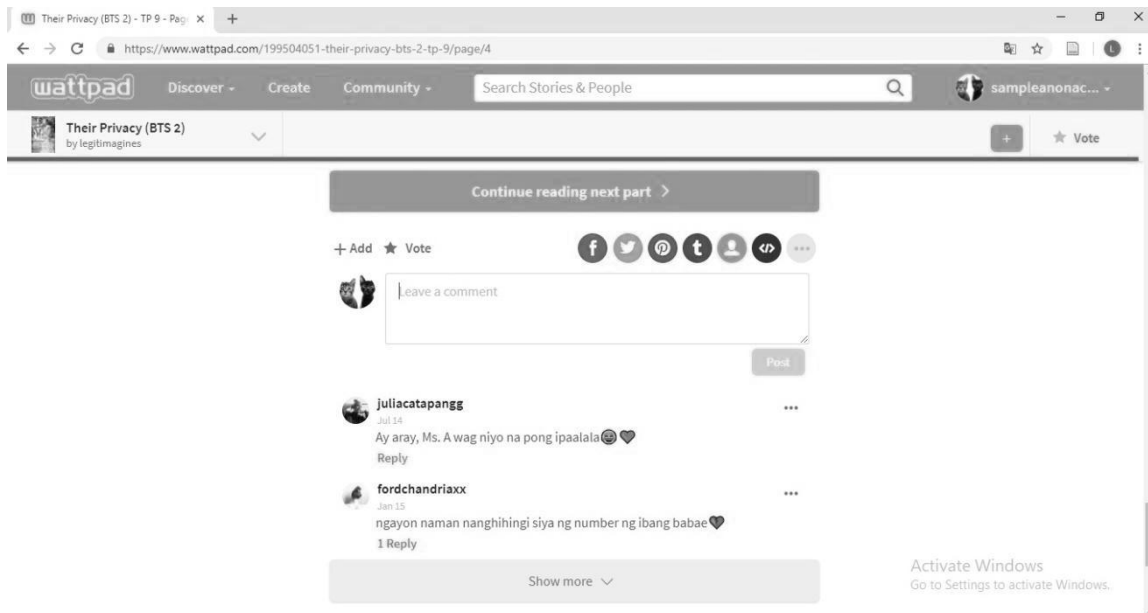


Figure 5: Screenshot of Wattpad Story's Comment Section

Equipment

The tools and equipment used to carry out this production thesis were laptop, mobile devices such as cellphone and tablet for the purposes of visual check or monitoring and internet connection in drafting and uploading the story on Wattpad. Additionally, the software programs Adobe Photoshop (CC) and Microsoft (MS) Word were utilized to edit the digital book cover and encode the story.

Personnel

This production thesis was pursued with the presence of the researcher and the online respondents who read and negotiated with the published narrative. An Information

Technology (IT) professional was secured for troubleshooting and to anticipate any technical glitches during the process of production.

Strategy

This production of Wattpad story was used to spread the Kingdom of God in a new form. Furthermore, the following were ways on how this project was used after it has been made:

1. Potential of Christian Literary Narratives on Wattpad. After proving this approach was effective on Wattpad, a great potential of Christian literary narratives on the platform is evident. Production of this study proceeded despite its limits. The data produced would benefit similar studies nonetheless.
2. Transferability of Digital Stories across other Platforms. This thesis will be a basis for future Christian literary narratives on other platforms.
3. Stable Template from Process Documentation. The documentation details a process that could serve as a working template for similar studies.
4. Documentation of Virtual Engagement. This preserves an account of the process and indicators present in virtual engagement. This is not exhaustive as per limits of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCEPT

Story or Idea

Abiah Fontinilla, is a fresh graduate with flying colours of the course photography. As soon as she graduated, she owned a small photo studio. Her passion is her source of income. Aside from being focused on building a foundation for her future and helping her family Abiah is a person who grew up in a Christian environment. She's grounded with Biblical teachings since she is a second generation Christian.

All is going well until one day a client is scheduled to shoot a wedding pre-nuptial in her studio. She is usually so accommodating and approachable but that time she was cold and she's trying to control her temper. The client was so controlling which makes the shoot problematic and complicated. The incident created a gap between her and the customer. After the incident, Abiah received a photo shoot invitation from a company. She delightedly accepted the invitation as it is an opportunity for her to gain more experience. On the day of shoot, she saw Navarro, their customer who complained too much during the pre-nuptial shoot of his sister. He asked for forgiveness a couple of times and finally he was forgiven. With the issue settled, an opportunity for them to be friends opened. Little did she know, Navarro was interested to know Abiah more. As they talk they developed their friendship. Navarro waited for an opportunity to express his feelings and when he did, he learned that Abiah was sharing the same feeling with him.

They decided to be in a relationship and things started to be complicated every time Navarro wanted to do something against Abiah's will. She was well-founded to live a Christian life. Throughout their relationship, she was trying to influence her boyfriend and tell him what God's word said about a relationship. However, this made things more complicated as they always ended up arguing. She was always tempted to fulfill her boyfriend's request but she always comes back to what the Lord is telling her every day. Navarro started to question Abiah's love for him. Everything changed when Abiah broke up with him. She shed tears for months but then at the end of the day she was happy that she decided to follow God rather than her feelings.

Style and Treatment

The narrative was a story divided into twenty chapters that was uploaded on the platform one to three times or based on how the audiences engaged every week. This project was unique compared to other stories on the website since it was exclusive in its content and intention. This study was distinctive since it was the first Wattpad story published from a Christian devotional.

Script or Manuscript

The twenty chapters, prologue and epilogue in the story are presented here. For this section, the chapters have been condensed. The complete script is found in Appendix A.

LOVE, MOVES

Prologue

“Why don’t you just give it a try... again?” Jean asked me after drinking her extra hot non-fat café latte with caramel drizzle on top. *(Continue in page 61)*

Chapter One

She was tying her long soft wavy almond hair that goes all the way down to her shoulders as she answered the grey telephone ringing on her working table. *(Continue in page 63)*

Chapter Two

It was seven in the morning when Abiah arrived at the office wearing her black go-to jeggings topped with a brown leopard print knit sweater... *(Continue in page 66)*

Chapter Three

It’s Saturday morning when Jean received a message from Abiah.

From: Abiah F.

Good morning beautiful Jean! (Continue in page 70)

Chapter Four

The whole Soulful Snaps team made sure that everything needed for the “urgent company shoot” was ready. *(Continue in page 74)*

Chapter Five

“*Mr. Navarro Tecson?!!!*” Abiah’s inner self shouted. She almost wanted to back out upon seeing that very familiar face. *(Continue in page 78)*

Chapter Six

As soon as the Soulful Snaps team arrived at their office, Abiah went straight to

where her best friend was and asked her to come to her office immediately. *(Continue in page 81)*

Chapter Seven

Just as Abiah clicked the send button in the e-mail she was composing, her office clock made a short soft bell sound notifying her that it was already five o'clock in the afternoon. *(Continue in page 85)*

Chapter Eight

Everyone inside the Soulful Snaps' office were totally surprised as a guy wearing a fit black denim pants, white v-neck shirt... *(Continue in page 89)*

Chapter Nine

Abiah was already on her way to the office when she was thinking of her actions lately. *(Continue in page 93)*

Chapter Ten

Abiah tapped her cheeks several times before sitting on her bed with her back against the headboard. *(Continue in page 97)*

Chapter Eleven

"I've never been here," Abiah said as she looked around the expensive-looking place where Navarro decided to bring her for lunch. *(Continue in page 101)*

Chapter Twelve

Months have passed and the two continued the relationship that they had. Navarro did his best to make Abiah feel that she mattered... *(Continue in page 106)*

Chapter Thirteen

It was not a surprise to anyone when Abiah and Navarro revealed that they were

already in a relationship. *(Continue in page 110)*

Chapter Fourteen

The whole team going to the orphanage that Abiah supported were already on the way to the place. Her parents, Jean, a few photographers... *(Continue in page 114)*

Chapter Fifteen

“Please remind me again tomorrow so I can reply on that e-mail as soon as I arrive here in the office.”

“Sure Abiah.” *(Continue in page 118)*

Chapter Sixteen

Months have already passed after the birthday celebration of Navarro’s grandmother. *(Continue in page 121)*

Chapter Seventeen

After the incident, Abiah and Navarro’s relationship became as cold as the peak of the winter season. *(Continue in page 125)*

Chapter Eighteen

The tension between Abiah and Navarro became worse after Navarro said those things. Navarro looked firm and strong like he would never regret what he just said, while Abiah was obviously hurt because of the offending words.. *(Continue in page 129)*

Chapter Nineteen

Abiah went on with her daily lifestyle. “Well,” she thought, “This is how life should be. Whatever happens, *life must go on.*” *(Continue in page 133)*

Chapter Twenty

Abiah could not stop herself from sobbing as soon as she entered their house. She

wanted to look fine in front of her parents, but she was feeling so weak and sad.

(Continue in page 137)

Epilogue

I am not afraid of entertaining guys again, Jean. And I don't think I am traumatized like what you're saying. I am happy." *(Continue in page 140)*

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND RESEARCHER'S EVALUATION

This chapter focuses on the assessment of the narrative in three sections: the Plot Writing, and Audience Response.

Plot

The researcher prepared five questions based on sections of Freytag's Pyramid to validate the structure of the whole story although it is divided into chapters. The questions and answers on this evaluation can be seen in Appendix G and Appendix H.

This part of the chapter discusses the findings from the interview of three evaluators who participated in the completion of the questionnaire. The evaluators were required to read the story on Wattpad before evaluating the plot excluding the Wattpad reader who had read the narrative while the story was in progress.

The expert discussed that the prologue and the first chapter sufficiently created a picture of who the main character was and what kind of world she lived in. Similarly, the hobbyist asserted that the first few chapters emphasized the fundamental information needed to understand the characters through the clear descriptions and detailed explanations. As had been noted from the expert and the hobbyist, the reader also agreed that the story was introduced efficiently allowing the reader imagine and get to know the characters well.

Confirming the existence of rising action, the expert agreed that suspense and tension were clearly built in chapters fifteen and sixteen although the rising action was slow to peak. The hobbyist discussed that the building of suspense and tension were anticipated with the mindfulness of Abiah every time Navarro asked her to engage premarital sex with him. It was a hint symbolizing that something will happen in the following chapters. The reader also approved that presence of rising action since the tension increased every time Navarro forced intimacy with Abiah.

The evaluators unanimously affirmed the clear transition of parts before and after the peak of the story. The evaluators confirmed that the changes in the plot were immediately perceivable through the division of the story chapters, as well as the employment of appropriate transitional devices. Furthermore, there was a clear indication that the plot was changing based on how the chapters were written and how the plot's mood shifted.

The falling action was validated as the evaluators affirmed the denouement with the main character succeeding in her mission. The protagonist's reflections and realizations exposed the main character upholding her value to triumph over temptation and immorality.

Finally, although the evaluators' answers differed as to the question whether the conclusion justified the story or not it shows that the story has conclusion. The expert does not confidently assert that the conclusion justified the story or that the story justified the conclusion because the central idea which is to "move out from that relationship that is taking you away from the Lord" was not developed at the rising action, climax, and falling action portion of the story. Moreover, she explained that the break up was

expected but how it came to that decision was not sufficiently played out in the rising action and climax. Conversely, although other twists in the story were assumed, the reader affirmed that the conclusion justified the story because the expected couple break up happened. Meanwhile, the hobbyist discussed that the conclusion either justified or did not justify the story. It was argued that it could be justified because Abiah accomplished her mission, or not since the story took a hard time developing resulting to crammed chapters which affected the conclusion.

Summing the answers of the evaluators, their responses confirm Freytag's plot structure. First, they all agreed that the story sufficiently provided the basic knowledge a reader should have in the beginning of the narrative. Thus, this proves that the story has an exposition. The evaluators also approved that the rising part of the narrative showcased an obvious suspense and tension through how the main character responded as she was persistently tempted. Hence, this verifies the presence of rising action. Moreover, as they claimed that the transitional devices used clearly indicated shifts before, during, and after the climax, made changes in the mood of the story and allowed the readers to comprehend the story, the existence of climax is validated. Furthermore, the evaluators confirmed that the protagonist undoubtedly succeeded in her mission through her realizations and reflections. This validates falling action. Finally, there was a variety of answers regarding whether the conclusion justified the story or not because of how the whole story was structured. Still, these affirmed that the denouement existed in the narrative.

Writing

Style

The writing style during the initial part of the story was emphasizing the fundamental information of the narrative. It was aimed for readers to familiarize and comprehend the photo studio's brand, the names, and roles of each character. Repetition of words and information was very rich at the exposition. As the story flows, there were fewer reiterations until names were solely used. It was consistent from rising action to denouement. This style of writing used is seen in some stories on Wattpad like 'The Girl He Never Noticed' by sweetdreamer33.⁹⁷ The author also restated words especially characters' roles to allow recall among readers.

Consistency in point of view from chapter one to twenty is observed. Nevertheless, because flashback was used as a literary device, the writer chose using the protagonist's point of view to begin and end the story through prologue and epilogue giving the story a different tone and mood. The involvement of flashback and changes in point of view are usually applied in stories uploaded on Wattpad such as 'Rising' by AvaLarksen⁹⁸ a romance fiction story that won Watty Awards⁹⁹ in 2019. The technique applied was similar to how Love, Moves was written. It was important to emphasize change of time and backstory of the plot. Another story is 'Hired to Love' by

⁹⁷ <https://www.wattpad.com/story/24021854-the-girl-he-never-noticed>.

⁹⁸ <https://www.wattpad.com/story/176636020-rising>.

⁹⁹ Watty is Wattpad's annual celebration allowing users who are qualified based on the website's standards to share their stories that evaluated by chosen judges of Wattpad. Receiving Watty Awards signifies that the story was effective, creative and worth reading.

JordanLynde.¹⁰⁰ The story is utilized of different point of views which makes the story have different moods every chapter because of the diverse personality of characters

Language

The language used throughout the production from story title, description, plot, comments, and author's notes was English. Using god-term words were intended the story is perceived light and acceptable across ages. For instance in the statement, "Sheltered with biblical perspectives, she blossomed knowing that no one in this world is and will ever be her first, true, and ultimate love because she is already loved even before she was born." The initial part of the narrative was structured with god-term words especially when Abiah was introduced to build a good image for her.

However, there were also few devil-terms when the first conflict happened. Such sentences are, "I don't think the shots you're taking are great" and "Stop it. I don't like him okay? He will never be my type." Devil-terms were used to highlight the existing clash and to show the annoyance of the protagonist. Other than those, pleasant words from rising action to climax were used.

The choice of language changed again when Navarro initially asked Abiah to spend the night with him. Few explicit words emphasized Navarro's unfavourable request. Subsequently, there were always negative words that indicate a problematic scenario until they broke up. The separation had to appear challenging so the weights of words were relevant. Nevertheless, to balance the events, encouraging language was used to allow readers to perceive the protagonist's positive outlook in life.

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.wattpad.com/story/46159699-hired-to-love>.

Vocabulary

The goal was to achieve clarity in vocabulary. Since the age bracket of respondents were undistinguished, dependence on familiarity of words, context, and firmness of sentence structure were imperative. The writer avoided overly sophisticated words to cater young readers. However, the presence of complex words was to justify the maturity of the characters. Clarity was present through the adjectives describing how the characters were feeling or thinking and how the setting felt and appeared or simply its tone and mood. There were few long sentences when necessary but short sentences were applied to convey clear flow of thought among readers.

Effects of Uploading Schedule on Writing Elements

Wattpad encourages uploading once or twice a week as a strategy to gain readers. This was followed to acquire most number of reads possible for a week. It was the outmost priority to gain engagements especially through comments to encounter the process of negotiation. This updating strategy did not affect the elements of writing since it only focused on when to logically and intelligently release the chapters.

Audience Response

Three metrics on Wattpad were significant in analyzing the effectiveness of the story: reads, comments, and votes. These are useful factors to validate reader's engagement in the story.

Wattpad Metrics

Reads

The story gained four hundred ten reads from an undistinguished audience after the epilogue was posted. With the figure, it could be assumed that this study is feasible depending on the execution. It is seen that the number of reads attained is satisfactory given that the story was only introduced in Taytay First Church of the Nazarene's Generation Congregation.

Wattpad presented a graph of completed reads by part after the story was completed. Completed reads does not represent the number of reads per chapter; rather it is defined that the user has read the chapter from start to the end of the whole without stopping mid-way.¹⁰¹

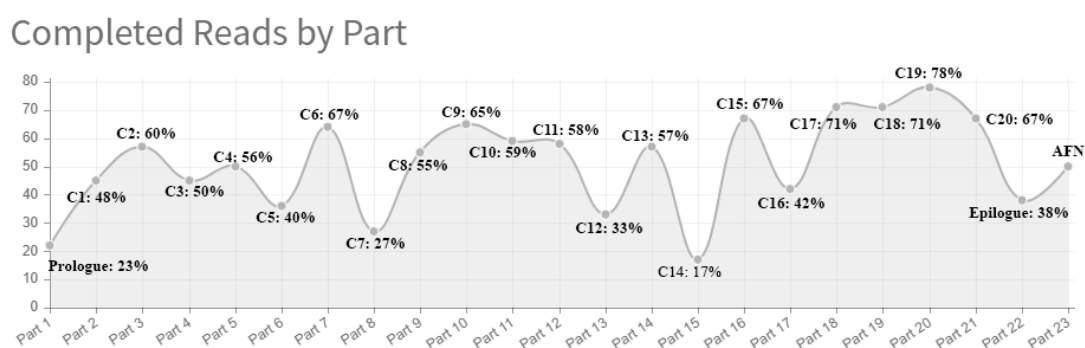


Figure 6: Line Graph of Completed Reads by Part from Wattpad
Legend: C- Chapter, AFN- Author's Final Note

The statistics show that high number of completed reads started from chapter seventeen (part 18) to chapter twenty (part 21). Chapter eighteen has seventy-eight percent being the chapter with the most number of completed reads. These contained the parts where the couple's relationship started getting complicated until they broke up and

¹⁰¹ "Understanding Writer Analytics" Writer Analytics, Wattpad, March 26, 2020, <https://support.wattpad.com/hc/en-us/articles/206018496-Understanding-Writer-Analytics>.

the protagonist chose to move on as she learned a lot from the separation. Furthermore, chapter eighteen contained the part when the central character spent time talking to her parents and communicating to God asking for wisdom for her next move. The researcher believes that chapter eighteen got the most number of completed reads because it was the part when the main character confirmed to herself that ending the relationship answers her problem. It could be assumed that these chapters made the readers intrigued causing them to finish the whole chapter.

Contrarily, chapter fourteen (part 15) with seventeen percent was the chapter that received the least number of completed reads. It may be that this chapter was not interesting enough since there were several things that happened such as the protagonist's birthday and the invitation for a night out by the boyfriend. There were scenes in the van, the orphanage, and the discussion between the couple. Perhaps the chapter was crammed allowing several audience to lose interest and flick through the part.

CHAPTER	NUMBER OF READS	CHAPTER	NUMBER OF READS
Prologue	88	11	15
1	34	12	14
2	20	13	11
3	17	14	10
4	10	15	14
5	17	16	17
6	19	17	8
7	14	18	12

8	17	19	14
9	24	20	8
10	35	Epilogue	13

Table 2: Number of Story Reads by Chapter

Table 2 shows that prologue gathered eighty-eight reads having the most number of reads among chapters of the story. The story could have made a good impression to the readers whether in terms of title, story cover, or description leading them to read. It is also observed that two chapters have reads amounting to less than ten while the rest ranges above ten.

The data for reads clearly demonstrates that the story has evidently an inconsistent number of audiences. Moreover, it may be argued that most of them are binge readers since the graph and table illustrate inconsistent numbers of reads per chapter. It may also be assumed that the sudden descend of reads was because several readers jump into the next chapter without reading entirely the previous one. It could be considered that the varying changes may be the effect of how some chapters were structured in terms of plot or writing.

Votes

The story received a total number of fifty-three votes after the epilogue was posted. Wattpad also released a graph of completed votes by part. The graph indicates that prologue (part 1) gained the most number of votes which is five while chapter fifteen (part 16) obtained one vote. Moreover, one chapter received four votes, five chapters gained three, and the rest secured two votes as seen in the Figure 11.

Votes by Part

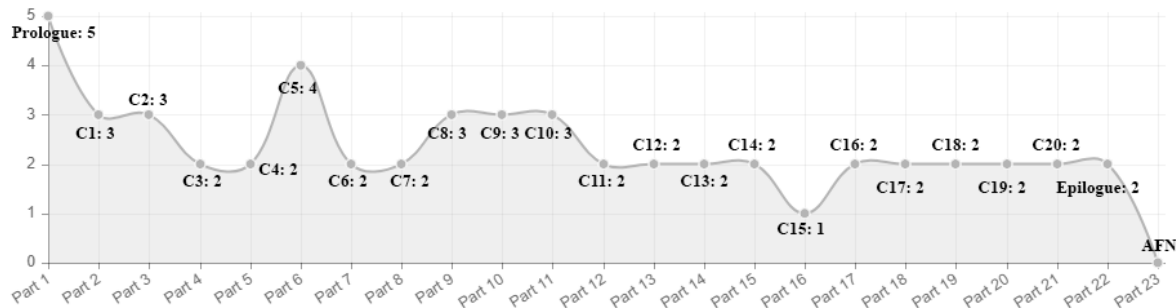


Figure 7: Line Graph of Completed Votes by Part from Wattpad
 Legend: C- Chapter, AFN- Author's Final Note

The line graph presents the following suppositions: not all readers voted and readers who voted were inconsistent in voting. As with the statistics on reads, it is distinct in Figure 7 that most of the audiences are silent readers who do not interact with the writer and readers but solely read what was posted. It could be argued that perhaps the readers did not appreciate the chapters because something was lacking or the writing was not convincing. However, the number of reads per chapter shown above has a low percentage of supporting this idea.

Comments

The story received thirty-one comments after the epilogue was published. The comments on different chapters came from three readers and responses from the author. Ten comments were from a reader who was probably a binge reader seeing that the user interacted consecutively from prologue until chapter six which was the last chapter available that time. One comment came from a different reader and eight from another. The last two readers left their comments mid-way of posting which were inconsistent. The rest of the comments came from the researcher as a means of engagement among the

readers. Figure 8 shows a line graph Wattpad produced showing total number of comments.

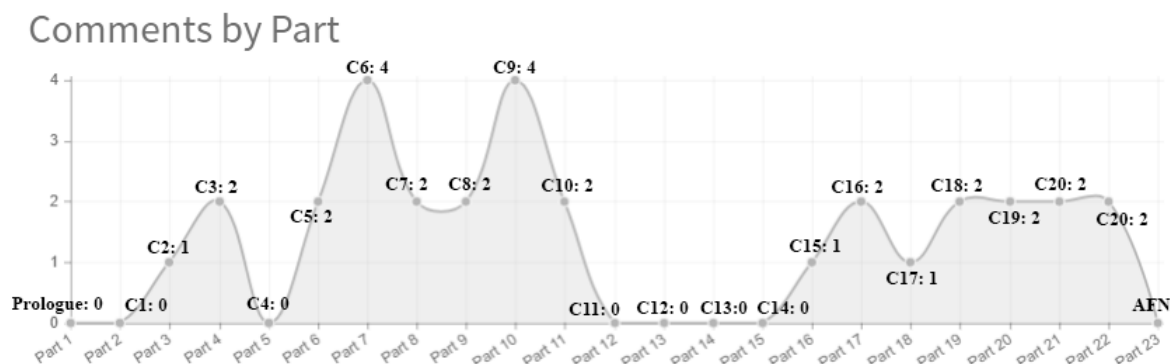


Figure 8: Line Graph of Completed Comments by Part from Wattpad
Legend: C- Chapter, AFN- Author's Final Note

Figure 8 proves similar analysis from the graphs of reads and votes. The story has certainly an inconsistent number of audiences. As illustrated, the readers posting comments during the initial part of the story are not similar readers who left their comments at the developed chapters. This may be the effect of the diversity of audience.

From these data of reads, comments, and votes, it may be concluded that the kind of readers were highly binge and silent readers. Their routine of reading the story, either read the chapters completely or stopped midway, engaged with the writer or not, gave a huge impact on the story's execution. Furthermore, the plot and writing could be factors influencing the interaction of readers.

Vanity Metrics

An additional metric on Wattpad is the Vanity metrics. This meter indicates where the story lies among the rankings. The researcher noted the times when the story made it to different rankings on Wattpad based on its hashtags. The hashtags used were Abiah, Christian, Christian love, Christian love story, couple, fiction, love, love life, love

romance, love story, Navarro, photography, romance, and short story. These hashtags were important to categorize and index the story allowing it to be searchable. Throughout three months of posting, the story made its way to the rankings based on the hashtags used. Tag rankings are determined by algorithm that takes into account factors such as the popularity, trendiness, user engagement of a story, relevance of the tags used, and when the story was last updated by the author.¹⁰² Presented below are the tag rankings on the first and last week of posting.

The story received the first ranking on its premiere on December 15, 2019. Love, Moves' most impressive ranking was number two hundred seventy-two out of four hundred sixty four stories under the hashtag love romance as shown in Figure 9.

< Story Rankings

Love, moves.

Most Impressive Ranking

#272 loveromance
out of 464 stories



Figure 9: Screenshot of December 15, 2019 Ranking

The final ranking was recorded on the last week of uploading. While the previous rankings, seen in Appendix I, showed decreasing results, the final list of rankings indicated that the story recovered. The story ranked eight among sixty-two under #navarro, #christianlovestory was second out of twenty-three, #christianlove was twelve among one hundred eighty-four, #lovelife was number three hundred thirty-eight out of seven thousand stories, #christian was four hundred ninety-four out of more than thirteen

¹⁰² "Seeing Tag Rankings," Tag Rankings, Wattpad, March 11, 2020, <https://support.wattpad.com/hc/en-us/articles/201410220-Seeing-tag-rankings>.

thousand four hundred and the most impressive rank, #photography placed four hundred nineteen out of twelve thousand stories.

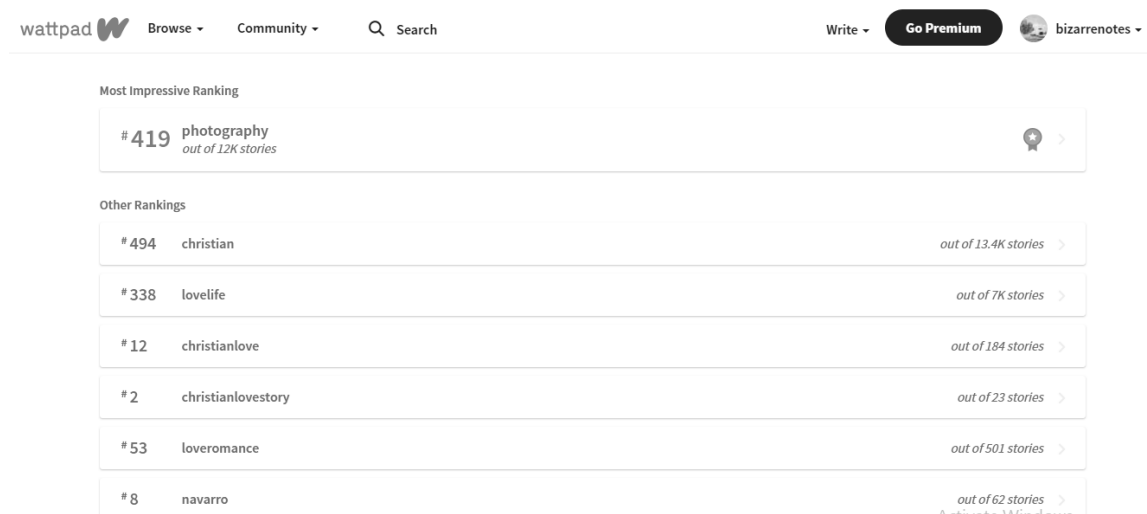


Figure 10: Screenshot of March 18, 2020 Ranking

The data present the effectiveness of the story in engaging the readers. It is observed that the story was established well initially and the numbers were continuously rising. The figures show that readers were hooked so they consistently supported the story resulting to improved ranks each week. However, some numbers fluctuated possibly because of the minimal update or once a week posting the researcher implemented. This is complementary to the comment written in chapter fifteen posted on week twelve when the ranking went down. The reader requested daily updates that the researcher addressed. When daily updates was executed, the rank started escalating. The reappearance of high ranking shows that readers desired consistent uploading during that time given that the story was approaching its finale.

Ultimately, in reference to audience response as a whole, although the audience did not actively engage in terms of leaving comments and votes, the reads and rankings substantiate that the story thrived and was supported by a number of audience.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY OF THE PRODUCTION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the production, conclusion and recommendations based on the analyzed overall evaluations made.

Summary of the Production

Accordingly, this project is designed to write a Christian narrative for the Wattpad readership, initiate audience engagement and document the process of the production.

The production began with the conceptualization of the story's plot, characters, story title, and digital cover. It was succeeded by the creation of a Wattpad account and a specific book for the story; it included writing the description and necessary information of the narrative. Subsequently, the chapters were posted weekly. The production concluded as the version history was released and the writer identified herself as a researcher to the readers. After these, evaluation of the production followed.

Conclusions

Based on the evaluation of the production, the way of writing applied was effective since the readers were able to comprehend the story's flow of thought. In some chapters though, extended scenes might have caused readers to skip some sections. Few

readers' act of leaving suggestions and reactions on the comment box proves that they grasped the information presented in the story. Hence, the style, language, and vocabulary employed in the narrative were effective. Furthermore, the transitional elements were clear enough to indicate that the plot was changing. Nonetheless, the plot was partly vague making it lacking and unrealistic. The use of flat character made the story dreary. Thereby, the plot and writing are satisfactory and could be enhanced.

The kind of audiences the story had were either binge or silent readers thus making their engagement inconsistent. This significantly affected the negotiations that were needed. However, audience responses necessary were attained. The engagements were explicitly apparent with the existing number of reads, votes, and comments albeit it could be increased and improved depending on how the story is executed and what kind of readers will be engaged. Additionally, the audiences being mostly binge and silent readers resulted to reduced interaction among them and with the researcher.

There was also no allotted time for binge readers to react since the evaluation started immediately the day after the epilogue was posted. Accordingly, it could still be claimed that the production was successful in its aim to engage readership however, it could be enhanced for a better interaction with the readers. Therefore, writing a Christian narrative was not only feasible, but also successful.

The researcher expected that writing a Christian story would be complex and sensitive. Being novice in writing a Christian story in English was a challenge to the writer. That being the case, one huge struggle of the researcher in the writing process was making sure the narrative was not overly preachy while maintaining the story in a Christian perspective. These factors made an impression that Christian narratives are way

different from the usual secular stories. However, as the narrative was written, and posted on Wattpad, the writer apprehended that writing a Christian story and a secular story are the same considering the writing style, tone, mood, and technique. Each writer's creativity could be implemented in writing as long as the mission to convey the Christian message remains prioritized. Innovate scenes in the narrative is encouraged to make the story unique, intriguing, and exciting. In that way, the narrative could be humorous, suspenseful, serious, optimistic, and more without setting aside that it is a Christian story. It is significant to think outside the box of the traditional ways to relay Christian morals through writing. Indeed, secular, and Christian narrative can both have twist, and turns which makes content and lesson the difference between the two. Moreover, preparation is imperative in writing a Christian story. The planning applies not only on the conceptualization phase of the story but also in the wisdom that wants to be imparted to the readers. Thus, the writer must be knowledgeable of the morals that are desired to be conveyed among the readers. The researcher understood that being well educated in the topic could help writing the narrative since being less informed limits the flow of the story, creativity, and confidence of the writer. Therefore, it is important that a writer understands what the main point in the story is. These are vital things to distinguish, and consider for writers to be more comfortable and assertive in writing a Christian narrative.

There are many creative ways to communicate Christian message especially with the modernization that the world is experiencing. As this research shows, one of those creative mediums is Wattpad which is not merely limited to romantic fiction narratives. Wattpad is also open for uploading devotionals, short inspirational or motivational messages, poems, instructional materials and other literary works in Christian

perspective. Christian writers should maximize the availability of this platform and take the opportunity to spread Christian works. The researcher encourages Christian writers to take advantage of Wattpad as it gives freedom to share different literary works, explore more ways of writing that attract virtual readers, and enhance writing abilities, and creativities. It is recommended to share Christian works in the platform as it allows interaction, negotiation and personal message exchanges between the writer and readers. With this advantage of free communication among users, the writer will be able to understand the points, opinions, and reactions of readers who willingly communicate with the writer. Wattpad is indeed one of the virtual mediums that should be utilized in sharing the word of God.

This study helped the researcher grasp a more profound understanding with regards the important aspects to consider, recognize, and perform when writing a Christian story. The researcher gained an experience that allowed her to be more passionate in writing. Although it was challenging, the study inspired and ignited the heart of the researcher to pursue writing Christian works. Furthermore, this thesis proved that changes in the world could indeed be used to the advantage of the church. As Lina Baldemor claimed, we should not let non-Christians monopolize the modern society that we are in.¹⁰³ This study manifest that Christian works should not be underestimated because even on a platform where secular stories prevail, Christian narrative could be feasible and successful.

¹⁰³ Lina-Bautista-Baldemor, "Drama As A Tool for Christian Communication" (Master's thesis, Asian Theological Seminary, 1987), 15.

Recommendations

The researcher proposes several recommendations for future studies. These recommendations are based on the documented experience of the researcher throughout the production, and suggestions of the panellists, and evaluators.

1. Aside from focusing on just the thresholds of the sexual boundaries in the story, everything in between the least and most should also be addressed to see and understand the topic as a whole.
2. Explore other kinds of Christian works that would be effective in engaging readers on Wattpad such as devotionals, poems, instructional materials, inspirational or motivational messages, and one-shot stories.¹⁰⁴
3. Consider other online storytelling websites to engage readers in Christian perspective in terms of sexual touch boundaries then compare and contrast the result of engagement with the story posted on Wattpad.
4. Explore on other Christian topics addressing a certain problem that the study's target audience are experiencing.
5. The researcher suggests exploring other interesting literary genres such as mystery, fantasy, comedy, fairy tale, and such then evaluate whether it is more effective than the romance fiction story published for this study.
6. Write a true to life romance story about sexual touch boundaries being transparent to the readers that it is a real life narrative then evaluate if readers are more interested reading a genuine story rather than a fiction story.

¹⁰⁴ One-shot stories are those that have only one chapter narratives having a word limit of 1,000 to 1,500 words.

7. Aside from adapting an inspiration of the story from a devotional, the researcher recommends exploring other sources such as sermons, lessons in seminars, handouts and testimonies.
8. Use an existing account not exclusive to Christian followers to reach a wider audience. Old accounts with followers that publish secular stories or non-Christian works should be taken advantaged since there are already guaranteed readers. New writers on Wattpad on the other hand must not be discouraged because promoting the story consistently is one key in securing readers. In this research, there was a huge need to promote the story virtually, in the platform itself, as it could have helped the story gain more readers from Wattpad. This kind of virtual promotion can be done freely through asking established writers or accounts that promote stories to do so. Aside from promoting the story on Wattpad, sharing the story on other social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter could be an effective technique to lead readers to the Wattpad story. As it is done in this research, promoting the story in churches could also be a technique considering continuous follow-ups, and announcements of the narrative.
9. It is recommended to do evaluations of theological or ethical concepts similar to but different from the devotional, “The Sexual Touch Boundaries and Scripture” such as secular notions on sexual touch boundaries.
10. It is recommended to create fora which the work Love, Moves is displayed and evaluated as to whether the short story would be effective in the former traditional, physical publishing avenues.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

COMPLETE STORY SCRIPT

Prologue

ABIAH'S P.O.V.

“Why don’t you just give it a try... again?” Jean asked me after drinking her extra hot non-fat café latte with caramel drizzle on top.

Yup she’s Jean, she loves extra hot non-fat drinks. The same Jean who happens to be my childhood best friend whom I already consider as my ‘blood sister’ since she literally has been by my side for around eleven to twelve years—way back when we were in elementary school. Uhm, just like other typical ‘getting to know your best friend’ stories we were neighbors who just started playing together until we came to the point that we convinced our parents that we should the same school till we were in senior high. During our younger years we always had those pajama parties at each other’s homes—well we still have our overnights until now but not as often as when we were younger. We also attended ballet classes together until *voila!* we became the best of friends and the rest is history. I never felt the reality that I am an only child since Jean sincerely became a sister to me. I know people are thinking that our relationship makes her know everything about me, like my secrets. Yeah that is right, I can’t deny it. She knows me too well. From my likes, to my feelings on such things, my dreams, my stand in different aspects, and my experiences in life. Of course this also works the other way around which I think is absolutely very natural for best friends like us.

Back to the present, as of the moment, after working, we both decided to grab a drink in a nearby coffee shop while waiting for the rain to stop so we could go home safe and dry. If you are wondering where we work, we both work in a same photo studio company.

“Can you stop?” I gave her an ‘I don’t like these kinds of topic’ look but then she stared at me like she can’t believe I asked her to stop so I giggled before speaking, “What are you talking about Jean?” I laughed once more then took a sip of my favorite sugar-free vanilla latte with soy milk.

“Perhaps, one more time... or two? Three?” She answered while grabbing her grilled cheese sandwich then looked at me seriously. “There’s no harm in trying Abiah.” She raised her left brow, eyes still on me, waiting for me to respond while taking a bite of her sandwich.

I just continued sipping my drink escaping the eye contact she’s giving me

through staring outside the slightly misted window while raindrops are falling down on it. Oh how I love rainy days, well, loving it as much as I love sunshine. I took my phone that's on top of the coffee table and captured the wonderful view of the busy street in front of me. While enjoying the scene I was suddenly interrupted by this woman in front of me slaying her signature hairstyle, bob cut.

“So you're giving me that ‘I didn't hear you' card again? Come on Abiah Fontinilla! Owner of the best photo studio in town, who could not know Soulful Snaps?” Oh there she goes again. I kept my mouth shut as I allowed her to continue her speech. “How could I forget, a degree holder of Bachelor of Arts in Photography. Oh wait there's more! With flying colors!”

I looked at her after she exclaimed my undergraduate degree then panned my head from left to right to check if some customers were looking at us because of her loud voice. “Shh! Jean you don't have to shout okay? I am not meters away from you.” “What? I'm not shouting, I'm just explaining my point Abi.”

I shook my head before answering her, “And what does being a graduate with flying colors contribute to what we are talking about at this moment of time Jean?”

She disappointingly stared at me and sighed, “You're too smart to not understand what I am talking about, Abi. You're 25, working, paying your bills, you buy your own needs, and can even buy your wants. You are independent. All I'm saying is you are entitled to date. Go out, get to know someone, entertain somebody who you think deserves your attention, and be happy.”

“Well Jean, I am happy.”

“I know you are not.”

“I am Jean. I know you know that.”

“What makes you say that? You are not happy. Well maybe you are. You are happy working, happy drinking your favorite coffee, happy with your family and friends but other than that, hmm?”

I don't know where she's getting all these things because I too, have no idea why she's saying I am not happy. “Jean, I really don't know where that's coming from. But how could you say that? Of all the people, I know that you know, I am happy, contented, and taking things a step at a time.”

“You are not happy.” She is seriously annoying me. I gave her a blank stare and before I could even utter a word she asked me, “Are you still thinking of him? Are you still afraid of handling or entering another relationship?” Oh, she's back with this again. So this is what she wants to talk about huh? I shook my head and took another sip as she continued, “Abi, you know I really think maybe you're traumatized or something. Don't you think so?”

I shockingly threw back a look at her.

She carelessly responded, “Then why are you so afraid to entertain guys who are obviously head over heels with you?”

YOU. ARE. SO. IMPOSSIBLE. JEAN. I laughed at her statement while pressing my right hand against my forehead before giving her nothing but a smirk. When it comes to me having a special someone in my life, this woman surely is a feisty one.

Chapter One

She was tying her long soft wavy almond hair that goes all the way down to her shoulders as she answered the grey telephone ringing on her working table. “Hello! Good afternoon this is Abiah Fontinilla of Soulful Snaps how may we help you?”

Owning her own photo studio was her dream as a child—well, “ultimate dream” as per how she described it when she was thirteen. This ambition of an innocent sweet young girl came into existence as Abiah—commonly known as Abi by her family and close friends—pursued her passion and finished her undergraduate degree, a Bachelor of Arts in Photography in a prestigious university in their place. She was known in her alma mater for performing very well in her classes and representing the university in competitions relating to photography. She indeed loved taking pictures that she really aimed to have her first camera even before she was eighteen—of course with the help of her parents. People who saw her works were amazed of the art she produced.

There were times when her college invited her to be a guest in certain photography classes to share her experiences and advice to the students who also want to pursue careers in the world she’s in. She gladly accepted these invitations and gave her best to encourage and inspire the students to keep pushing and giving their one-hundred percent because in time all the efforts will pay off.

With all the achievements she attained and the name she established, many people were amazed. She is a focused and goal-oriented as she really gave her best, pushing her limits to be able to reach her goals not only for herself but for her family as well. People said that she is an ideal woman any guy would ever dream and wish to have. Why is that so? Aside from her red plump lips that gives a sweet enchanting smile to all the people she comes across while walking along the streets or while having a drink in her favorite coffee shop, her long black curly lashes that move gracefully as she closes her autumn brown expressive eyes, her slender body that she dresses professionally and beautifully, her radiant personality and intelligent comprehension, one thing that makes her extremely beautiful is being a follower of our Creator.

She was born in a family where her parents served in the church—that made her constantly present in the church. She grew up singing Sunday school songs, joining summer camps, revivals, conferences, and other religious events. Sheltered with biblical perspectives, she blossomed knowing that no one in this world is and will ever be her first, true and ultimate love because she was already loved even before she was born. Unlike some ladies in her generation, and maybe even other generations, she believed that a woman should seriously and patiently take her time to pray for her future partner in life. This was the core reason why at the age of twenty-five she had never had any boyfriend at all—no boyfriend since birth as they call it.

People around her said that she will definitely grow into an old maid if she will continue to have that unreachable and impossible standards, plus being choosy looking for something which they believe no man would never ever have. Friends, neighbors, and people around her were always pushing her to go out with guys and entertain them since she has the looks and undeniable potential. There was a time in her early twenties when someone told her that she was wasting all she had: the time, beauty, milestones, opportunities, and many more to mention. It was weird that people said that, but why?

It was because she was not making an effort to find someone who she will share

the success and achievements she reaches. However, of course, with the attitude and point of view she had? Nah, it doesn't bother her at all.

She blissfully focused on her photo studio, thriving more to make her small business grow and be well established not only in their town but in the whole country. Also, assisting her parents with their financial needs and helping a foundation for abandoned children. Unlike all the other women her age, Abiah was highly contented and satisfied with what she has—period, no comments from people who don't know her could ever change her firm viewpoint.

“Okay. Everything is noted!” She waved her hand to her assistant who was also in charge of listing the schedules of the team to take down notes of everything she says. “Sure sir, we will. Okay so for the record sir, February 25th, that's a Thursday. The studio is reserved all for your sister's wedding pre-nuptial shoot.”

Jean, who handled the finances of Soulful Snaps, entered her office wearing her cream shoulder tote bag, fetching her best friend since she's ready to leave. Abiah raised her right hand once more and pointed at the telephone against her ears indicating that Jean had to wait for a while. “Thank you so much for trusting Soulful Snaps sir. Have a good evening!”

As soon as she finished the call, her assistant approached her holding an envelope containing an invitation card, “Abiah, here's a letter from a magazine inviting you to be a part of the production for their anniversary issue.”

“What magazine Lyn? May I know what contents they produce?” She answered with her eyes on the wide computer monitor as she scrolled down through the pictures of the birthday shoot they just had an hour ago.

“*La Manera*.” Lyn responded.

Abiah paused for a while because she's sure she heard *La Manera* before. “Sounds familiar.”

“Well, basically, it is a fashion magazine.” Abiah nodded her head while listening to her assistant. “It's written here that as they celebrate their anniversary this year, they will feature few prominent people who make a stand against bullying.” As soon as she heard what Lyn said, she locked her eyes with her, smiled sweetly, then reached out for the invitation.

Lyn beamed broadly as she placed her elbow on top of her boss' office table, “I knew you were going to accept this invitation Abiah. But, of course, I have to confirm just in case you have personal plans on that day. I don't want to cause schedule conflicts.”

“You know your boss too well huh?” Jean answered while sitting on the couch across Abiah's working table. Lyn giggled at Jean's comment.

Rolling the swivel chair she's sitting on, Abiah favorably answered, “This is happening the day after the pre-nup shoot on the 25th. Hmm... Not a problem! Yah, sure thing, tell them I'll be there.”

“Okay. I'll just repeat the details. It's going to be on February 26, that's Friday next week at ten in the morning.” Abiah nodded as she closed her computer.

“Got it. Thank you so much Lyn!”

Aside from her studio, Abiah was accepting invitations for photo shoots with advocacies helping the society change for the better—those who had good intentions for others. Busy as she appeared to be, Abiah still made time to help others. She took that as an opportunity to be able to somehow tell people that in this crazy, chaotic, constantly changing world where good things seem nowhere to be found, there are still people who do good, people who give, love, and care whether they know you or not. It was to remind people that Someone up there does not leave them. He is with them whatever their circumstance in life is. She believed life revolved around serving others and being an instrument to show the love and care that were also freely given to her. Well, she grew up having this rationale as one of her priorities in life.

“Okay Lyn. Is that all we have for today?” She sweetly asked her assistant as she fixed her things inside her emerald green satchel bag.

Lyn gave her a nod, “Yup. That’s all for today. You have the rest of the day to relax.”

“Lyn, you should tell her that she has the rest of the day to think of work.” Jean giggled at her own words while her eyes were locked on her phone.

Abiah disregarded her best friend and gave her a few more instructions for tomorrow’s work. She stood up from the swivel chair then released a sigh of relief, “I’ll be leaving early today then. Jean and I have to meet a group of friends.” She looked at Lyn as if she thought of a bright idea. “You know, I think you should join us. I’m sure you will enjoy it and will learn from the conversations we share.” She looked at her assistant while packing. “What do you think?” she added.

“Sure Abiah but not this time I have to give the team instructions for the set of tomorrow’s shoot.”

Shrugging her shoulders, Abiah looked at her assistant who was busy organizing the papers in the folder she was holding. “Okay then promise us you will join next time or else...” she jokingly threatened.

Lyn looked at her. They both laughed when Lyn realized her boss was joking. “Don’t worry Abiah. I surely will, promise.” She shook her head like she can’t believe her boss was treating her that way. “But before you leave, let’s go through your schedule for tomorrow quickly.”

Still focused on her belongings Abiah agreed, “Okay shoot.”

“From seven in the morning until twelve noon is a quick birthday shoot of the customer who was here last week. Rolando will drive you to the location of course with the photographers you’ll bring with you.”

“This is Ms. Ramirez? The shoot for her grandson?” Abiah asked.

“Exactly. Then from one o’clock in the afternoon till five o’clock is another shoot which the people in the studio are preparing for right now.”

Abiah wore her bag, “Mr. Bill from the South right?”

“Yup. He’s requesting you to be there.”

“Right. He mentioned before.”

“Of course you know who your customers are and what they want. You really remember your schedules and everything they say when you talk to them. I wonder why I’m still doing this job?” Lyn cupped her chin then rubbed its sides with her thumb and index finger.

“Because I need you to remind me of things that I might forget.” Abiah laughed

before walking towards Jean who was still busy with her phone.

“Which never happens right?” Lyn responded.

Abiah giggled before asking her best friend, “Shall we?”

Jean looked at her, “All done?”

“Uhum. Let’s go.”

“Okay then. See you tomorrow Lyn! Take care.” Jean stood up and opened the glass door of the office.

“We will go ahead Lyn! Be home safe. See you tomorrow. Have a good night!”

Abiah exclaimed before closing the door that leads her out of the office.

Lyn shrugged her shoulders, shook her head then released a long deep breath.

“I’m really so lucky for this opportunity to work with a very pleasant, kind and welcoming boss.”

She cannot believe she was working with a boss who treated her like a friend. A person in charge who assigned work and instructions without giving her fear and making her feel intimidated. The first time she joined the team of Soulful Snaps, Lyn cannot believe that Abiah called her out for addressing her Ma’am Abiah. She didn’t even want to be called Miss Abiah or Miss Fontinilla—she was not comfortable with those titles. That’s why everyone called her simply Abiah. The kind of attitude she demonstrated made her employees work more comfortable and effective since they feel that while Abiah was the person in charge, she could be a friend as well. Of course there were times that she needed to correct mistakes or wrong doings in the office but she handled it very well—honestly, fairly, and properly—that even Jean did not know how her best friend does it.

Well this was basically a very transparent Abiah—from being a student way back in college, a friend, a leader, and most especially, a person.

No wonder why people claimed she had everything except... a lover.

Chapter Two

It was seven in the morning when Abiah arrived at the office wearing her black go-to jeggings topped with a brown leopard print knit sweater and finished with a grey scarf and cozy black loafers. She immediately placed her bag on top of the office table, sat on her swivel chair, and turned on her computer. While waiting for the computer to start she heard a knock on her door.

“Come in.”

“Good morning Abiah,” Lyn greeted her.

“Good morning Lyn! Have you eaten your breakfast?”

“Yes of course and you?”

“I had a piece of French toast at home but I’d like to drink a hot white chocolate mocha. Can you make one for me please?” she sweetly asked Lyn.

“Of course I will but before that...” Lyn read Abiah’s schedule for the day. “You only have one schedule for today and that’s with Mr. Tecson. It’s happening less than an hour from now here in our studio.” Abiah nodded as she was scrolling through her computer. “If you still remember, this is the prenuptial shoot of his sister.”

“Oh yah. I still remember,” Abiah affirmed.

“Other than that, we don’t have any other scheduled shoot for today.”

“Okay I got it. May I know tomorrow’s schedule as well?” Abiah looked at Lyn who quickly turned the page of the clipboard file she’s holding.

“Tomorrow... you only have the *La Manera* shoot,” Lyn answered as she verified the schedule.

“Can you also remind the people who will join me tomorrow about that shoot?” she humbly requested.

“No worries I will.”

“Thank you so much Lyn!”

“That’s it. I’ll be back in few minutes with your white chocolate mocha,” Lyn promised before leaving the office. Abiah then logged into her work e-mail and started the day reading messages since she had a lot of new e-mail in her inbox, as usual.

Minutes later, Lyn went back to Abiah’s office holding a mug. “Here’s the coffee you requested Abiah.” She placed the hot mug on the coffee coaster. “By the way the client is already here,” Lyn added.

With a shocked face Abiah immediately looked at Lyn then checked the wall clock across from her. It’s eight o’clock. “They came thirty minutes early huh?” She reached out the mug of coffee from the coaster and slowly took a sip of the coffee.

“Uhum but it’s not a problem. Mr. Tecson said they’re willing to wait for the time. They just didn’t want to be late,” Lyn responded.

“Are they complete?”

“You mean our production staff? Yes they are. But if you’re referring to the customers, they’re all here as well, the bride and groom most especially.”

Abiah felt better knowing that they were just waiting for eight-thirty to start shooting. “Okay please entertain them while we wait for the time. I have few urgent e-mail that need to be responded to.”

“Got it!”

“I will be there as soon as I am done, but definitely not after eight thirty,” she said before taking another sip.

“Sure we will.” Lyn directly went out and did her job.

Doing what she promised, Abiah walked out of her office at eight twenty-five and went directly inside the not too small but not too huge studio. She had a feeling that the shoot will of course not be easy but it will also not be that difficult since Mr. Tecson mentioned that they just want simple plain backdrops when she asked if the customer had any suggestions or requests with regards the shoot.

As soon as she entered the room, she saw the key light, back light, and fill light—basically the three important lighting in a shoot—were already turned on. The staff were also busy making sure everything was ready before starting. People assigned to the cameras were taking sample shots to make sure the output was neither too bright nor too dark. A worker was also talking to the couple giving instructions—the same person who already discussed with the couple beforehand so that the team knew what to do. While looking at everyone inside the studio, she saw five unfamiliar faces—two were the couple, another two seemed to be the ones in charge of the couple’s make-up and wardrobe and another person at the back just observing, “Maybe that’s Mr. Tecson,” she

thought.

She was walking towards the photographers when “maybe Mr. Tecson” approached her.

“Ms. Fontinilla?” He was wearing a classic round neck white t-shirt, black denim pants, and white sneakers. Well aside from the outfit, he was also wearing a serious face that almost looked like he did not want to talk to her.

“Good morning sir. Yes, I am Abiah Fontinilla. Welcome to Soulful Snaps.”

“Navarro Tecson.” He offered his hands that she willingly accepted.

“Thank you for choosing our studio to be your sister’s prenuptial shoot venue sir,” she responded.

“My sister has been mentioning Soulful Snaps to me. So as a gift for their wedding, I suggested to bring them here and have their prenuptial shoot be taken in this studio.”

“I am pleased to hear that. Like how we feel with other clients, we are truly excited to work with your sister.” She responded with a smile.

“Thrilled to see the output as well to understand why my sister keeps on mentioning this studio. Well, in fact there are more well-known photo studios in other towns.” Abiah was dumbfounded looking at Mr. Tecson trying to figure out what to say. She gave him a fake smile and slowly nodded.

“Abiah!” She almost wanted to kneel down and thank Ray, one of the photographers, for giving the opportunity to escape the awkward moment.

“Excuse me sir. You may take a seat on the couch back there while waiting for the shoot to finish.” She politely said then she calmly approached Ray.

They were in the middle of shooting for the first layout when Mr. Tecson cleared his throat loudly. Everyone stopped what they’re doing and looked at his direction.

“Okay let’s tr—” Abiah was not even done with what she was about to say when Mr. Tecson interrupted her.

“I don’t think the shots you’re taking are great,” he told Ray. Everyone, including Abiah, was surprised with what he said. “Why don’t you just take the best shot so we won’t spend too much time here?” He said with a blank expression while his arms were crossed like he was sending a negative message to the entire production staff.

Ray looked at him and smiled before saying, “Actually Sir we already got it. We are just trying a few more shots just in case we can capture a better one.” Ray smiled and added, “Also for the couple to have more choices.”

Mr. Tecson slowly shook his head with a little smirk on his face, “It doesn’t make sense. Can you just take sure shots so we won’t spend too much time here? We have more things to arrange. It is not wise to spend the whole day taking the best shots.”

Abiah was completely stunned and upset with what she heard but she still gave her best to try controlling her emotions. “Excuse me sir, if you want to, you can check the pictures and if you think there’s already a perfect shot for the first layout, we’ll move on to the second layout.” She still beamed even though she was frustrated with Mr. Tecson’s attitude. She patted Ray’s shoulder, a signal to show the pictures to the man who was not careful with his words. Meanwhile, the couple in front was so ashamed of what Mr. Tecson was doing. As Abiah and the bride came across each other’s stare, the sister smiled apologetically. Abiah gave her a ‘don’t worry it’s okay’ look.

As they were scanning the pictures, the room was filled with awkward silence. Mr. Tecson as well remained silent until the scanning was finished. He sighed disappointedly before speaking. "Didn't you realize that the background is too plain before taking pictures?" He asked the innocent Ray.

Abiah walked towards them. As the leader of the team, she faced Mr. Tecson. "I'm sorry sir. May I know what's the problem with the shots?" she humbly asked.

"Did you see the pictures? Those shots are plain and dull," he carelessly exclaimed, almost saying that they were not doing their job well.

"I'm sorry Sir but I remember the first time you contacted us you mentioned that you and the couple prefer plain backdrops as you want the shoot to be simple." Abiah tried her very best to calm down while speaking and before the other person said a word she explained, "And by the way sir, one of our staff talked to the couple before this scheduled shoot. It is for us to know what the couple wants to happen in this. I am pretty sure that they discussed about the background."

There was a quick moment of silence until Mr. Tecson's sister uttered a word. Everyone looked at her direction. "Hey Nav stop it. We want it this simple right? Ms. Fontinilla is right. We discussed this and I just relayed what output I want to be produced."

"I know but not that simple," he roughly replied.

"Nav... Don't be too harsh. We didn't even see the final edited layout. I'm sure it's going to be excellent," his sister sweetly pleaded.

"It's okay Ma'am." Abiah didn't want to waste time she had a lot of e-mails and other responsibilities to do. "We'll just disregard what you mentioned before. Anyway, do you have other background suggestions? Sir? Ma'am?" She panned her eyes from Mr. Tecson to the soon to be bride.

"Another thing."

Abiah looked at Mr. Tecson and thought, "Oh no not another complaint please."

"I'm wondering why aren't you the one taking the pictures Ms. Fontinilla?" He gave another blank expression to Abiah.

"No Nav it's okay! Photographers here are well experienced." His sister was trying her best to tell her brother that he didn't have to make a scene because the staff of Soulful Snaps know what they're doing.

"No. What are you talking about? We are paying for Ms. Fontinilla's skills right? It's going to be useless if she won't be the one behind those pictures."

Abiah closed her eyes and slowly released a long breath. She kept on telling her self quietly, "It's okay. It's okay."

"Okay I will take the shots." She managed to give a delightful smile as if everything was going well. She took the camera and whispered, "Let me handle this" to Ray.

Like what she said, Abiah took the shots while Mr. Tecson still had his complaints, questions, and unreasonable statements but the team didn't give aggressive responses or actions. They just kept quiet and only listened to him as he commented approvingly about the poses, the color, his sister's smile, the way the pictures were taken, and so much more.

Every time a picture was accepted by the client for every layout, they whole team

released a sigh of relief. They did not express it but they badly wanted the shoot done. So as soon as the last picture was taken, the whole team started smiling and giving each other a tap. However, Abiah still needed to face the unreasonable guy.

The couple extended their gratitude to the whole team most especially Abiah. The sister even hugged her tight and expressed her apologies for how her brother acted. “I am deeply sorry for all the things he said. I don’t think he meant those things. Maybe he’s just too tired from work or something’s stressing him. Believe me, Ms. Abiah, he did not mean it. I hope you understand.”

Abiah just smiled at her and said, “Don’t worry it’s okay. It happens. Anyway, thank you for choosing Soulful Snaps Ma’am.”

Everyone started leaving the studio. When Abiah stepped out, she saw the man who was like throwing tantrums a while ago. Although she felt bad, she still approached Mr. Tecson.

“Thank you so much for allowing us to take pictures for this special moment for your sister, Mr. Tecson. We apologize and understand if there were parts of the shoot that didn’t meet your expectations. This could be a great lesson for the team to perform better in the future, we don’t know maybe if we’ll work with you again.” Abiah expressed it honestly and wholeheartedly however what Mr. Tecson said shocked her whole existence.

“I doubt if we’ll work with you again. Maybe not. Thank you.”

Chapter Three

It was Saturday morning when Jean received a message from Abiah.

From: Abiah F.

Good morning beautiful Jean!

Jean laughed as she read the message because her best friend never addressed her as “beautiful.” Never. Unless... Abiah needed something from her. Usually when she received a message from her, it’s a long morning message containing information about work that made her almost not want to read messages from Abiah.

Playful as she was, Jean wanted to joke around with her best friend so she decided not to respond. It’s not even five minutes when Jean received another message from her dear friend.

From: Abiah F.

HEEEY WAKE UP! Want to go out with me today? Lunch?

Lunch date? It’s time to take advantage of the best friend. Jean smirked while jokingly thinking of it. She knew that the tone of Abiah’s messages were clearly saying that she needed to tell her something. She heard her phone beep once more.

From: Abiah F.

Nevermind.

She wasn’t even able to lock her phone yet when it beeped again.

From: Abiah F.

I'm coming Jean! See you hehe.

Jean laughed and rolled her eyes before saying, "Annoying photographer."

After ten minutes, Abiah was already knocking at Jean's room door as Jean was blow drying her hair. Abiah did not bother waiting for Jean to answer. Wearing above the knee denim skirt, white shirt, and white sneakers, she immediately popped inside the room. She dropped her bag on the floor and sat on her best friend's bed.

"You're not replying," Abiah frowned and gave her best friend a pouting face but Jean just giggled while still busy brushing and drying her short hair.

"Why are you suddenly asking me out on a lunch date," Jean responded to the sulking woman on the bed.

"Nothing. I just want to relax and have some time with you. You know, work's been so stressful these past days." Abiah laid her back on the bed after explaining.

"As if you can fool me, Abiah. Look at me, you are talking to me. Not somebody else." Jean looked at Abiah who released a little smile, "Tell me."

As simple as that, Abiah started telling her what was the matter. She sighed deeply before saying, "You remember the guy from last Thursday's shoot?"

"Uhm."

"I still.. ugh," she frustratedly expressed.

Jean turned off the blower and stared at Abiah for a while. "Don't tell me, you're still thinking of that problem the team encountered?" She raised her brows at Abiah.

"Ye-es? No. Ugh. You don't understand."

"Okay then. Make me understand."

"Finish up quickly so we can spend our Saturdate well." Abiah gave her signature sweet smile that can't be resisted. "I will tell the story later."

Jean dressed up as fast as she could because Abiah kept on bugging her and making her hurry as if they were running up late for a very important meeting.

It was exactly eleven o'clock when they arrived at the mall where they used to go de-stress themselves.

"So where do you want to eat Jean?"

"I don't know. Anywhere will do."

"Hmm? How about... what do you want to eat?"

"Uhm.. Wings?"

They both looked at each other and simultaneously uttered, "Buffalo's Wings N' Things!" It was the only choice they consider when they crave wings. So they immediately walked towards where the restaurant was located, looked for a vacant table, and ordered their favorite garlic parmesan and honey barbeque wings.

After ordering, Jean intertwined her hands and placed them on top of the table and stared at Abiah. "So what's our lesson for today teacher Abiah?"

Abiah sitting in front of her pushed her hands away as she giggled. "Stop it."

"What's with Mr. Tecson huh?" The silly Jean squinted her eyes a bit. "Ohhh do you like him?????" She acted shocked as she covered her mouth and gave Abiah

exaggerated big round eyes.

“What are you talking about?! NO JEAN. N-O! Never!” Abiah disgustingly stated.

“Oh come on. Spill it! Spill it!” Jean said while moving her brows up and down. “You know I actually find him cute,” she added.

“Jean will you stop?!” Abiah wrinkled her forehead. She can’t believe the words coming from Jean’s mouth.

“Hey, let’s be honest. He is kind of cute right?” Jean placed her palm below her jaw while her elbow was on the table. “And I like his height! He is tall, with a very masculine body. His hair is black and a little bit wavy... right?”

Abiah really couldn’t believe that her best friend was praising the ‘looks’ of that guy who just disrespected the team that was really striving hard to give quality outputs. The team who even at times stay up very late to meet deadlines but still produce great photos. “You are just making me more upset and frustrated,” she rolled her eyes.

Jean continued teasing her. “And oh his eyes! Did you see those intense dark brown eyes? It feels like you are the only one he sees! It’s like he really focuses on the details of your face, examining your eyes, nose, and brows like he’s reviewing for an examination on anatomy focusing on parts of the face.” She acted like she really found the man appealing and handsome. She even made gestures as she explained.

“Jean! Don’t act like you really stalked him while he was in the studio,” she quietly emphasized.

Jean happily giggled before asking her best friend, “So if you don’t like him, what’s up?”

“Didn’t you see how disappointed everyone was during and after the shoot?” Abiah explained.

“Huh? I don’t know Madame, I was not in the studio.”

“Hey, I told you that the same day of the shoot. Remember? We did not leave the shop together but I told you. I went to your office.” Abiah was really starting to be so annoyed.

“Aaand so? You do not act like that with other clients who show those kinds of attitudes... right?”

“This is different.”

“What makes him different Ms. Abiah? Do you like him? I think you really do.”

Abiah released a sigh of irritation before answering. “Stop it. I don’t like him okay? Not even 0.1 or 0.00001 percent. He will never be my type. You know me.”

The other giggled as she saw her “Mission: Annoy Abiah“ was being successful. “Okay seriously, what happened? Did he say or do something really bad?”

“He really had a lot of complaints. When I say a lot I mean it. A LOT. Like every shot Ray and I took, he was not contented. He made us feel like we don’t deserve the job. He also made me feel like I do not deserve building my own photo studio because we do not even produce quality outputs.”

“Abiah, you know that’s not true right?” Jean kindly reminded her.

“Yes but you know he even said there are more well-known studios in other towns and he just agreed with his sister to have the pre-nup shoot in Soulful Snaps because that’s what his sister likes. It’s like doing the favor even though it didn’t sound good to him.”

“You should not believe those kinds of comments! You know your ability and hello? Soulful Snaps has a lot of customers. The studio is booked the whole month of February, aside from having other shoots outside the office right?”

“You want to know what he told me before leaving?”

“Uhum. What did he say?”

“That he doesn’t think they want to work with Soulful Snaps ever again. He really got on my nerves Jean. I’m just thankful I had patience and calmness even though I really wanted to get back at him.” Abiah’s expression while telling the story explained how she was saddened because of the incident. “He acted like he knew better. I almost asked him to take the photos instead of us.”

Abiah continued telling her stories to Jean who was on the other hand shocked because it was the first time that a customer said negative things face to face. It happened to them many times already, but usually they were just rumors destroying the studio because in the business world Soulful Snaps was like selling pancakes—absolutely a threat to other photo studios.

After eating their lunch, they walked for a while and went to different stores to window shop until Jean wanted coffee so they went to one of their favorite coffee shops in the mall.

Abiah really couldn’t forget what happened, so sometimes she suddenly brought up her annoyance and how disheartened she was while Jean was doing her job to tell Abiah that everything the guy said was not true. Jean, however, was really wondering how someone affected her best friend that much for the first time.

While they were talking, Abiah’s phone suddenly rang. “Not work related, not work related, not work related,” she started chanting as she searched the phone inside her bag. It was not impossible that the phone call was work related since Lyn preferred working even on Saturdays.

She frowned as she saw her assistant’s name on the screen, “Hello Lyn. Good afternoon.”

“Good afternoon Abiah. Am I disturbing you?” Lyn greeted.

“Not really, I am just in a coffee shop hanging out with Jean. How may I help you?”

“Oh good thing. Our business e-mail just received a message from a company. They said they have urgent shoot for their company anniversary invitation that they will start distributing next month. They are basically asking if you could take the pictures for them. It is a request from their CEO.”

Abiah was shocked, “Really?”

“Yup! I sent the message to your personal e-mail. You can check it,” Lyn explained.

“Okay I’ll check my e-mail and I’ll get back to you in a while. Thank you Lyn.”

“You’re welcome Abiah.”

Abiah finished the call and immediately turned on her phone’s own data connection to access the e-mail sent to her.

“What did she say?” Jean asked.

“A company sent a message to our business e-mail. They have an urgent shoot for the company anniversary invitation they will distribute and they’re asking me if I could

take the pictures for them.”

“See!” Jean exclaimed.

Abiah shockingly looked at her, “What?”

“You are sulking over that guy who said random stuff about you and Soulful Snaps but look, companies want you to take photos for them. It’s not even just someone else there. It’s a company. So stop thinking about it!”

Abiah remained silent as she read the e-mail. Her frowning face started smiling. She felt very happy as she went through the e-mail. What made her heart flutter and forget what was said to her by Mr. Tecson is the part of the message that said:

“...As our company urges the best in everything, we also long to distribute our anniversary invitation with the best pictures in it. With that being said, the bosses met and deliberated who to invite among the best photographers and they came to the best decision. Based on the discussion’s outcome, we are inviting Ms. Abiah Fontinilla of Soulful Snaps to be the photographer in our urgent and very special shoot. We believe that her expertise in the world of photography will produce more than the expected output. It is a great opportunity for our company to send this invitation. We are hoping for a positive feedback from Ms. Abiah Fontinilla. Thank you so much.”

“Why are you smiling?” The innocent Jean asked. “What did they say? Hey. Can I read too?” she added.

Abiah laughed at her very curious best friend. “Nothing it’s just an invitation. I told you a while ago already.”

“No there’s more than that. Hmm?”

“Jean. It’s honestly just that.”

“Your smile is so different. It’s like someone you really like e-mailed you.”

“Really? Well maybe you are right because it’s about something I really like to do.”

Jean was still begging to read the e-mail to know the truth when Abiah dialed Lyn’s number and said, “Okay tell them I will be there.”

Chapter Four

Six o’clock in the morning.

The whole Soulful Snaps team made sure that everything needed for the “urgent company shoot” was ready. Abiah would be at the company with a few assistants who’d help her with regards to the setup of the shoot since she couldn’t do it alone. The assigned staff talked with the company regarding the details and these were the few: They wanted the shoot’s location not in the Soulful Snaps’ studio but rather in one of the vacant rooms in their office, at nine forty in the morning. It was not a problem for either Abiah or any of the staff because they were already used to that. With regards to the location, the team was open for outdoor shoots and even shoots where they would visit the customer’s place as per request. Although it was more difficult since they would have to bring the equipment for the shoot, they still accepted those kinds of demands. For them it was a great involvement and learning to experience those kinds of difficult tasks.

“Are we ready?” It was almost seven when Abiah asked the team—after the things were loaded in the van they would be using.

“I think so.” Lyn responded. “Let me go through the checklist once more before you guys leave.”

The company was located not more than an hour away from where they were so it was not too tiring and far for the team. Well there were even times when the location of shoots was more than an hour away from the office but since they always rent a van whenever they have these long distance locations, it was never a problem to them. Actually as their next project, they were considering buying Soulful Snaps their own van for far location shoots.

“Everything’s complete!” Lyn excitedly exclaimed.

“Alright then. Thank you Lyn. We don’t want to be late for this very important shoot right? Let’s go!” As soon as Abiah mentioned that, all the staff who were joining the shoot entered the van while saying, “Yes,” “Of course,” “Surely,” “Let’s go!” and when they were complete, the van drove off.

“Here we go.” Abiah softly uttered.

While travelling to the company’s office, Abiah could not figure out why she felt disturbed. She did not even feel that before travelling to the office. She woke up excited and positive because of this opportunity. She was very sure that she wants this. It made her feel special right? But where was the nervousness coming from? Was it because she was too excited? Was it because she’s meeting the people who claimed she’s one of the best photographers they know—big bosses of the company huh? She really did not know why she felt butterflies in her belly along with the fast heart beat that knocked her chest. She placed her palm on her chest where the heart was located then looked outside the window. The whole team discussed about the shoot and she knew that the shoot would be successful. She was very confident with this project. Yes she knew she was. But why? Something really unknown was distressing her. She tried disregarding the idea and just thought of the great opportunity she was chasing at the moment.

True enough, the travel time was not even an hour away. Abiah checked her watch when the van stopped. She smiled as she saw that they have enough time to set up. As colored white, grey, and dark grey. She slowly tilted her head from the bottom to the top, looking at the ten story building with a lot of windows, located in the central business district. She knew that the company was not ‘just’ a company.

“This is a huge one,” she sighed nervously. She felt her cheeks flush as she remembered that they chose her to be the photographer of their “urgent shoot.” The bosses did not just choose her out of nowhere. They sat down and deliberated for the decision.

“True enough, and you will work with them Abiah,” one of the Soulful Snaps team member told her.

She was caught being flustered as the feeling of nervousness came back again. The tips of her fingers started feeling cold and those butterflies flew back to her tummy. “This is weird,” she thought.

They brought the things down from the van and immediately approached the

building. Upon entering, there were three security guards who stopped them from coming in.

“Good morning.” Abiah beamed.

“Good morning Ma’am! How may we help you?” One guard asked her.

“We were actually invited by this company for a shoot.”

“Soulful Snaps?” the man clarified.

“Yes sir.” She confirmed.

“May I borrow your identification card please?”

Abiah searched for her I.D card and handed it to the very kind guard in front of her.

After making sure that they were really from Soulful Snaps, the guards allowed them to enter and gave a few instructions for the team to follow.

“You may use the elevator to reach the sixth floor and when you get there, someone will assist you to the room.”

The guards also instructed them to leave the heavy equipment since someone could bring the things to the room, so they did. While they were in the elevator, they quietly whispered their amazement because it was the first time they entered a company building for a shoot. As a team who was freshly established comparing to other studio competitors, they were delighted by the experience.

After stepping out of the elevator, a guy wearing a white long sleeve polo tucked into teal slacks tightened by a black belt, approached them.

“If I am not mistaken, Ms. Fontinilla?” the man asked.

“Hello sir. Good morning.”

“Good morning! Welcome to TCOM. Thank you for approving the company’s urgent shoot request. I am Dominic and I will assist you to the location of today’s shoot. Is that fine?” The formal looking guy told her.

“Hello Dominic, nice meeting you. Sure thing. Thank you so much,” she replied.

Abiah kept on telling herself, “Keep calm. Do not stutter, be confident and everything will be fine. You go girl we can do this!”

They entered a very spacious white and grey room with nothing in it but a few couches against the wall at the back part of the room. It was a closed room without any windows as well. The ceiling was not that high, not that low but was perfect for their setup and the whole floor was covered with a grey carpet.

“This is where we usually do our shoot for advertisement and such.” Dominic noticed that she was awed with what she saw.

She slowly nodded, “It looks great.”

“Let’s wait for the other equipment. They will be brought here any minute.”

Dominic said.

Still wanting to roam her eyes around, Abiah just nodded before saying, “Thank you Dominic.”

She took one step towards the center of the room when a few men entered the room with the lights, tripod, and other things they needed, so even though she still wanted to wander around the place—although it had nothing but the couches—she had to work. The team had one hour and twenty minutes left to set up. They immediately did their job since they did not want to mess up and make their clients wait.

They finished fixing the setup and setting the camera thirty minutes before the time. Dominic asked them to relax while waiting for the bosses to arrive. He handed them magazines that they can read which they accepted and browsed. Ten minutes after, the room was filled with different people until men wearing tuxedos and women wearing formal dresses also began entering. Abiah was shocked when the bosses, one by one, approached her and welcomed her. She felt so humbled by the way they treated her. They personally thanked her for saying yes to the request.

She could not believe that the bosses were shaking her hands and talking to her. The women even hugged her and asked her if she's okay, if she feels comfortable, and so on. Those actions, made her more at ease and confident with what she was about to do. She knew that she did not produce perfect outputs all the time in her career but the ambiance that they were giving her made her feel that she was not just in the right place but she would also capture great shots.

It was already twenty minutes past the scheduled time of the shoot but the "bosses" were still not complete. Abiah heard the people around her—who she believed were assistants of the bosses or assistants for that day's shoot—whispering to each other and looking for a certain person so they could start shooting. The 'assistants' were all panicking while the Soulful Snaps team were comfortably seated on the soft huge couch while waiting.

Dominic approached them with finger foods and asked them for their desired drink. Before asking Abiah for her drink, he apologized, "Ms. Fontinilla, we are very sorry for the delay."

Abiah kindly responded, "It happens."

"We are just waiting for our CEO's son. He is already here in the building so it will not take too much time to wait for him. When he arrives, the shoot can start immediately." He explained.

"Okay. Let's wait for him."

"We really apologize for this. Anyway, may I ask what drink do you prefer while waiting? Do you want water, juice, tea or coffee?" he gently asked Abiah.

"Hmm.. Water will do. Thank you Dominic."

"I'll be back in a while."

While still waiting, Abiah continued roaming her eyes around the room. She was amazed how huge the room was. It was even larger than Soulful Snaps' actual studio. Her imaginative mind made her think that someday after so much work, sacrifices, and effort, the studio would be that spacious. They would also be able to buy all of the equipment needed, not only to make things easier but also to fulfill the desired output of the clients. When they already have those things, it would allow the team to have more efficient outdoor photo and video shoots. Abiah did not realize that her imaginations made her smile all throughout the waiting. She woke up from daydreaming when she felt a nudge from her colleague.

"Yes what what?" She was obviously shocked while looking at the person behind her, trying to recollect where she was and what was happening.

"Dominic is talking to you." As soon as she heard that, she looked for Dominic who was standing in front of her.

Unconsciously, she also stood up before answering Dominic, "Oh I am sorry I... I

was thinking...” She giggled while scratching her forehead.

Dominic who found Abiah’s facial expression cute, just giggled, “It’s okay. I just want to say that the CEO’s son is coming so may I ask you to be ready?”

“Oh sure! Give me a second.” She drank the water offered to her and quickly stood in front of the bosses.

Abiah was making sure the camera was set when she heard someone say, “He’s here.”

Dominic tapped her back and said, “They’re complete.”

She nodded while still looking at the camera’s menu when she heard someone say, “I’m sorry I had to finish an international call.”

Her eyes widened. Her body froze. She instinctively tilted her bowing head up and had her mouth opened with what she saw.

Chapter Five

“*Mr. Navarro Tecson?!!!*” Abiah’s inner self shouted. She almost wanted to back out upon seeing that very familiar face.

Her jaw dropped when she saw the ‘CEO’s son.’ Along with her widened eyes was her mind screaming with this great surprise. She knew she can’t be wrong. It was just few days ago when this guy was in their office ranting about how he did not approve of the captured pictures. The guy who assuredly and firmly doubted if he will ever work with them again. As she saw the guy, the what ifs were bothering her. “What if he does it again?” She really didn’t know how to react but she clearly heard herself boldly saying and emphasizing, “BE PROFESSIONAL.” She kept on thinking of positive things to distract herself from remembering what happened from the latest shoot they had with this guy. She thought maybe the guy was just dragged in this shoot since he is the CEO’s son. Perhaps he did not know anything about the Soulful Snaps being in charge of their urgent company shoot. She needed to be optimistic so she could focus and push through the shoot successfully.

She flashed a smiling face as she looked at the professional looking people in front of her. She had no idea if Mr. Tecson already realized that Ms. Abiah Fontinilla was the photographer in front of him. This was so unexpected for her but she calmly faced them even though she wanted to roll her eyes.

“Good morning everyone!” she greeted them avoiding eye contact with Mr. Tecson. She was a hundred percent sure that the guy already saw her. “I am Abiah Fontinilla from Soulful Snaps.”

By the time she claimed where she worked, she looked directly at Mr. Tecson who was already looking at her. She instantly thought that the guy’s blood suddenly boiled the moment he heard her name and saw her face. She maintained a calm-looking face like nothing was bothering her but truth to be told, she was in total shock as Mr. Tecson did not give her the blank face he usually had during the shoot time days ago. He cheerfully smiled at her like nothing happened or like he never mentioned offending words to her and the team. “Where did the, ‘I don’t think I will be working with you again’ go?” she thought.

Abiah smiled back at him but with reservations, “Shall we start?” She asked them

and everyone excitedly responded yes to her.

The shoot went smoothly and quickly. However, the moment of truth came when everyone checked the photos taken. Yes, Abiah was very nervous not only because the models were bosses but also because she had to face Mr. Tecson again. She went back to her what ifs once more. She thought, “What if they will all react like how Mr. Tecson reacted before?”

Across from where the setup was, a projector was prepared for the viewing of pictures to be flashed on the white broad wall. As soon as the photos were transferred to Soulful Snaps’ laptop, Abiah connected it to the projector. She felt too much pressure especially that all the bosses were seated in front of her, all were enthusiastic to see the pictures.

Abiah’s heart started to beat faster when the first picture flashed against the wall. She did not even want to look at them. She slowly clicked the next button to show the following pictures. Everyone was so quiet. They did not even show facial reactions, not even a sigh. She bravely panned her head to where the clients were. She knew that acceptance was the key. Whether they will love it or not, she had to respect the decision of the clients.

While still going through the pictures, she suddenly assumed of a wild thought, she asked herself, “Did they just pretend that this is an urgent company shoot for Mr. Tecson to prove that we are not competent enough?” She felt sad with that idea. She really hoped it doesn’t go that way. She wished it was just her being paranoid.

While preparing herself for criticisms, Abiah suddenly heard someone clap slowly. It made her look around to see who did that. The applause was from the man in the center of the arrangement during the shoot. The man they claimed and who introduced himself as the CEO of the company. It was from the father of Mr. Navarro Tecson.

“Great job!” He claimed.

Her eyes widened and once more, she could not believe that it was happening.

“Can we have all the pictures? Do we have to add payment so we could secure the pictures?” someone asked.

“I told you! She’s a great photographer.” murmurs of praises on the pictures taken started to fill the wide room.

She looked at the direction of the Soulful Snaps team. They were all smiling while putting their thumbs up. That was the time when it sank into her that it was true. They loved her shots. She would not hear any criticism like what she was assuming. She did very well. While she was so happy with everything she heard, she saw the face that made her uncertain of what she was doing. The guy was talking to the person beside him while he was smiling. She was not sure of what they were talking about but she was happy that Mr. Navarro Tecson did not ruin the day. Did he like it? Did he appreciate the pictures now? She had no idea but she was contented.

The CEO talked to Abiah and requested to have a copy of all the pictures that were taken. He was willing to pay more just to secure the pictures. The person in charge made arrangement that the company eagerly accepted.

As soon as everything was settled, the team started disassembling the equipment and the bosses started leaving. Abiah was about to help them when she heard her name.

“Ms. Fontinilla,” a deep voice made her quickly look at the direction of the voice. It was the CEO. He was offering his hand to her for a handshake that she humbly accepted.

“Sir,” she slightly bowed her head as a sign of respect.

“Thank you for giving time for our company,” he smiled.

“No, thank you Sir for this opportunity. I am pleased,” she responded.

“Well if I may request, can we have you on the day of our anniversary to capture moments on the special day?” Though having a very deep voice, the CEO talked kindly—unlike his son, Abiah thought. He acted like he was not the owner of the company as he treated everyone well. Abiah noticed a while ago that he was mingling with everyone. He even said his personal greetings to the whole Soulful Snaps team and thanked them after the shoot.

“Hmm... I am willing to do that Sir but may I request that the company send an invitation to our business e-mail so we could see if I am available on that date? I am afraid to say yes and realize there’s already a scheduled shoot on that day. I just want to make sure,” she explained.

“Sure we will Ms. Fontinilla. I hope you enjoyed the shoot as much as we did,” the CEO gently smiled.

“I did. Well, yes I was nervous at first but sir, I really did enjoy this experience. Thank you so much.”

The boss shook her hand and thanked everyone once more before he left the room.

After packing everything Dominic entered the room and congratulated the team for a job well done. The men who carried the heavy equipment a while ago went inside the room to carry back the things to the ground floor.

“On behalf of the whole company, thank you so much Ms. Fontinilla. You did very well,” Dominic told her.

“This day is full of gratitude huh?” Abiah jokingly said. “Anyway, we also thank you Dominic for assisting us from the very start. We appreciate you so much.”

“Well that’s my duty.”

“Duty fulfilled.” Abiah and Dominic smiled at each other before Dominic made an announcement.

“Okay, as you saw, the men carried back the equipment. Do not worry about those things we will take good care of them. For now, we are inviting you to the second floor. The company prepared a lunch for everyone.”

Abiah checked her watch and saw that it was already past twelve noon. Dominic assisted them once more. They enjoyed the place by themselves while eating their lunch. After eating, they bade goodbye to Dominic and thanked him again. The Soulful Snaps team were all cheerful as they entered the elevator until they reached the ground floor. Everyone went outside already and checked the things while Abiah talked to the guards. She thanked them and also said goodbye.

Before she was able to step out of the building, she felt a tap on her shoulder. She confidently looked back and saw the CEO’s son.

“Mr. Tecson,” she professionally said.

“You can call me Navarro. Mr. Tecson is basically my dad,” he explained.

“Mr. Navarro how may I help you?” Abiah asked.

“It’s Navarro not Mr. Navarro,” he clarified again.

“Yes Navarro?” Abiah hesitantly asked. At that moment, she was very confident. She thought that if ever this guy would disapprove with the shoot again, it did not matter anymore because the bosses approved her shots and if he could not accept that truth, it was none of her business. It was not her problem anymore.

“Why so serious?” Navarro asked.

Abiah raised her left brow. She was wondering why the guy was acting so differently. Was it because his father was just inside the building? Was he afraid to be scolded for treating people without respect? Her inner self laughed at that thought.

“I’m sorry?” Abiah gave him a questioning look but Navarro did not say a word so she continued. “Is there anything I can do to help you? Sir?”

“Come on Abiah drop that sir,” he giggled.

‘He laughs cutely’ Abiah secretly thought. He took a step closer to Abiah and offered his hand. Abiah looked at his eyes that were intensely staring at her. Jean’s right, he had intense dark brown eyes. She felt that all his attention at the moment was hers and nothing could take away that focus he gave. As he was staring at her she heard something whisper at her saying, “Why are you looking at him like that? I think Jean is right, you like him. You have a crush on him!” That was when she immediately looked away.

“I’m sorry I have no time for this,” she said. She started walking towards the exit when Navarro stopped her by blocking her way.

“Hey hey give me a minute.” Navarro raised his index finger as a sign that he was asking for a minute.

On the other hand, Abiah did not want what she was feeling. She wanted to escape and leave the place so she said, “Maybe some other time. I have an appointment. Goodbye.” She quickly walked out of the building. She was nervous—she raised her hands and saw it slightly shaking. Abiah released a heavy sigh before entering the van. She just hoped that the team did not see what happened. She observed them after she entered, no one was speaking so she believed that they did not witness the encounter. She sat comfortably while trying to cope with what she was feeling. The person beside her poked her arm.

“Why are you blushing?” the innocent one asked.

Abiah quickly touched her cheeks and they were hot. She quickly said, “Hot. Yes. It’s kinda hot outside. That’s the reason why.”

“Oh okay.” The person beside her adjusted the aircon and made sure it was directly facing towards Abiah.

Abiah closed her eyes and sighed once more. “Today is a roller coaster experience,” she thought.

Chapter Six

As soon as the Soulful Snaps team arrived at their office, Abiah went straight to where her best friend was and asked her to come to her office immediately.

“Why?” Jean innocently asked.

“I have to tell you something.” Jean just stared at her. “Important,” she added.

“Important? Hmm... About?” Her best friend curiously asked.

“Jean.” Abiah firmly stated. She gave Jean a very serious face then said, “Just come to my office. Please?” She desperately pleaded.

Her best friend giggled then said, “Okay madam I will be in your office in a while.” Abiah frowned at her best friend before leaving.

Being true to her word, Jean was in Abiah’s office after a while. Abiah then told her best friend about what happened in the shoot, how the team was treated, and most especially, that she saw Mr. Tecson, the CEO’s son. Jean was also shocked at first. Like Abiah, she also could not believe that it happened, but her approach was more or less to tease her best friend because of the encounter. Of course, Abiah was not buying the “teasing game” from her best friend. She was ignoring how Jean was making fun of her claiming that she had a crush on Mr. Tecson.

“Jean, please stop. You know I don’t like those kinds of people right?” Abiah gave Jean a disappointed look.

“Yes I know but Abiah, I heard the same stories like you and Navarro.” Jean sat on Abiah’s receiving area. She looked up remembering the stories she knew.

“Mr. Tecson.” Abiah corrected.

“But he told you to call him Navarro.” Jean teasingly said. “Oh I’m sorry!” she suddenly took back what she said. “Maybe calling him Navarro is only for you. I’ll call him Mr. Tecson then,” she playfully added.

“JEEEEAN!” Abiah, really annoyed, exclaimed while the other was just laughing at her best friend’s very irritated reaction.

“Anyway, you remember my aunt Marlyn? She and her husband were also not in good terms when they first met. They didn’t like each other. But see, they already have three children now. My teacher in calculus, she told us that she and her husband hated each other, they didn’t have a good start but they are happily married now. Our neig—”

“Really Jean? Stop it. I don’t need those jokes right now,” Abiah breathed. Her facial expression signaled Jean to stop playing around.

“But seriously Abiah, why didn’t you allow him to talk to you?” Abiah did not say a word and merely stared at her. “Who knows? Maybe he wanted to apologize but then you didn’t want to talk to him. Or maybe he wanted to discuss something about what happened during the preuptial shoot and tell you he’s sorry. Well??”

What Jean said suddenly made Abiah feel guilty about what happened. Actually she was thinking of that the whole ride back to the office. She knew that the way she acted in front of Navarro was rude. It made her feel guilty because she knew that no matter how bad the person treated you, there is no reason for you to behave the same way the person did. Abiah kept quiet. She was still thinking of the things that just happened.

“Well maybe it could have also gone the other way around. Perhaps he could’ve insulted you again and say things that would make you feel worse. Like what I said, who knows? But... for me, just for me, you should have allowed him to speak even just for a minute or two.”

Abiah took a deep breath before speaking, “I know. I know. I am also ashamed of what I did. I know it’s not right. I should not have used his mistakes against him and based my treatment on that.”

Jean held her hand, “It’s okay. But you know what? It’s the first time I saw you react that way. Why is it so?” Jean suddenly became serious.

“He insulted me Jean.”

“But you have received worse insults than that before. Am I right?”

“Uhum. I don’t know. Maybe the way he acted and told me those harsh words made it more offensive,” Abiah forcefully giggled.

“Well it doesn’t matter because his dad loved your shots and he wanted to work with you in the future. You are really a very effective photographer. I’m so proud of you!” Jean stood up and hugged her best friend.

“Thank you so much.” Abiah hugged her back. They were still hugging each other when Abiah asked, “You think we will meet again?”

Jean removed her arms around Abiah and looked at her. “He really bothers you huh? Well surely, your paths will meet again. You will have another chance to talk to each other and forgive him if he’ll ask you to.” ‘This is more than being insulted during the shoot,’ Jean thought.

Abiah smiled at Jean but her face showed that she was thinking of something else. Jean went back to work after talking to Abiah. She really thought Abiah was so much affected with Mr. Tecson which was very unusual for her. She did not want to annoy her best friend more so she did not want to tell Abiah that she’s attracted to the guy.

After work, Abiah decided to be alone to give herself a quick time to rest from work and all the things that were happening. She was really bothered especially by the way she reacted towards Navarro. She was still thinking of what ifs. What if she entertained the conversation with Navarro? Would she feel better? Maybe if they cleared things out, her grudges against the guy would disappear? Or would she feel worse? Maybe because Navarro could have added insult to injury? Abiah did not really feel good about the thoughts that were playing in her mind. They were stressing her out and making her uncomfortable which made her really need to spend time alone. She went to one of her favorite coffee shops and ordered a hot macchiato. As soon as she received her order from the counter, she searched for a perfect place to have her private time. She found a seat at the very corner of the shop, beside the window, where there were only a few people who passed by the area. She sat down and started drinking her coffee.

She was enjoying the relaxing bossa nova music that was playing inside the coffee shop. She brought out the book she was reading since last week and started reading to de-stress. After flipping her eighth page, her phone suddenly rang—the sound of an e-mail notification. Instead of reading the e-mail, she automatically pressed the mute button of the phone and continued reading. She was already near the end of the page when her phone vibrated and lighted up. Still looking at her book, her right hand made its way to the phone and locked it. She was on her tenth page when her phone vibrated once more. This time, she looked at the phone and the screen showed that she had three new e-mails. She then took her bookmark and placed it in between the pages of the book before she closed it. She placed the book on the table and took her phone, unlocked it, and read the e-mails.

Two were not very urgent messages from Lyn so she ignored them and decided to reply at home. The last message was from an e-mail address that’s not familiar to her but when she read it carefully, she was shocked. She did not want to read the message immediately. The e-mail subject, “Read Me! I am important,” tells her that the message is not really that significant. She could also read the preview of the e-mail that said, “Hi Miss Abiah.”

“It was a bad idea.” She quietly told herself. She thought, she should have just turned off her phone instead since she’s already focused on the book she’s reading. She really didn’t want to press the e-mail to see the message. Her nervousness was comparable to a student’s feeling of not wanting to see his or her grades online since the student knew he or she did not do well in that subject. This time, she did not want to open the e-mail since she became rude to the sender hours ago. However, she knew she had to face the reality—open the message and respond. Well, if she ignored this opportunity once again, how would she know what the guy wanted to tell her? Abiah really wanted to solve the conflict already and make things okay. She was thinking maybe it was really just an honest mistake by Mr. Navarro Tecson.

She took a deep breath, placed her thumb on top of the message, and closed her eyes, slowly putting down her thumb against the screen. When her thumb felt the surface of the screen she slowly opened her right eye followed by the left one. She suddenly laughed at herself, “What are you doing Abiah?” she chuckled.

She bravely looked at the screen and started reading what Navarro sent.

From: Navarro Tecson

Re: Read Me! I am important

Hi Miss Abiah!

Well, it is me again, your favorite customer, Navarro.

This is not a very formal letter but as the subject says, this is important, for me, I hope it is important for you too. :)

Don’t wonder where I got your e-mail address, I asked a business card from your assistant when we had my sister’s shoot. I don’t know if this e-mail will ruin your day since it’s very obvious that it is a no-no for you to talk to me. Sigh. I hope you reached this part. Okay, so here it goes. I just want to apologize for what I did... you know when... you know what I did, you know what I said. This morning I just wanted to personally tell you that I did not mean everything I said. Actually, you were really great! I know you won’t believe me but you were. During my sister’s pre-nuptial shoot, the company shoot, you exceeded the expectations, right now you are doing great and I know even in the future you will be the best. I just really want to talk to you in person and apologize and even explain my side if you want to. Please?

You can send me a message through my personal number that I will attach below. You can also call my office landline if you prefer to.

So yah, I am really sorry. I apologize for that kind of behavior.

Did you reach this part? Wow I am happy you did. Thank you so much.

See you soon,

Navarro

Abiah did not know how to react after reading the message. Was the message serious? Did he send it wholeheartedly? Well maybe? She thought, who would exert an effort sending a message if the person is not serious?

A part of her really wanted to respond immediately and discuss about the schedule of their meeting. She just really wanted to fix things with Navarro and tell him

that she already forgave him. However there was a part of her that said do not reply, ignore, delete the message, and leave him alone. She knew it was her pride wanting her not to lose the battle but her heart whispered ‘you will never win by being impolite, you will surely win through forgiveness.’

She immediately pressed reply and typed a message to the person she knew she will be friends with.

To: Navarro Tecson

Re: Read Me! I am important

Hello Navarro!

Sure, I will be available on the afternoons of Tuesday and Wednesday next week. Let me know when you are free.

Thank you,

Abiah

After pressing the send button, Abiah felt better. She became unbothered because she knew that it would be solved. She knew that she would earn a friend by being humble and putting down her pride. At least, after talking to him personally, she would have better days knowing that she forgave him.

Chapter Seven

Just as Abiah clicked the send button in the e-mail she was composing, her office clock made a short soft bell sound notifying her that it was already five o’clock in the afternoon. She sighed deeply while her eyes were on the white wall clock in front of her. She sighed once more before standing up and started to fix her things. She quietly took her jacket, put it on, and left the office. If she were to be observed, she acted so odd today. Every time she bumped into someone, they asked her how she was because of her gloomy aura. Just like when her assistant handed her a cup of coffee. Lyn was worried because Abiah was different. She replied, “I am fine” to everyone who asked her, but the truth was, something was bothering her.

She and Navarro made a mutual decision to meet that day, after office hours. She seemed silent and not okay because she was thinking of the meeting. As she walked towards the coffee shop near their office, she felt very nervous. The tips of her fingers started to feel cold and uncomfortable. Abiah herself did not know why she felt that way. Maybe it was because of the way she treated the guy the last time they saw each other. She really did not want to be rude or impolite that was why she was feeling guilty and uncomfortable. Actually, Navarro wanted to talk about the matter over a dinner but Abiah did not want to. Yes, she wanted to make things clear with the guy but she did not want to do it in a very uncomfortable way. She felt that having a dinner with Navarro would make her worried with what she had to say since they would be spending too much time in that case. So she made herself clear with him that she just had time to talk about the matter over a cup of coffee in which he agreed to.

She was still really anxious as she made her way to the meeting place. To put herself at ease, she kept on telling herself over and over again that she had to do this to resolve the issue between the two of them. Doing so would definitely help both parties

remove the uneasiness they felt toward each other. She really just wanted the problem to be solved.

As she reached the coffee shop, she stopped in front of the entrance and checked the time; it was five twenty-three. She was seven minutes early. She felt okay with that because she would have more time to prepare while waiting for Navarro. She tucked her hair behind her ear, fixed the way she wore her jacket, and shrugged her shoulders before entering the coffee shop.

However, contrary with what she thought, as soon as the door behind her closed, she saw a hand waving at her, it was Mr. Navarro Tecson. When he knew that Abiah already saw him, he stood up and waited for Abiah to come close. He was wearing a red striped with white polo shirt and had his jacket hung on the backrest of the chair.

Abiah simply smiled at him and walked his direction. When she reached the table for two, Navarro assisted her as she sat down.

“Thank you,” she uttered.

When Navarro thought that she was already comfortable sitting down, he also took his seat and faced the lady he really wanted to talk to. “Hi Abiah,” Navarro gently said.

Abiah beamed at him before replying, “Hello Navarro.”

And then... silence.

Navarro didn't know what to do so he awkwardly offered his hand to Abiah for a handshake. That gesture made the two of them suddenly simultaneously laughed, Abiah accepted his hand while laughing.

“Shall we order first?” Navarro asked her.

“Sure,” she answered shortly.

“What drink do you wish to order?” Navarro was trying to be light and friendly with her which Abiah preferred because their environment started to be chill and pleasant.

“I am having sugar-free vanilla latte with soy milk.” Abiah did not even bother to take a look at the menu that Navarro was handing to her so he was shocked.

“Ohhh,” he smirked a little while taking back the menu and going through the drinks. “You know what you want huh?” he said while still having that small smile on his lips.

Abiah gave him a soft chuckle, “Yeap. My best friend and I usually go to this coffee shop to unwind.”

“I see.” Navarro responded while nodding his head.

After they made their orders, another awkward silence came. Abiah was avoiding eye contact with Navarro while he was literally staring at her. Navarro smiled as it was obvious that Abiah was doing her best to avoid eye contact with Navarro.

“Hey,” Navarro uttered to get the attention of Abiah.

Abiah awkwardly looked at Navarro, “Yes?”

“I am so sorry,” he simply stated while looking at her. He was trying his best to show Abiah that he was really genuine and everything he would say at that moment was from his heart. “I really did not mean any of what I said during that shoot,” he added.

Abiah gave her full attention to the guy in front of her explaining.

“I really regret telling you everything I said. Well, in fact, those were opposite of

what I saw.” He shook his head while looking down at his knitted fingers. “I was... I was so tired from work. Yes. It is a veeery lame excuse. I know, I know.” It was very evident from Navarro’s tone of voice and actions that he was really regretful and was very sorry for his actions.

“Shh. It’s okay. I mean yes, it was not okay before but it’s all fine now.” Abiah assured him. “I was kind of dismayed but I knew it is part of the industry I am in. So yah.”

Navarro felt ashamed of himself especially that Abiah forgave him that fast. He was expecting Abiah to get mad and tell him all the mistakes he did. He was thinking out loud as he said, “Amazing.”

“I’m sorry?” she asked.

“I mean, you are amazing. How could you forgive me that fast? I know I was so harsh at that time. Truth to be told, I was thinking of that incident over and over again after that day but you, you can say ‘it’s okay’ that quick.”

“You know Navarro, I don’t have the right to punish you through not forgiving you. I myself am forgiven as well.” Abiah was smiling at him the whole time while Navarro was a bit confused of what she said but he nodded. “We are human beings we make mistakes. What’s important is to learn from it and never do it again. So in time, we will avoid doing errors already. Right?”

“But it’s inevitable Abiah, we will always make mistakes. I think nobody’s perfect.”

“I think we can if we choose to make good decisions Navarro.” Unknowingly, Abiah was able to grab Navarro’s interest.

“Well I am really sorry Abiah.”

“It’s okay Navarro. I forgive you. Hmm. I would also want to ask forgiveness from you.” Abiah humbly said.

“What do you mean?” Navarro was completely shocked with her statement.

“The last time we met? Remember?” She asked him.

“Uhum... during the company shoot?” he clarified.

“Yep. I am sorry for being so impolite. That was rude. I feel guilty because it was the first time I did that to a client,” Abiah explained.

“Nah. That’s nothing. Well, I deserve that right?” Navarro giggled.

“No Navarro, you don’t. I just really did not know what to do. I was not ready to talk to you. I’m sorry that was rude,” Abiah apologetically looked at Navarro.

“Well, I also forgive you.” Navarro chuckled. “I didn’t know you did me wrong huh?”

Abiah released a soft laugh, “It happens.”

They started drinking their coffees while sharing stories as soon as their orders came. Abiah never thought that she would feel comfortable around this guy. She was very conscious with the time at first but she suddenly forgot about it.

“Anyway, you are really a great photographer Abiah. I’m glad you did the prenuptial shoot for my sister despite my attitude that time.”

“Well one of the mottos of Soulful Snaps is to finish what we started unless the client says so. You were really a huge problem that time,” Abiah jokingly said. “The positive thing is that, the incident tested the patience and work ethics of the team and gladly, we responded positively to the incident,” she proudly claimed.

Navarro smiled and found what Abiah said very positive, “You are a very positive person. I will not wonder why everyone in the team acts the way you do.”

“I have to. I am the leader of this team. I will keep on pushing them up and making them understand that it is not easy, but everything happens for a reason. Just look at the bright side and you will be positive.”

Navarro kept nodding his head before drinking.

“So...” Abiah started. “You can hire Soulful Snaps on your future events,” she giggled.

“Promoting?” Navarro teased her. “Well you know you don’t have to promote. Soulful Snaps is known in town,” he raised his brows up and down.

“I am just reminding you just in case you forgot,” Abiah teasingly said.

“I even think that you got the heart of my dad’s company. Your team will surely be present in all the company’s events.”

“I hope so.”

“Well, if ever I have personal events that need to be photographed, I will surely communicate with you,” he assured her.

“If you will propose to your girlfriend, the team can document for you,” she said unconsciously before letting out a laugh and added, “Other photographers of Soulful Snaps are competitive as well.”

Navarro shook his head while chuckling too. “That, I have to figure out since I don’t have someone to propose to yet.”

“Oh, I am sorry. It’s... It’s what we do so I thought of that.”

“Don’t be sorry it is okay. I just want to clarify.”

“Yah it is okay. You will meet that person along the way. No need to rush.”

“The good news is I am not rushing.” Navarro gave her a smile.

They continued sharing stories to each other until Abiah realized it was already almost eight in the evening.

“I am sorry but I have to go now.”

“Oh sure. Do you have... you know, a car? How are you going home by this time?” Navarro worriedly asked.

“Don’t worry about me I will be fine.”

“You sure?”

“I am sure,” she assured him.

“Thank you for this time Abiah, I appreciate it.”

“Thank you too. I appreciate you making an effort to solve things. From now on I will feel good that we are both okay and we both forgave each other already.”

“So, can we be friends? From now on?” Navarro hopefully asked her.

Abiah smiled and slowly nodded her head.

Abiah really felt good that finally, the case was closed and that she gained a new friend. She would be able to sleep knowing that everything was settled. She already tucked herself into bed when her phone beeped; it was a notification from an e-mail. For the last time she thought, she would read it and reply tomorrow.

She was shocked when she saw that the message was from Navarro.

From: Navarro Tecson

Re: Hi

Hey Abiah! I hope you are still awake. I just want to thank you again, for the last time for giving me the opportunity to say sorry and settle things with you. I hope you feel the same way too. Uhm, I just want to ask if there's a way I can communicate you not through e-mail? This looks too formal with the messages I am sending.

Anyway, if you are already asleep, have a restful night Abiah!

Abiah smiled before sending,

To: Navarro Tecson

Re: Hi

Well you can reach me through this number. Thank you Navarro. Good night!

Chapter Eight

9:00 in the morning.
Soulful Snap's office.

Everyone inside the Soulful Snaps' office were totally surprised as a guy wearing a fit black denim pants, white v-neck shirt topped with a casual beige coat, and a comfortable looking loafers, went inside the office. The staff did not want to make any noise at all. No one wanted to look at him in the eyes so they acted busy while others who came across him bowed their heads to avoid eye contact with the man.

Jean heard the murmurs outside so she was curious. She wanted to find out what was happening. However, even before she left the room where she was, Lyn already entered. She looked worried and very nervous as she approached Jean.

"Jean!" Lyn quietly but seriously and worriedly called her.

"Oh? Wait. What's happening?" Jean took a step back and looked at Lyn. "What's the matter? I hear murmurs outside. Everyone out there was just laughing a while back then it suddenly stopped." Jean flashed a very curious face.

"The guy!" She shouted, still quietly and breathy. "Th-the guy. Do you remember?" She was obviously panicking while talking to Jean.

"What guy? Who's that guy?" Jean questioningly responded. She did not bother waiting for Lyn's response when she thought of something ridiculous. "A thief?! Call the police!" Jean started to panic as well.

"No! Hey no no no!" Lyn held Jean's wrists. She faced Jean and made serious eye contact with her. "Do you remember the guy from the shoot? The same guy who was in the company shoot of TCOM?" She tried her very best to calm down to be able to explain things to the person in front of her.

"Yah? What about him?" Jean started getting confused. She thought there was a thief then suddenly that Navarro was already mentioned.

"He's here." Lyn softly said while peeking outside the door.

Jean needed few seconds to absorb what she just heard and when she finally got it, she started smiling. She grabbed Lyn's arm before asking, "Hey Lyn, do you know what is he here for?" She quietly asked the still nervous Lyn.

Lyn, who was still acting nervous, wondered why Jean was all smiles but she still answered the other's question. "I am not sure. No one dared to talk to him yet."

"What?" Jean shockingly responded. "Someone should entertain him. Whatever happened, he is still a customer, right?"

Lyn did not want to talk to Navarro. "Maybe you can talk to him then," she wittingly suggested.

"Okay. I will, it's not a problem at all."

Jean confidently walked out of the room. She found the guy, Mr. Navarro Tecson, in the receiving area, sitting while waiting to be entertained. As soon as Navarro saw Jean approaching, he stood up.

"Good morning sir. Welcome to Soulful Snaps." Jean cheerfully greeted the customer.

"Good morning." Navarro smiled for few seconds after he responded.

"How may we help you sir?"

"Yah. I am here as a representative of TCOM," he started. "I am here, personally, to invite the owner of this photo studio to our company anniversary."

"Ohhh." Jean nodded with a smile.

"So is there any way I can talk to Ms. Abiah Fontinilla?" He stopped for a while but realized it was too direct so he continued, "I mean, is she here? Or..."

Jean who really knew the guy was up to something else grinned and said, "You may take a seat for a while sir, I will talk to Abiah's assistant so she could check if Abiah is not busy."

"Yah, tell her... uhm, it's going to be very quick. I just have to—you know invite." He was trying to convince Jean so he could really have the time to talk to Abiah personally.

"Yes sir, we'll see. Excuse me." Jean was already smirking as soon as she turned her back. She really thought Navarro's intention was not just all about the anniversary.

Jean went back to where Lyn was and asked her to check on Abiah and tell her that someone wanted to talk to her. Lyn immediately did her job.

Meanwhile, Abiah was busy with the final checking of the outputs that would be released on that day to a customer when Lyn knocked on her door.

"Come in," she said while her eyes were still on her computer monitor. Her office door opened and showed her assistant. "Yes, Lyn?" She asked.

"Uhm, Abiah?"

"Yes, Lyn?" Abiah repeated.

"A customer wants to talk to you. It is an invitation for their anniversary," Lyn expressed.

"Hmm." Abiah looked up to her assistant. "Can you just talk to the client instead and relay the message to me? I am so sorry. I have to review a lot of pictures that need to be given out today. And his afternoon, as you said, I have a scheduled Skype meeting with another client, right?"

“But Abiah,” Lyn didn’t know how to explain things to her boss.

“Yes? Or just ask them to send an e-mail. Assure them that we will respond to that. You go through all e-mails right?” She continued scrolling through the pictures.

“Abiah, it’s the guy who was here for a studio shoot before.” Lyn started to get nervous as she did not know how she could explain things to the client.

Abiah nodded before saying, “Or maybe ask that guy to schedule an appointment. I’m sorry. You know I really entertain customers when I have the time to do so.”

“Okay.” Lyn scratched her forehead before turning her back to Abiah.

“Oh wait, can you bring me the usual coffee? Please?”

“Sure.”

“Thank you, Lyn.”

Lyn was practicing all the words that would come out from her mouth before facing Navarro. She was nervous and scared at the same time, but she had to do her work. Navarro was busy on his phone when Lyn took his attention.

“Sir.”

“Yes? Can I talk to Ms. Abiah now?” he happily asked.

“I’m so sorry, sir. I talked to her and asked if she could entertain you, but she’s busy reviewing outputs to be released this afternoon,” Lyn worriedly and sadly said.

“Really?” Navarro did not expect that he would not be able to talk to Abiah so he tried to convince Lyn to persuade her boss. “Uhm. Miss? Can you tell her I will talk to her for just ten minutes. Or five. Yes. Five minutes will do. I really have to talk to her please?”

Lyn did not expect that Navarro would respond in that way. She really thought she would be scolded or that he would make a scene that would worsen things. However, she was still torn. She knew that if she would go back to Abiah and tell her that the client really wanted to talk to her, Abiah might be annoyed since she was really busy. But, she did not also want to disappoint the client. She thought, she’d explain the situation once more to the client while he was in his ‘chill mode’.

“I am so sorry sir. But right now is not the perfect time to talk to Abiah. She’s really busy with the outputs and she also has a scheduled online meeting this afternoon.” She took a deep breath before continuing, “You can schedule a meeting some other time. I can tell you her vacant hours this week so you can talk to her as soon as she is available.”

It was evident in Navarro’s face that he was sad about the matter but he was persistent. “What if I’ll just go straight to her office? Is that allowed?”

“Oh no no no sir. I’m sorry.” Lyn replied.

“Miss, please? Can you tell her once more? If she says no again, I will leave.” Navarro pleaded.

Lyn took his words, so she went back to Abiah’s office and told her that the guy really wanted to talk to her. “Abiah? He’s asking if you can give him five minutes. He said that would be enough.”

Abiah felt that the guy really wanted to talk to her so she looked at her assistant before answering her, “Okay bring him here and please, my coffee. Thank you.”

“Okay I will.” Lyn felt relieved.

Navarro was already standing even before Lyn arrived. He was so excited to know if he could talk to Abiah.

Lyn gave him a smile, “Five minutes sir.”

Navarro smiled widely before responding, “Yes! Five minutes.”

“May I bring you to Abiah’s office?”

“Sure thank you.”

Abiah pressed the sleep option on her computer when she heard the knock on the door. She stood up and was about to go to the receiving area of her office when Lyn and Navarro entered the room. She was totally shocked, so she stopped walking. Before she could ever say a word to Navarro, she asked her assistant for the coffee once more.

“Lyn, the coffee after five minutes please?” she sweetly requested.

“Okay Abiah, after five minutes.” Lyn pulled the door gently until it was closed.

“Well, hi, take a seat Mr. Navarro Tecson. What brought you here?” Abiah welcomed her unexpected visitor.

“Hello Abiah, good morning.” He gave her a big smile, a smile of success.

“Good morning,” she responded.

“Well I am here because my father sent me here,” he expressed.

“Oh. Really? What is it about?” Abiah curiously asked.

“On behalf of TCOM, I am here to personally invite you as an official photographer to the company’s anniversary celebration.” He handed the invitation card to Abiah which she gladly accepted.

“Thank you. I told Mr. Tecson...” Abiah stopped when she realized that the one in front of her was also Mr. Tecson. “I mean your father, the other Tecson, that he can simply send an e-invitation to Soulful Snaps.”

“Yah, he mentioned that during the meeting for the anniversary but the whole team decided to send someone to personally invite you for that very special day. So I am here.” He looked at Abiah and smiled.

Abiah let out a small laugh before answering, “Well, let me check with my assistant if I am free on this special day for your company. If I am, I will surely be there. It’s my pleasure to make memories on TCOM’s anniversary.”

“I hope you can come and join us,” Navarro optimistically stated.

“Is that all you came for?” Abiah asked before she realized it sounded wrong.

“No. I mean, is that all? ‘Cause you know, the office is kind of busy at the moment, I personally am.” She took back what she said earlier.

“Uhm... Yah, that’s basically all.” Navarro sounded uncertain if that’s really all he came for. “I am sorry I was really persistent to hand the invitation to you personally that your assistant needed talk to you several times.”

“It’s okay, it happens. Sometimes I really can’t grant the clients’ request to talk to me when they walk in but this time, five minutes is not a lot of time.” Abiah gave him a little smile.

“Well it was supposed to be ten minutes, but I see that you really can’t give that much time so I said five minutes will do since I really wanted to talk to you. I mean, for the company.”

While they were talking, Lyn knocked on the door and entered with Abiah’s

coffee which she placed on the coffee saucer on Abiah's table.

"Lyn, can you check my schedule on this day." Abiah gave the invitation to Lyn for her to check the details.

Lyn went out of the room for a while and went back with the clipboard of Abiah's schedules. "You don't have any schedule on that day as of this moment Abiah."

Navarro smiled widely hearing that Abiah was work-free that day meaning she will positively attend the company's anniversary celebration.

"Okay thank you." Lyn went out of the room as soon as Abiah thanked her. "You heard it, I can make it to your company's event." Abiah approved the invitation.

"Wow that's great news! Thank you." Navarro excitedly exclaimed.

"You're welcome. So, if that's everything..." Abiah stood up while tucking her hands in the pockets of her pants.

Navarro took seconds to respond, "Uhm yes... no."

Abiah looked at him in the eyes, "Is there more?"

"Shoot." Navarro was left with no choice. "Can we hang out?"

Abiah let out a laugh before going back to her desk.

"I mean let's get to know each other. What do you think about it?" Navarro added.

"Well sure why not, I'll check my schedule," Abiah giggled. "Goodbye Mr. Navarro I need to work," she teasingly said.

Navarro was shocked. He stood up, bid goodbye to Abiah and walked out of the room happily.

Chapter Nine

Abiah was already on her way to the office when she was thinking of her actions lately. She thought something was really wrong with her. She of course told her beloved best friend about Navarro wanting to get to know her and her responding yes to that invitation. Jean was very happy for the decision Abiah made. Jean was telling her that finally she was open to entertaining someone. She was happy about the idea as well. She even thought that maybe Navarro would finally be the guy for her because of certain reasons. First of all, yes, when they initially met she really thought that there was not a chance of liking him, but Navarro, admitting his mistakes changed her perception of him. She wanted to give him a chance since then. Another was that aside from the fact that Navarro was a good-looking guy, Abiah found him interesting the first time they sat down and talked in a coffee shop. Again, she never imagined that things would be that light and comfortable with him. His aura appeared to be like a long-time friend to Abiah.

Although there were many things to consider, Abiah was still thinking, "Is it right?" Did she give in too easily or are people right—that she's too strict, closed, and choosy when it comes to entertaining guys? It bothered her that maybe she was being caught off guard and being too emotional that she was already controlled by her heart.

She sighed while looking outside the window of the car she was in. Things were going quickly she thought. But then she was also thinking, it was not like Navarro was already her boyfriend. Maybe she was just overthinking. Thoughts were arguing against each other inside her head until she came to the conclusion that there was nothing wrong

with what was happening. She was just trying to get to know someone who she thought was a good person. Well in fact, it was just in the beginning of the journey, not like they were already getting married. She was laughing at herself for being too paranoid of the things that were happening.

Days passed when Navarro and Abiah started communicating with each other. Navarro expressed how he was interested with Abiah and that he really wanted to get to know her more, personally. He always asked permission if he could pay her a visit but Abiah was really very busy. Her calendar was fully-booked from different kinds of shoots to personal and online meetings. Since they were both busy they were expecting to see each other on TCOM's anniversary. Navarro thought he could ask her personally at that time for permission to bring her out on a date.

Despite the fact that Navarro was already present in Abiah's life, she still did not want him to be the cause of all the things that she was already doing before, she thought, that if he was really into her, he would not be the cause of distraction, instead, he would be with her along on the journey of growing. And as far as Navarro was concerned, everything was falling in the right place.

Abiah was busy composing her last e-mail for the day when she heard a knock on the door. She continued focusing on composing the message when she realized that Lyn did not enter the room. She looked at the direction of the door for a while and waited for another knock but she heard none. Disregarding what just happened, she continued typing. When she was already at the last sentence of her response, she heard another knock. That time she looked at the door while waiting for it to open but again, it did not open. She removed her fingers from the keyboard, placed her left elbow on the table and leaned her jaw on her fist while staring at the door. She was waiting until someone knocked again.

"Lyn?" She asked but no one entered.

It was very odd because usually, Lyn entered the room right after she knocked, she did not wait for Abiah to respond which was not an issue for Abiah.

So when there was another knock, Abiah commanded, "Come in."

The door then opened slowly. Abiah was shocked when the door exposed a man holding a bouquet of pink carnation flowers.

"Navarro?!" she confusingly asked.

"Hello. Good afternoon, Ms. Abiah," he greeted her.

Abiah stood up, opened her eyes very wide then slightly covered her mouth with her hand, and asked, "What are you doing here Navarro Tecson?!"

"Don't I receive a 'good afternoon' too?" Navarro asked her while grinning.

Abiah blinked thrice and looked at the direction of Navarro once more. "You are here," she claimed.

"Yes I am here. Why do you look surprised?" Navarro started walking towards her and handed her the bouquet in his hands.

"Why are you here Navarro? What brought you here?" She asked him while receiving the bouquet of beautiful flowers. "Thank you," she placed the flowers on her desk.

"You," Navarro gave her a big smile.

“What do you mean me?” Abiah asked before sitting down on her swivel chair. “Take a seat,” she added.

“You brought me here,” he sweetly said.

“Oh come on Navarro!” Abiah jokingly rolled her eyes which made Navarro laugh.

“Am I disturbing you?” he asked as he saw that she had her eyes locked on the computer monitor.

“Give me five minutes. Make yourself comfortable.”

Abiah finished the e-mail she was composing and sent it to the recipient before turning her chair towards the direction of Navarro.

“Why are you here?” she asked him once more.

“Well I had some errands to do nearby so I thought why not pass by your office and surprise you with a bouquet. Do you like the flowers?”

“They’re so pretty thank you so much but you know I’m fine without these,” she grabbed the flowers and smelled them. “So are you done with the errands you’re supposed to do?” She asked him while looking at the flowers.

“Of course I had them done and realized I have extra time so I’m using it to be here.”

Abiah tried her best not to make it obvious that she found what he did sweet. She was avoiding eye contact with him and was just giving him small smiles whenever he captured her eyes.

“Do you want anything? Coffee, juice, water, or tea? I can ask Lyn to prepare one for you,” she offered him since it looked like he had no plans of leaving yet.

“No, thank you. I am fine,” he told her while staring at her.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes I am sure Abiah.”

“Okay then.” Abiah looked at the screen of her monitor pretending that she was reading something.

“Uhm may I ask a question?” Navarro nervously asked.

“Hmm?” Abiah looked at him then smiled.

“What are you up to after work?” It was evident that Navarro felt ashamed asking the question but he really had to he thought.

“I have to go home and prepare to meet the group I gather with every Thursday evening,” she explained.

“Oh I see,” he looked down at his fingers which were intertwined with each other.

“Why?” Abiah felt that he wanted to say something.

“Nah. I just thought you are free tonight.” Disappointment was very evident in his voice.

“Well what if I was free?” Abiah curiously asked.

“If you were free, I would...” He looked at her in the eyes while she was also looking in his eyes wondering what will come out from his mouth.

“You would?” Abiah emphasized each word, really eager to know what was his plan.

“I would ask you out? Maybe a dinner? Or if you can’t maybe a cup of coffee in your favorite coffee shop?” he hopefully explained.

“I’m so sorry Navarro, I really can’t,” she apologetically said.

“It’s okay.” Although he gave out a forced small smile, it was very evident that he felt sad for failing to invite her to dinner.

Navarro remained silent after that, which made Abiah feel guilty for not being able to accept his invitation. However, she knew she could not also ditch the people she would be meeting. They were very important people in her life and that was the only time she de-stresses through hanging out and sharing stories with them. She could not do anything but feel sorry for the guy in front of her.

“So... aren’t you going back to TCOM?” She tried to break the deafening silence inside her office.

“Earlier, I wasn’t supposed to go back there. But now...” he awkwardly giggled. “I will drive back to the office and read a few e-mails.”

“I am really sorry Navarro. I truly have schedules every Thursday evening. You know, I am even strict with accepting work on this day. Lyn knows the drill, she declines all invitations every Thursday after four o’clock in the afternoon.”

“I understand Abiah. Don’t feel sad about this,” he was really trying his best to give her an assuring smile that everything was fine. “Hmm...”

Abiah was waiting for the next thing he was about to say so she repeated after him, “Hmm?”

“I was thinking what if...” Navarro started.

Abiah scratched her forehead because Navarro kept on cutting what he wanted to say. She giggled before saying, “Can you tell me directly what you want to say?”

“I’m sorry,” he started giggling too. “I am just trying to compose the words in my head.”

“Okay I’ll give you five minutes to compose your statement,” she jokingly said.

Navarro laughed before telling her, “What if we go out some other time?” Abiah stared at him not saying anything so Navarro explained further. “I mean, it doesn’t have to be a dinner. Lunch or breakfast will do. Or if you still don’t have time... During your break time? Coffee? Is that fine? Whatever is convenient for you Abiah,” he explained straightforwardly.

Abiah laughed because of Navarro’s facial expressions. It was very obvious that he wanted to go out with her.

“Did you just laugh?” Navarro asked her. “What does it mean Abiah? Is it a no?” His questions made her laugh even more.

“Why do you look too nervous?” she asked while giggling.

“Well I am. Since I don’t know what you are going to say. Especially I did not expect you to just laugh at me,” he scratched his head while explaining.

Abiah gave him a smile before being serious, “Why are you asking me to eat out with you?”

“Abiah, I already told you. I want to get to know you. Yes we communicate but I want to talk to you in person. I want to get to know you personally. I want to see your mannerisms, your facial reactions, and I want to hear your voice when you speak,” he desperately explained.

“Navarro are you serious?” she calmly asked him.

“What? Abiah, I am serious,” he earnestly replied.

“What does this mean Navarro?” she asked him once more.

“You really want everything sure huh?” he smiled. “Abiah, I really find you

interesting. I'd like to date you if you allow me to. I want to court you whenever you are ready. Abiah, I want you to know that I am not making fun of you. I am dead serious. I know you might think that I am not because of the first encounter we had, but I am trying my best to change that perspective you had of me. Here, I am doing it now. I just really hope you give me a chance." He looked very serious and hopeful that Abiah will allow him to prove himself.

"I know Navarro. I know how you're trying to erase the first impression I had with you. Well let's give it a shot. Let's set it on the day we are both free."

Navarro was dumbfounded with Abiah's response while Abiah stood up and started fixing her things.

Chapter Ten

Six o'clock in the morning.
Saturday.

Abiah tapped her cheeks several times before sitting on her bed with her back against the headboard. She closed her eyes for a few seconds before preparing herself for her own quiet time. It was almost seven when she was staring blankly at the digital clock on her bedroom desk. She was feeling it again—the nervousness and those butterflies in her belly. Last night, she couldn't sleep knowing that something unusual would happen the next day. She even tried choosing the clothes to wear yet she woke up still not knowing what to wear on this day she considered special. Yup, she thought allowing someone—a person of the opposite sex in specific—to bring her out on a date, just the two of them, was something different and rare to the one and only Abiah Fontinilla.

As expected, she already told her best friend about it. Aside from teasing Abiah that she saw a very bright future for Abiah and Navarro, Jean also expressed that she was really happy because of the improvement she saw on her best friend through being open to others and that made Abiah at ease.

When she realized that she still has to search for what to wear, she stood up and prepared for their ten o'clock meeting time. She had her breakfast—French toast grilled cheese and coffee with creamer—as fast as she could to be able to go back to her room quickly to get ready. After taking a bath, the real battle started, looking for what to wear. Abiah began inspecting all her clothes, from her pants to the different kinds of dresses inside her closet.

"Should I wear a dress?" She asked herself, bothered that she will look overdressed. "Well, I think not," she sighed deeply. She went past the dresses and saw her rompers. Once again, she stopped and thought if it was proper to wear those kinds of clothes on a date, a first date to be specific. She took one playsuit that she had never worn and fitted it then looked at herself in front of the mirror. She shook her head and uttered, "No no no." She removed what she wore and threw it on her bed before looking for another one while checking the clock from time to time. The cycle repeated again and again until she became upset.

"Abiaaaaah! Make up your mind girl. Come on!" Her room became a mess with all the clothes scattered on her bed and some on the floor. She walked away from her closet and sat on the small couch beside her bed. She breathed deeply before grabbing the

glass of water on her side table and drank half of it.

She sighed once more, “Okay. So Abiah, you should decide now or else, you will really be late,” still talking to herself while putting back the glass of water. She spent a few seconds to think about it until she found herself searching ‘what to wear on first date’ on her phone. Confidence and comfort—the two words that were repeated as she searched several times. “Correct. I am not impressing Navarro right?” she asked herself. “I will wear something I am comfortable and confident with.” She went back to her closet and to where all her clothes were scattered to take another look of all the garments she had. At first she was still clueless and undecided until she finally found what she thought was the best thing to wear for that day.

Abiah slowly stood in front of her full length mirror to look at herself. She held the ends of her canary yellow short sleeves knee low chic midi dress before turning around slowly, eyes till on the mirror. She smiled and affirmed herself, “This is what I want. I love this!” She grabbed her phone and went back in front of the mirror to take a picture of herself and sent it to Jean.

To: Jean

What do you think Jean?

She tapped send without a doubt or even thinking that Jean will tease her again. Her ever supportive best friend replied immediately.

From: Jean

You go girl! Have fun today!

Abiah wore the dress with an olive beige flat sandals and a black classic sling bag. She combed her hair once more and decided not to tie it anymore. It was past nine thirty when she knew she was ready although still nervous. Her phone beeped and when she checked, it was a message from Navarro.

From: Navarro

Good morning! Are you ready? I’m coming in a few. See you, Ms. Abiah!

And her heart started beating fast...

Everything happened quickly. She was just walking out of her room and then she found herself already sitting on the passenger’s seat of Navarro’s car. She was aware that Navarro greeted her and opened the door for her but she still felt that she was out of herself. Not knowing whether she was just anxious of what was going to happen or she drank too much coffee that made her too nervous. The car was filled with awkward silence so Navarro decided to break the ice.

“You look wonderful Abiah,” he told her while his eyes were still on the road.

Abiah slowly panned her head towards Navarro and looked back at the road quickly. She smiled shyly and thought, ‘Okay so what do I say? Thank you? So are you? Happy New Year? Hey look at that and point to the road?’ She really felt uncomfortable

every time someone appreciated how she looked. She had no choice but quietly say, “Thank you.”

Navarro noticed that she felt uncomfortable with what he said so he tried to get away with that topic. “So, what are you looking forward to today?” he randomly asked.

“Hmm.. Where are we going?” She was still clueless of where they were heading to for the rest of the day since they decided that Navarro would be in charge of everything for their first date.

“Do you want to make a guess?” Navarro gave her a grin.

Abiah observed the surroundings and the direction of where they were going and she noticed that it was the same direction to where Navarro was working. She started giggling, “Stop making me guess Navarro. I know where we are heading.”

“Really? So where are we going then?” Navarro was hoping that she was guessing wrong.

“You don’t have to ask me.” Abiah was still giggling when she said, “We are going to TCOM right?”

Navarro felt relieved when Abiah made a wrong guess. He giggled before telling her, “Well, let’s see!”

“Hey that’s unfair. You should tell me if I am right or wrong.” Abiah pouted at him.

“Chill. You will know when we arrive. This will be quite a long ride.”

Abiah sighed and jokingly rolled her eyes. She knew she was right but Navarro didn’t want to spoil the place so she patiently sat there and waited. While waiting, they were talking of random things and at moments of silence she was still thinking of what was going to happen. She really hoped it would be a memorable day.

“Are you okay?” Navarro asked her.

“Uhum. Are we there yet?” She wondered since the car stopped.

“Yup. Your long wait is over,” he said while parking the car.

Abiah wondered where they were when she saw the familiar building. Her eyes grew big and she had her mouth open in shock. “WHAT?!”

Navarro got out of the car and opened the door for the still surprised Abiah. “We’re here Abiah. Do you mind going out?” He let out a soft laugh.

“Am I dreaming?” Abiah uttered as she stepped out of the car.

Navarro brought her to a very famous photo museum that she really wanted to visit when she was in college. It was a well-known museum that even people from out of town visited even if the entrance fee is a little bit expensive. He never knew about Abiah’s desire to visit that museum. He just thought that she would enjoy it since she’s into photography. Well as for him, if he were to be asked, he doesn’t really enjoy museums but seeing Abiah’s reaction gave him the excitement to be inside that building.

“Navarro.” Abiah was staring at the building while her hands were intertwined below her chin. “Wow,” she was obviously left speechless.

“Shall we?” Navarro smiled at her.

As they entered the museum, Abiah roamed her eyes around the room with a very excited expression painted on her face. They approached one masterpiece of a very well-known photographer. It was a black and white picture of a bus with people inside it. Navarro found it very adorable that Abiah was giving attention to even the very small

details of the picture. ‘Her heart is really into photography’ he thought.

“So, what’s in that picture?” he asked her.

“This photo is taken by Robert Frank. Do you know him?” She looked at him and waited for an answer.

“Well of course... of course I don’t know.” They both giggled to what Navarro said.

“He was a famous street photographer and this piece is part of his photographic book, *The Americans*. Well this was his most famous work if I remember it right. You know what’s interesting? Aside from street photography he also gave attention to photojournalism so his visuals had texts written straight on the negatives and prints,” Abiah explained.

“How about this picture?” Navarro pointed to a picture of elephants with a background of pink sky.

“Well this one is a shot of Frans Lanting he is Dutch and obviously a wildlife photographer. You know you might have seen this already since his works regularly appear in *National Geographic*.”

“Woah really? He’s a great one then.”

“Yah of course. I mean, they all are,” she claimed.

Because of Abiah’s explanations, Navarro became unconsciously interested in the different photos that were displayed in the wide room, while Abiah was also enjoying every piece that told different stories.

While they were in their own worlds, individually being fond of the pictures, Abiah saw Navarro staring at a photo of people of all ages crying. She approached him.

“Do you want to make a wild guess of what kind of photography is that?” Abiah smiled at him.

Navarro automatically flashed a smiling face upon seeing Abiah beside him. “Give me a minute to think about it,” he said.

“Okay Sure.” Abiah said almost giggling.

Navarro took a minute trying to think of the right answer. He thought if the first one was a street photography and the other was wildlife what could this crying people be? He started laughing at himself when he decided what to say. He had zero knowledge or even interest when it comes to photography so he knew he’ll make a very wrong guess because again, honestly, if it were not because of Abiah he would never be in this place.

“Why are you laughing?” Abiah wondered.

“I have an answer in mind but I find it amusing. Promise me you won’t laugh when you hear my answer. Okay?” he said still giggling.

“Uhum sure, I’ll try my best not to,” Abiah replied, eager to figure out what Navarro knew about photography.

“Is that a crying photography?” he said slowly. Abiah can’t help but let out a giggle. Navarro knew then that he was wrong and that made him laugh as well. “Hey you told me you’re not going to laugh,” he said pouting.

“I’m sorry.” Abiah tried her best to stop laughing and corrected him after. “Sure those people are crying but Navarro, that’s actually war photography.”

“Oh I was about to say that!” Navarro jokingly said. “I just thought it is crying photography since they’re crying.” He laughed once more. “So who took this photo?”

“It was taken by Donald McCullin.”

“So he does war photography?”

“Uhum he actually presented photographs that depict the unemployed, oppressed, and poor. Basically he documented poverty and war.”

“Hmm interesting.”

“I know right? These pictures are interesting.”

“No I mean you.”

Abiah looked at him wondering why he said that. “Me?”

He faced Abiah before telling her, “Yeah, how could you know all of these? I mean yes, you studied and you’re into photography but you really memorize everything?”

“Well yes, I know some since they were mentioned when I was studying but not all. The others are...” She walked away and pointed at somethings at the bottom part of the canvass, “Read this.” She started giggling as she walked away from him.

Navarro realized that he was not reading the captions of each picture so he started laughing as well.

They went around the museum. Abiah discussed few things with Navarro, like the different kinds of shots and shared some facts about photography. It was exactly twelve noon when they were looking at the last picture in the museum.

“Did you enjoy?” Navarro asked Abiah as they left the building.

“Of course. Thank you so much Navarro.”

“Nav,” he corrected her.

“Nav,” she said.

“I still think Navarro is too formal,” he smiled. “Anyway, do you want me to take a picture of you with the museum behind you? I will try my best to apply the things you mentioned earlier.”

Abiah laughed at him but she willingly handed him her phone for a picture. After taking pictures they drove off for lunch.

Chapter Eleven

“I’ve never been here,” Abiah said as she looked around the expensive-looking place where Navarro decided to bring her for lunch. The restaurant was twenty minutes away from the Museum, and she had never really visited the area nor known that a restaurant like that existed. Studying the place, she felt that she was in a different country. She started wondering, how could she not know the place? Aside from it being a perfect place to de-stress and reflect, it was a great place for shoots.

As they entered the restaurant they were welcomed by soft relaxing jazz music. The restaurant’s lighting was subtle which gave a very romantic mood. The special interior design, unique decoration, high-quality furniture, porcelain dinnerware, flatware, and linen tablecloths of the restaurant gave an exclusive vibe that screamed ‘they’re in a classic modern fine dining restaurant.’ Every tiny detail of the restaurant complemented each other.

Abiah noticed that there were very few people inside. Still in awe and mesmerized by the restaurant’s elegant ambiance, she whispered, “Very exclusive.”

While Abiah was still enjoying every part in the interior of the restaurant, a waiter

approached and greeted them, “Hola, buenas tardes Ma’am, Sir!”

“Hello, good afternoon. Reservation for Navarro Tecson please.” Navarro requested.

“Just a moment Sir.”

As the waiter checked where they were supposed to be seated, Navarro saw Abiah observing the place. “Are you okay?” He smiled.

Abiah nodded before saying, “This is a very elegant place.”

“Have you ever been in an elegant place?”

She looked at him and flashed a smile. “Yup. Work. You know, shoots and all.”

The waiter returned immediately and invited them, “Shall we Sir, Ma’am?”

They were escorted to the second floor. The place looked the same until they reached the door to the restaurant’s terrace. There were just a few tables on the balcony, but there were no customers aside from them. Abiah thought that what she saw inside was already a big thing, but the overlooking lake amazed her more. She could not help but whisper, “Wow.”

The waiter was about to pull the chair out for her, but Navarro signaled that he would do it instead. So the server took a step back and waited for them to be settled.

“Hola! Welcome to *La Comida Buena*. I am Ricky your server for today. Here are the menus Ma’am, Sir. I’ll be back to take your orders whenever you’re ready.”

“Thank you,” Abiah shyly smiled.

She was browsing the menu that obviously contains Spanish cuisines and realized that most of the dishes were alien to her.

“Do you have anything in mind that you want to order?” Navarro asked her.

She felt ashamed to tell Navarro that she was not familiar with the food but she wanted to be honest rather than pretend. “Uhm,” she looked at Navarro who was—always—already staring at her.

“So?” Navarro asked her one more time.

“Ah-I ah.. I actually prefer that you decide what to eat Nav.” She scratched her forehead before saying, “I am not that familiar with these dishes,” she chuckled.

Navarro found her honesty amusing yet unusual since the ladies whom he dated before had never been that transparent with him. He was grinning while looking down at the menu while Abiah was still giggling ashamed of what she just said.

The waiter came back when they already decided what to eat, “Are you ready to order?”

Navarro told the waiter what food and beverage to prepare for them.

“Would you like anything for dessert?” the waiter asked.

Abiah looked at Navarro and at the waiter then said, “I’d like to have churros please?”

“Yup what she said,” Navarro confirmed.

“Anything else Ma’am, Sir?” the server asked once more.

Navarro made sure Abiah was able to order whatever she wanted to eat before the waiter left.

After the waiter left, Abiah placed back her attention to the beautiful view in front of her. She took her phone and captured it. Navarro felt that she was enjoying the place.

“Do you have any schedule today?” he asked her while they’re waiting for the

food.

“Nah. I’m free today but I have to go home early.”

“Why is that so?”

“I go to church every Sunday, with my family. How about you?” she asked him curiously.

Navarro bowed his head, “I actually don’t—well, yes. Yes, sometimes, but not frequently.”

It was apparent that Abiah felt sad about that revelation, so before she could even ask another one, Navarro immediately threw out a question.

“So how many siblings do you have?”

“I am an only child so I’m really close to my parents.”

“Oh I see. What do your parents do for a living?”

“My mom has a flower shop and my dad worked in media. But my dad isn’t working anymore so they’re both focused on managing our small flower shop. Right now, I support them with what I earn from the photo studio and I’m glad I have the opportunity to do so.”

“Wow, so I guess you got the skills from your dad?”

“Well... I can say yes. He was a videographer back then. There were times that he brought me in the studio where they shoot. Slowly, every time I set foot in that studio, I felt that I’m in love with photography.”

“Wow good thing for you.”

“My dad had his own digital camera before and I remember borrowing it and taking random pictures. I heard them say I have an eye for photography but I didn’t know what it meant. It’s just like that until I aimed to have my own photo studio.”

“And now you own Soulful Snaps. That’s amazing.”

“Well, by God’s grace.”

Navarro nodded slowly before asking, “They supported you from the very start?”

“Hmm.. Of course, like other parents, they wanted me to earn big after I graduate. So they suggested medical courses and other high paying jobs. I didn’t want to make them feel bad, but I prayed about it and expressed myself to them. Before entering the university, I took the examination that calculated where I’m good at. Shockingly, the result was leading to arts and photography. My parents said they’ll support me all the way so I studied photography.”

“Perks of being an only child huh?”

“Hmm not really. I think it’s just that I really communicated with my parents and they understood me.”

“That’s very rare.”

“How about you?” Abiah asked him. “How many siblings do you have?”

“We are four children in the family. I am the second child. Two girls and two boys.”

Abiah nodded remembering the lady in Soulful Snaps. “I suppose the one who had her studio pre-nuptial shoot is your older sister?”

“A-ah nope. She’s my younger sister. She’s getting married with her long term boyfriend who happens to be an architect like her.”

“Oh!” Abiah found it amazing.

“Well, I also am an architect. That’s why I’m in my dad’s architectural firm. My

sister is also working there.”

“So... your younger brother is also working there?” she curiously asked.

Navarro giggled at her assumptions. “Well, no. Not yet. He’s still pursuing his bachelor degree and of course he’s taking architecture.”

“Wow! That’s cool!” Abiah was really surprised that they were actually a family of architects. “So how about your mom and your older sister?”

Navarro did not answer immediately. He felt his throat dry so he took the glass of water in front of him and drank a few sips. He looked at Abiah and gave her a small forced smile. “My mom stays at home and my sister...my sister... she’s a photographer.” Navarro gently uttered.

“Really?! So why didn’t she take the pictures for your other sister then?” She was so surprised by that revelation.

“Well... because, th-they... died in a car accident.” Words were choking him. He looked down for a minute before looking back at Abiah who was really astonished with the revelations.

“A-I’m sorry Nav. I’m really sorry,” she quietly and carefully said.

“It’s okay Abiah. You know what, you actually remind me of her. The first time I saw you it was like me seeing my sister back to life.”

Abiah left her mouth open in shock and couldn’t say anything. She thought maybe that was the reason why he acted rudely towards her during that shoot. She composed herself before asking him, “Is that the reason why?”

“Yes, I am sorry Abiah. Don’t think about it, it’s not your fault.” Navarro tried to assure her. “I always told myself my sister was the best photographer although my dad hated her for not studying architecture.”

Abiah was trying to process everything that came from Navarro’s mouth.

“That’s why I really didn’t want the idea that Ana, my younger sister, really loved your work. But then after the shoot, I realized that it shouldn’t be that way. Don’t get me wrong. I did not say that I’m into you because you remind me of my sister. I’m interested because of who you are.”

They were interrupted when the waiter arrived with their food. While they were eating, Navarro felt uncomfortable not knowing what Abiah’s reaction to that revelation was. So he bravely asked her, “Did you feel bad with everything that I said?”

Abiah gave him an eye contact, “Of course not. I was just so surprised about that story. Don’t worry I understand your sentiment.”

They enjoyed their lunch talking more about things in their personal lives.

Navarro revealed that they were all forced to take architecture, but his older sister insisted that she wanted to pursue photography. He also shared that his father was also preparing him to take his position in the near future. Since they were already talking about their likes and dislikes through text messages they went really deep with the conversation they shared while eating.

“Did you enjoy the food?” Navarro asked her.

“Very much. Superb!” Abiah energetically said.

“Are you ready?”

“Sure let’s go home!”

“No were not going home yet.” Navarro told her while assisting her to stand.

“What do you mean?”

“Let’s spend few more hours here. Don’t worry I’m bringing you home before four in the afternoon.” Navarro promised her.

“Where are we going?” Abiah wondered.

“Somewhere beautiful like you.”

Abiah tried her best not to react although she felt her cheeks warm.

They walked through the balcony down the wooden stairs and Abiah was surprised that there was a bridge going to the middle of the lake where there was a small shade and few benches for those who want to enjoy the view.

“Wow! Very wonderful! How I wish I brought my camera with me!”

“Well you can use your phone or do you want to use mine?” Navarro suggested.

“Nah don’t worry my phone will do.”

A cool wind breeze was kissing their skin as they walked along the bridge.

“I’m glad it’s not that sunny today or else it will be so hot here.” Navarro said while walking with hands in his pocket and looking at Abiah who was taking pictures of the scenery.

“This is a great place to have shoots huh? Your sister should’ve chosen this place as a venue for their pre-nup,” Abiah suggested.

“Well a studio shoot was their choice.”

They walked towards the end of the bridge where the benches were located and sat there.

“This place is so perfect.” Abiah let out a deep sigh then closed her eyes. She wanted to enjoy the silence of the place; hearing only the chirp of a few birds flying around the place. Not knowing that Navarro was already staring at her beauty.

“Have you ever had a boyfriend?”

Abiah suddenly opened her eyes and looked at Navarro who was still gazing at her. “I haven’t,” she casually said.

“Really? Why not?” Navarro didn’t want to believe that the gorgeous lady never had a boyfriend.

“Well for me entering into a relationship is a serious matter. It’s not just like when you meet someone handsome then he’s the one,” she explained.

“I see. No one ever asked you to be their girlfriend?” He was trying to fish information from her.

“There were some men, but it didn’t work.” She shrugged her shoulders. “They say it’s me. I always close doors because it isn’t my priority. Well, it’s because I think before doing things. Most of them weren’t able to wait for me. In some cases, I didn’t think they fit my personality,” she explained. “But it’s okay. I know God’s best is yet to come.”

“How about now? Can you say you’re ready?”

Abiah looked at Navarro before looking away, “My door is open but I want to take things one step at a time.”

Navarro could not help but smile to what Abiah said. ‘This is my chance!’ he claimed.

They spent a few more minutes talking about random things to get to know each

other more and as what Navarro promised, Abiah was home before four o'clock in the afternoon.

Chapter Twelve

Months have passed and the two continued the relationship that they had. Navarro did his best to make Abiah feel that she mattered, she was loved, and that someone saw her deserving of time and attention despite the busy schedule. He sometimes visited Abiah's office to bring food, flowers, or anything for her. They would also go out together on unexpected breakfast, lunch, or dinner dates where they were able to learn more things about each other. One of their discussions was who should pay when they go out since Abiah didn't want Navarro to pay everything. They talked about their religion and Abiah learned that Navarro was her opposite since he did not come from a family of church goers. She thought that it would be an opportunity for her to invite him to their church.

They also agreed that before being officially together, Navarro should visit Abiah's parents and talk to them. It was a long debate, but finally after a very long conversation they decided they both should get to know each other's families. Abiah's parents were open to the idea that their daughter was entertaining someone, but they gave her advice especially not to rush things but to take it slowly.

It was already evident that they liked each other. People around the two, especially the staff of Soulful Snaps—who were witnesses of how they started—were really surprised that the two ended up being more than friends.

They have really gone a long a way to the point that Navarro knew that being late made Abiah mad and giving her a handwritten letter made her day. Same as Abiah, she knew that cats would make Navarro freak out and that going around the rural places riding big bikes made his day. They knew what jokes they should crack to make each other laugh, what stories would comfort one another, and what words would make the other feel loved or feel better on sad gloomy days.

It was already four thirty in the afternoon and the whole team was rushing an output to be released at six in the evening. Abiah was already so much stressed about what was happening. What made the working day more nerve-wracking to her was that Lyn filed a leave on that day for some emergency matters. She had to continually check the time of her own schedule because no one would do it for her. From time to time, she checked the clock to not miss her five o'clock meeting. She went to the production room to check if all the pictures have been printed out already.

"We have ten more copies to print," a staff told her.

She let out a sigh and reminded herself to keep calm, "Okay that's good. Thank you so much."

Abiah took a glass of water before going back to her office. She sat on her swivel chair then closed her eyes to rest for a while. The day has been exhausting. She answered e-mails, took a few shots in a scheduled birthday invitation studio shoot, answered calls, rushed an output, and would finally attend a meeting, her last schedule for the day. It was then when she realized that Lyn was a very big help to her. She couldn't imagine her every day in the office doing so many things.

"I might die early," she giggled before looking at herself in the mirror. She took

her pressed powder to hide her oiliness and applied lipstick for her five o'clock video call meeting. She then opened her Skype and waited for the call.

The meeting was almost over when her office door opened. She was shocked to see Jean holding a bouquet of red roses. Her best friend approached her desk and left the bouquet on top of it. She whispered "I'm going," waved, and blew a kiss to Abiah before going out. Abiah's eyes were fixed on the flowers; she saw a folded brown paper that gave her excitement.

"If there are no more concerns, that's it for this meeting."

As soon as Abiah heard that sentence she looked at the computer camera and answered, "Thank you so much everyone. Have a good night. God bless!"

She immediately ended the call and reached out for the bouquet. When it was already in her hands, she smelled the roses and took the folded paper leaving the bouquet on her lap.

*Abiah,
Hey! You were not answering either of my messages or my
calls today. I'm worried. Please message me as soon as you
receive this letter.
Take care,
Nav*

"Oh no!" Abiah placed her palm across her forehead and took her phone.

To: Navarro
*Nav! Today was a very busy day. I'm sorry I wasn't able to
update you. Thank you for the flowers. I love them. Hope
you're fine.*

Abiah stood up and fixed her desk while waiting for Navarro's response. She took the letter and read it once more. She realized that she missed reading one part of the letter.

"P.S. I just want to ask you..."

"Huh ask what?" She turned the paper upside down and checked its back to see if it had a continuation but it did not have. She read and checked the paper once more but it really did not have anything. "It doesn't make sense," she sighed. "Let's deal with that when you get home Abiah," she told herself

She packed her bag and walked towards the door. She freaked out when she saw a person upon opening the door. She knew that she was the only person left in the office since it was past office hours already so she was really startled.

"Ahhhh!" She banged the door to close it and immediately pressed the lock button. She was breathing heavily. She looked around, finding something to use for self defense. When she was about to get the ruler on her desk she heard the person speak.

"Hey Abiah it's me."

She stopped and waited for the person to speak again.

“Abiah, it’s Nav. Open the door.” Abiah rolled her eyes and opened the door for him.

“You scared me!” She slapped his arms after opening the door.

Navarro laughed before entering her office. “I’m sorry. What made you think I’m somebody else?”

“I’m just so tired today, and I thought I was the only person left here. Why are you here?”

“I was waiting for you outside at the receiving area. But you are taking forever, so I decided to come in. But this happened.”

Abiah rubbed the crease of her eyes showing that she was really very tired.

“Do you want to go out for dinner?” Navarro invited her.

“I’m so tired Nav. Can we go out next time instead?” she suggested.

“Hmm... Do you mind me driving you home?”

Abiah thought, it will be more comfortable and less tiring for her so she agreed to Navarro’s offer.

They both went out of Soulful Snaps, made sure all doors were locked, and went to the nearby parking lot where Navarro left his car. While they were in the car, Navarro asked Abiah one more time if she wanted to eat out since he really desired to spend few more minutes with her.

“Are you sure eating out doesn’t sound good to you right now?” Navarro asked her while waiting for the stoplight to turn green.

“Hmm...” Abiah looked outside the car’s window and watched the people walking along the sidewalk. “I’m sorry. I really need to rest. I need energy for tomorrow.”

Navarro was so persistent, so he brought up another suggestion to her. “How about something to munch while I take you home? We can drive thru if you want to.”

Abiah looked at Navarro and thought it was a good idea since she was also already hungry. “Well, maybe we can pass by... McDonald’s!” She exclaimed so they drove thru the fast food chain before going to Abiah’s place.

They ordered two double cheeseburgers, one large fries, and two regular Coca-Colas. While driving to the town where Abiah lived she remembered that the letter Navarro gave her was incomplete. She quickly finished the fries in her mouth and took a sip of the soda.

“Nav, do you remember what you wrote in the letter you gave me a while ago?” She asked him before taking a bite of her cheeseburger.

“Uhum. I remember everything. Why?” Navarro said while his eyes were focused on the road.

“Are you sure you wrote what you have to say completely?” Abiah wanted to know if he just missed writing the last part completely or he really forgot to finish writing that part.

“What do you mean?” Navarro tried to act innocently but the truth was he knew what Abiah was talking about. Yes, he intentionally left out that missing part.

“You did not forget to complete a sentence or what?” She was considering the idea that maybe Navarro was also tired so he was not aware that he forgot to continue writing the message.

“Nope. Why are you asking me that?” He asked while making a right turn to the

entrance of the village where Abiah's family stayed. "Did I miss anything?"

"You did. There's an incomplete part." She giggled while preparing to go down as they were nearly approaching Abiah's home.

"Really? I think it's complete." He argued still acting innocent.

"I read the letter. It's incomplete. Do you want to see it? I can show you if you want to." Abiah was giggling at the guiltless looking guy beside him—well that was what she knew.

Navarro chuckled before saying, "Sure. Let's read it before you leave then."

Navarro made a few more turns before finally turning off the car's engine across from Fontinilla's residence. "So where's the letter?"

Abiah opened her bag and gave the letter to him. "I want you to read it aloud for me please." She was grinning with a thought that Navarro would realize that she was right after all.

"Okay." He turned on the dome light of the car and opened the letter. He sat properly making sure he was facing Abiah. "Abiah, Hey! You were not answering either of my messages or my calls today. I'm worried. Please message me as soon as you receive this letter. Take care, Nav." Navarro paused for a while which made Abiah think he'll end reading the letter there.

"Hey no, read further. There's more." Abiah was pointing at the bottom part of the letter.

"P.S." He looked at Abiah before continuing, "I just want to ask you..."

"See? I told you! Ask me what?" She was giggling while looking at Navarro's face.

"I just want to ask you this.... will you be my girlfriend?" He asked nervously.

Abiah's laughter was cut off by Navarro's question. She wanted to make sure she heard him right so she asked him, "What?"

"Will you be my girlfriend?" Navarro repeated loudly and showed her a nervous smile.

Many things entered Abiah's mind. Should she say yes? Was it the right time? They have been more than friends for almost a year now. She already introduced him to her family as her suitor and she was introduced to Navarro's family as well. Her parents told her that they would not stop her from considering guys but they instructed her to pray for it and think wisely not just out of her emotions. Navarro showed nothing but good things to her. Yes, there were times when they fought about things but they were able to fix things through communication and understanding. He surely was one of the most mature men she ever encountered. Was Navarro the man God prepared for her? She knew she had to decide now. With all the things that were running inside her head and all the feelings that she was currently feeling she knew what to say exactly.

She sighed deeply and looked at Navarro. "Give me a minute," she requested.

She shut her eyes and silently prayed, "Lord please be with me in this decision that I will make." Upon opening her eyes, she looked them on Navarro and slowly, genuinely said, "Yes. Yes, Nav, I am your girlfriend now."

Navarro unconsciously shed a tear upon hearing Abiah's response. He had been waiting for that day to come and he was happy and thankful that he finally heard those words from the lady he had been waiting for for so long. He felt he was on cloud nine and could not keep himself from smiling all the way.

Chapter Thirteen

It was not a surprise to anyone when Abiah and Navarro revealed that they were already in a relationship. Most of the people around Abiah were so happy that she finally opened her door for a romantic relationship. Her parents were also happy for her since they knew that their daughter had been praying about her future partner for a very long time now and Navarro came in the most unexpected time. Of course, Jean was also very glad that her best friend was no longer a single lady.

Although they were already together, Abiah kept on praying for her future with Navarro. She was also doing her best to encourage and influence her boyfriend to know God more. She consistently invited him to join their family every Sunday in which she observed that Navarro was enjoying his time in the church every time he was there. Because they go out more often after they became official than when they were just getting to know each other, Abiah took the opportunity to put prayer as part of their relationship—whenever they eat, they end the day, and sometimes even on calls. She was just very happy to see that Navarro was willing to do the things he was not used to do and she saw that he was really into it.

Upon entering the relationship, they discovered deeper things about each other and Abiah was clearly enjoying her boyfriend's company. Of course just like other normal couples, they also had arguments and debates about some things but what kept them together was to willingly solve the misunderstandings. They reminded each other to always choose to love rather than fight because their journey was not about fighting each other but fighting together.

The shoot Abiah had with the TCOM's anniversary—which she discovered that it stood for Tecson Company—became easier than she thought since she did not have to avoid a person anymore. It just felt good to her that the guy she once avoided was already someone very close to her heart.

It was Thursday afternoon when Navarro messaged Abiah that he was on his way to Soulful Snaps. Abiah quickly checked the clock and saw it was four thirty in the afternoon. She thought she could still give a few minutes time for her boyfriend. While waiting for him, she continued answering messages on her e-mail. Not long after the last message, Navarro came knocking on the door and entered his girlfriend's office.

"Hello, Babe," he gladly greeted his girlfriend while approaching her with a cup of brewed coffee from Abiah's favorite coffee shop.

"Wow that was so quick huh. Hi, Babe," she greeted back and looked at him smiling before completing the message she was composing.

As soon as Navarro was beside Abiah, he patted the top of her head, placed the coffee on her desk, and sat down on the couch. "Still busy?" he asked her.

"Uhm just finishing this e-mail and I'm going. Give me a few more minutes," she uttered, with eyes still on the monitor.

"Sure." Navarro always understood how busy his girlfriend was so he understood why even when he arrived at her office, she was still stuck on her computer. He lay down on the couch and checked his very rarely visited Facebook account while patiently waiting for Abiah.

Abiah took less than five minutes before sending the e-mail. "Done!" She started

closing all the opened windows and shutting down her computer.

Navarro looked at her, "Good!" He locked his phone and placed it inside his pocket. He closed his eyes before telling Abiah, "I want to eat ramen. Is it okay that we go to a Japanese restaurant tonight?"

"Huh?" Abiah was kind of confused with Navarro's statement.

"What do you mean 'huh'?"

"Did you forget what day today is?" She casually asked him while fixing the things in her bag.

"Thursday. Nope I did not forget. What about Thursday?"

"I have to meet people, they own my Thursday evenings. You know that right?"

"Oh yeah I forgot." He sighed disappointingly.

"Uhum you forgot." Abiah repeated while this time fixing the mess on her desk.

"Can't you skip the cell group now?" Navarro tried to ask her although he knew that she would not ditch whatever happens.

"Navarro we already talked about this right?"

"How about me joining the cell group?" He smiled widely like it was a very good idea.

Abiah quickly looked at him and giggled. "This group is actually composed of women. So I am sorry Babe, you can't."

"Ow yah I forgot."

There was a moment of silence and Abiah felt that Navarro really wanted to join them. So she added, "But the good news is I can ask the men in the church about their schedule so you can join."

"Hmm. Abiah, I can't remember your explanation before, what is a cell group again?"

Abiah painted a wide smile on her face. She felt happy that her boyfriend was really very interested when it came to those matters. "Well, a cell group is gathering of members as an avenue for enhancing growth of individuals spiritually, personally, and such."

"Ohhh." Navarro said nodding his head, became enlightened.

"So sometimes we share problems, talk about things in life, give advice, and such. It's actually also called a care group," she explained further. "So next week, or as soon as I know the information of the group I'm talking about I'll inform you."

"But Abiah..." He gave her a very big pout as a sign that he really wanted to go out with her on a dinner date.

"Nav, Babe, I already explained right? You have all my vacant time except Thursdays, Sundays, and on special days with the church."

Navarro did not react. He remained silent, thinking of words to say to encourage his girlfriend to ditch the meeting for the very first time. "I just really miss you. It's already more than a week when we had a date right?"

"Hmm. Yah. Nav we can go out tomorrow after work." Abiah looked at the sad face of Navarro looking down at his intertwined fingers. "Or if you want to..."

Navarro felt the hope from Abiah's words so he tilted his head up and stared at her looking like she was thinking of something. "Are we going out tonight?"

Abiah giggled and said, "Okay so here's the arrangement I thought. Just like what I told you before, it ends most probably before or exactly at nine in the evening. If you

really want us to go out tonight, you can wait for me and let's have a coffee nearby. What do you think?" Abiah tried her best to make her boyfriend think that it was a good idea.

"Coffee? Not dinner anymore?"

"I'm sorry babe." Abiah approached and sat beside him. "I am eating dinner with them. It's a must. We would be too hungry if we eat after nine, wouldn't we?"

Navarro released a deep and heavy sigh. "I can't do anything to convince you right?"

"I'm so sorry Nav." She rubbed his shoulders before standing to continue fixing her bag.

Navarro's actions were a bit weird for Abiah because it was the very first time that he suggested such to her. However, she did not overthink it and just understood that maybe Navarro was just genuinely missing her because just like what he said, they were both very busy the past week and they agreed to focus on their work since they had more days to come with each other. That was one thing Abiah appreciated a lot in their relationship; they made arrangements to avoid arguing with each other.

Anyway, she thought that if Navarro would not agree to what she said, she would just try to make it up to him on the coming days because she was dedicated and firm that she would not ditch the group's meeting. One of the things that she always told herself was that even if she was already in a relationship, she would respect and support the beneficial practices of that person. Alongside, she would stand firm to the good things she had been doing when she was still single—in her case the activities she did in relation with the church would continue, no matter what.

Navarro was staring blankly at her. He could not believe that Abiah denied his request. He continuously told himself that he should not make it an issue since Abiah's heart, soul, and mind were really into doing these services for the church—he wanted to give his one hundred percent support to Abiah.

"Fine," he sighed before standing and helping Abiah fix her things on the desk.

"What do you mean?" Abiah clarified before finally wearing her shoulder bag.

"I will wait and will fetch you after. Just tell me where you're at."

Abiah looked at him and smiled, "Okay."

Navarro brought Abiah to a mall nearby where the venue of the meeting was. Abiah kept on asking him where he would eat so he also kept on telling her that he was fine and she did not have to worry about him because he could handle himself. As promised, Navarro stayed in the mall. He found a place where he could stay while waiting for Abiah.

It was nine o'clock when Abiah updated Navarro that they were done. Navarro immediately asked where she was at and fetched her there. While walking to the parking lot, they both decided not to drink coffee outside anymore instead, go to Abiah's house and drink coffee with her parents. Navarro did not like the idea at first because he was thinking they might disturb her parents but Abiah said they were awake until ten in the evening. She persuaded him more so they could save money and he could bond with her parents more. Navarro finally said yes after many times of explaining to him.

Just like what Abiah said, her parents were in the living room watching television

when they arrived. They were no longer surprised by Navarro's presence since Abiah sent them a message when they were on the way.

"Good evening Ma'am, Sir!" Navarro greeted them. He shook Mr. Fontinilla's hand and gave Mrs. Fontinilla a quick hug.

"Good evening Navarro." Abiah's parents said in unison.

"Have you both eaten dinner already?" Mrs. Fontinilla asked them before standing up ready to prepare dinner for them.

"We're done mom. We just decided to maybe drink coffee with you guys before going to bed." Abiah explained.

Her mom smiled, obviously appreciating their effort to bond with them. "That's so sweet. Help me prepare the mugs then Abi."

"Sure mom. Here we bought bread to eat as well."

Abiah and her mom prepared the coffee mugs, teaspoons and all the other needed things and mixes. They altogether sat around the dining table after all the things were prepared. They talked about random things. Abiah and Navarro were asked how their relationship was as well.

They were still catching up with each other when Mr. Fontinilla mentioned Abiah's plan for her birthday. "Abi, have you mentioned to Navarro the plan for your birthday that you were telling us about yesterday?"

Navarro panned his head to Abiah wondering what her father was talking about.

"Oh not yet." Abiah said before having a bite of the bread they bought.

"What is it?" Navarro asked her.

"Well, this is not yet the final plan, but do you remember the foundation I'm helping? My parents and I are planning to celebrate my birthday there. Of course we will have a program, food, and all. It's basically just like bringing the party in the orphanage, to share my blessings with them."

Navarro was just nodding his head while Abiah was explaining. "That's a great idea. I can help you with that."

"Really?" Abiah was so happy hearing that from him. She was really thankful that her boyfriend was very supportive in all she did.

They spent more time talking about the celebration at the orphanage when Mrs. Fontinilla felt sleepy. "I'm sorry but I have to leave you all here, I need to take a rest."

Abiah saw that the time was past ten already. She looked at Navarro and he nodded.

"I actually am leaving already as well. I have to wake up early tomorrow for work."

They bid good night to Navarro who gave a hug to both Abiah and her mom and once more shook Mr. Fontinilla's hand.

"Good night Babe. Take care. Tell me when you're home." Abiah waved goodbye to Navarro before closing the door.

Chapter Fourteen

Six o'clock in the morning
Saturday

The whole team going to the orphanage that Abiah supported were already on the way to the place. Her parents, Jean, a few photographers from Soulful Snaps to capture moments, a few churchmates, and of course Navarro were part of the special celebration. Abiah was very hands on from the food, gifts for the children, program, decorations to producing simple invitations for the people she decided to invite. Unlike what Navarro assumed, his girlfriend arranged a very simple program for the party. She just wanted to feed the children, give them gifts and allow them to enjoy the day. She always explained that the celebration was for the children and not for her. Doing that had actually been her birthday tradition since she started earning money. Although she was not receiving huge salary, she wanted to be an instrument to show and tell these unfortunate feeling children that they were indeed blessed and loved even though they did not have their own families. Busy weeks had passed for Abiah before the celebration because while working, she had to arrange things for the party and at the same time do her responsibilities as a daughter and a girlfriend.

“Are you excited?” Navarro asked Abiah while they paved their way on the one and a half hour travel to the orphanage.

Abiah looked at him and smiled, “I am. I am very glad and excited to be able to share the blessings I received in the past year. I believe that it is very important to give back.”

Navarro smiled sweetly and intertwined his hands to Abiah's—one of the few things that Abiah allowed her boyfriend to do. It was quite strange to her the first time Navarro held her hand. She was not really used to it since Navarro was her first boyfriend. It was a struggle for her at the beginning as she did not know how to be a girlfriend but as time passed by, she got used to it.

As they were approaching the orphanage's parking space inside the compound, the children were already outside the house waving at the van. Some of them were jumping up and down and the others even ran to where the van stopped. It was evident that the children were really very excited and happy for this day.

Abiah were all smiles as she observed the children approaching them. Navarro assisted Abiah as she got out of the van and all the children were chanting her name, hugging her tightly, and showing that they missed her so much.

“Abiah! I miss you!”

“Abiah you are here!”

“I love you Abiah!”

“Abiah!!!”

“Abiah, I drew something for you!”

“Flowers for you Abiah!”

Those were a few of the things that the children said.

“Okay, everybody, let's all gather at the garden so we could start partying. How does that sound?” All the children looked at Abiah before rushing and running to where the gathering would happen.

“Be careful kids!” She shouted as soon as they began running away from her.

After they transferred all the things they brought for the party at the garden, everyone assembled in the area so they could start. There were a few tables and chairs arranged, enough for fifty children at the garden. The place was decorated simply— a few balloons and a banner that said, “HAPPY BIRTHDAY ABIAH!”

When everyone was ready to start, they distributed red party hats to the children which made the kids even more excited.

“Good morning children!” The staff from the orphanage greeted the very eager kids.

“Good morning!” All the children energetically exclaimed.

“So like what we have told you yesterday, we are gathered here to celebrate Abiah’s birthday like what we always do right?”

“YES!”

“Before we start, can we sing a birthday song to her? In 3.. 2..”

“Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday, happy birthday... Happy birthday to you!” They all sang wholeheartedly and happily while clapping their hands.

“So before we start, Abiah is here to tell you something.”

“Thank you,” Abiah whispered to the staff member before standing in front of the children. “Hello children!”

“Hello Abiah!” they unanimously greeted her back.

“I know we are all excited for today. Don’t worry, we will start very soon but before that, I want to introduce the people who are with me today. Is that okay?”

“YES!” They uttered with the consistent energy they had.

“Of course you already know some of them. My parents, Jean, these people who work in where? Who can tell me where they work?” She asked them like she was testing if they still remember.

Once again they shouted saying, “Soulful Snaps!”

Abiah laughed at the ‘too much’ energy the children were giving, “You also already know our friends from the church right?”

The children were nodding until one young girl stood up and pointed at Navarro, “But we don’t know him Abiah. Who is he?” she wondered.

Abiah waved at Navarro asking him to stand beside her, “His name is Navarro,” she told the children and Navarro automatically waved at them.

The young girl who was curious of Navarro stood up from her chair once more, made a teasing expression on her face, and said, “Is he your boyfriend?”

All the other children started teasing Abiah because of that question which made the adults laugh including the couple.

Abiah placed her palm on Navarro’s shoulder and answered the question of the young girl, “Yes he is my boyfriend.”

Her response made the children tease her more which just made her laugh. After she introduced Navarro to them, the party started.

The celebration began with a short prayer followed by a children’s song that Abiah taught them, a message from a church leader, a few games with prizes, lunch, and gift giving. After all the children received the simple present Abiah prepared for them,

the children told Abiah that they have prepared a song for her. So they all stood in front ready to sing for Abiah. The instrumental of Carpenter's "You" started playing and they sang along with the music. She was just smiling all throughout the song until one by one, the children approached her and gave her one flower each. Her eyes started to swell and she was not able to stop the tears from flowing as the children were singing, "You are one of the few things worth remembering... and since it's all true, how could anyone mean more to me, than you?" She really felt loved by the children. She knew that they really captured her heart and she will always, always help them and make them happy as long as she can.

After the party, they spent a few more minutes at the orphanage to bond with the children before leaving. Some started crying, wanting Abiah to stay and spend more hours with them. She hugged them and explained that she had to go because she had still a lot of things to do but promised that she would visit them soon. Everyone leaving was already inside the van and Abiah was left outside. She was rushing her way towards the van when a boy shouted her name. Abiah stopped and looked back, it was Raphael an orphan around ten years old. He rushed towards Abiah and hugged her tight.

"Happy birthday Abiah. Thank you for the gifts and the food that you gave us," he expressed while hugging Abiah.

Abiah held his shoulders before responding, "Thank you too Raphael. Take good care here and look after the younger ones too okay?"

"I will surely be a good brother to them." This was what Abiah taught them, that they were all siblings in that orphanage so they should love one another rather than fight. She was just so happy that they remember her words to them.

"Okay. I have to leave now Raphael. See you next time." Abiah bid him goodbye.

She was about to turn her back from Raphael when the young boy spoke again, "Abiah?"

"Yes Raphael? Do you want to tell me something?" Abiah curiously asked him.

He slowly nodded his head and told her, "Take care Abiah. I admire you because you are smart, you love and pray for us, and you tell us that we should always do the right thing. You will stay the same right?"

Abiah was completely confused why the boy was saying such things but she answered, "Of course Raphael."

Raphael hugged her once more before finally saying goodbye.

Abiah really felt weird because of Raphael's words. She was phasing out trying to understand where the young boy was coming from until Navarro snapped his fingers in front of her face.

"Oh ya-ah! Yes? What?" Abiah said.

Navarro laughed at his girlfriend's reaction before he started telling her his suggestion, "I was thinking, we haven't celebrated your birthday yet."

Abiah looked at him—confused, "We just celebrated my birthday right? We also celebrated at Soulful Snaps? What do you mean?"

"I mean just the two of us," Navarro explained.

"I see. Well, we can celebrate later. Let's have a dinner together. What do you think?" Abiah suggested.

"Dinner?" Navarro asked. He was not buying Abiah's suggestion.

“Uhum?”

“It’s not that I don’t like the idea you said. You know I really love spending time with you right?” he asked her.

“Yeah of course.”

“But I don’t want to do something very usual for your birthday. I hope you understand me,” Navarro expressed while looking directly at Abiah’s eyes.

“Ohh I understand. So, what do you think should we do for my birthday?” Abiah asked him, “Do you have plans or suggestions?”

“Actually, I am planning that we should de-stress,” Navarro blandly expressed.

“Wow, I like that idea!” Abiah happily said.

“So, I think we should go out of town have an overnight and just forget the work and all the things that stress us.”

“What?” Abiah was stunned by Navarro’s suggestion. She wanted to clarify things so she asked him, “You mean, we will go out of town for my birthday?”

Navarro nodded with a wide smile on his face.

“Well…” Abiah was trying to compose the right words to express her thoughts clearly. “I really think that is a good idea. But it would be so much fun to bond with our friends away from our place.”

“Wait. Abiah, I was suggesting just the two of us so we could have an alone time together.” Navarro clarified.

“Hmm, Navarro are you sure of what you’re suggesting right now?” Abiah seriously asked him.

“Yeah I am serious. I want to spend time with you.” Navarro said with a very soft voice.

“You know we can go in a park out of town. We never did that right?” she suggested.

“Abiah, don’t you like my suggestion?” Navarro frankly asked her.

“Honestly, I think it is not a good idea. You said overnight? We do not have time for that and I am not comfortable about that thought.”

“Why not?” he sadly asked her. “We are just going to de-stress.”

“We can de-stress in some other way. What about play bowling right? Please Navarro?”

He released a deep sigh before responding, “Sure. Your decision. Since it’s your celebration, your wish is my command. I respect that maybe you’re not comfortable with me yet.”

Abiah quickly looked at Navarro before explaining, “It’s not that I am not yet comfortable with you Nav. You know I am already comfortable with you.”

“Then why not?”

“Well, just like what I told you, I think it is not a good idea. We can bring our family and friends if you want to. The more the merrier right?”

“It’s not like I will do something that would harm you.”

“Of course. I know you will not allow that to happen but Babe, please understand me. I’m pretty sure my parents won’t agree with that idea too.”

Navarro breathed deeply, “Okay fine. Let’s just play bowling.”

Abiah smiled and felt relieved that Navarro did not argue with her anymore.

“I believe it will be fun,” she claimed.

Chapter Fifteen

“Please remind me again tomorrow so I can reply on that e-mail as soon as I arrive here in the office.”

“Sure Abiah.”

“Thank you Lyn.” Abiah expressed her gratitude before her assistant left the room. “What’s the celebration for?” She then asked her boyfriend immediately after talking to Lyn.

Navarro surprised her again—like what he always did—with a cup of coffee since he had to do an errand nearby. Abiah invited him to eat dinner with her parents since her mom cooked oven barbecue ribs but Navarro declined since, as per him, he had an international meeting later that night. Instead, he offered to drive Abiah home before going back to his office.

“It’s my grandma’s ninety-fifth birthday.”

“WOAH! Really?” Abiah stopped arranging her things and looked at him.

“You heard it right. So you must be there. She had wanted to meet you ever since she knew that I already have a girlfriend.” Navarro smirked at her.

“Aww that’s so sweet! I will surely be there. Tell her that, okay?” she assured him.

“Noted! I will tell her that. So don’t forget that’s on Friday night.”

“Don’t worry I will not forget it this time.” Abiah chuckled as she remembered the time when she unintentionally forgot that they have a scheduled lunch together. She was surprised when Navarro was telling her that he was already on his way to her office. It was a hilarious experience but it gave Navarro a lesson to always remind his busy girlfriend of their plans and schedules.

“Anyway, it’s just a house party, an intimate one. Only family members will be there. So, you can wear anything comfortable. It doesn’t have to be formal. I want you to be at ease and relaxed.”

“Are you sure I am allowed to join the celebration? I am not a family member.”

“You are my girlfriend which makes you a hundred percent allowed to join the celebration,” Navarro winked at her.

She giggled and shrugged her shoulders, “Okay then.”

After fixing her things, Abiah asked her assistant to plot the date of the birthday celebration on her calendar to make sure she would remember the party.

The car was full of excitement and expectations for the near birthday celebration of Navarro’s grandmother while they were driving to the Fontinilla’s residence. Navarro said that the gathering would also be sort of a reunion for their family since all his cousins, aunties, and uncles would also be there. He expressed that he would also meet new faces, new partners of his relatives, new children, and such. That was why he was also very excited to bring Abiah and introduce her to them.

“I can sense it will be so much fun!” Abiah claimed with so much enthusiasm.

“Sure, it will be,” he assured. Navarro thought it was the perfect time to tell Abiah what was on his mind in relation to the celebration. “You know Babe, I even think because of so much fun, we may be staying up until dawn and not be aware of it.”

“Of course! It also happens when I meet my relatives after a very long time. There are unending stories to tell,” Abiah explained heartily.

“That’s why you should prepare yourself, okay?”

Abiah looked at Navarro, confused about what he just said. “What do you mean? Well yes. I am ready to meet your relatives. I am nervous, but based on your stories I feel that they have a good heart like yours.”

“No—I mean yes. But what I’m talking about is that it is obviously better if you stay the whole night. Besides, I can drive you back home in the morning.” Navarro quickly looked at Abiah before focusing back to the road. He was trying his luck this time. Truth to be told, Abiah always refused these kinds of invitation he made.

“Oooh.” There was obviously a change of mood on Abiah’s tone. “Well sure... We’ll be up all night... right?” Abiah was making sure it was not an invitation that she did want to entertain.

“Of course we need to sleep. Everyone will eventually.”

“So yah, I think... I’m fine.” Abiah paused to be able to think and say the right words. “I can sleep beside your female cousins right?”

Navarro let out a giggle, “Babe, I have my room.”

Abiah thought, ‘Here we go again.’ She was already composing the words she wanted to say in a manner that her boyfriend would not be hurt but at the same time understand the situation.

“My cousins of course have their own partners. Do you want to sleep with them? Or maybe beside my younger cousins who still sleep with their parents. Or just sleep with me in my bed?” Navarro plastered a small smile which was covered by the darkness of the car.

“Well, maybe it’s appropriate for me to just go home when I’m already sleepy... Right?” Abiah calmly said.

“Abiah, I might not be able to bring you back home by that time.”

“There are more ways Nav.” Abiah looked at her boyfriend whose eyes were stuck on the road.

“I don’t understand Abiah, what’s wrong with that? I can ask permission from your parents if you want to.” Navarro desperately stated.

“Nothing will change Navarro. Things will just get worse if you will ask permission from them. I’m sure they will not allow me. So if I were you, I wouldn’t do that.” Abiah thought she was trying to help Navarro remove that kind of mindset—that he was allowed to bring Abiah or any other girl in a private place to spend the night together just the two of them. She was sure that once her parents knew about this, they would be the ones to encourage her to think twice about her relationship with him.

After Abiah spoke, the car was filled with deafening silence until the car pulled over in front of the Fontinilla’s residences.

They remained quiet for a little more time. Abiah was trying to be sensitive of what her boyfriend was feeling at that moment. She did not want to leave the car with that kind of environment between the two of them so she spent a minute more to construct words in her head before saying, “Thank you.”

Navarro did not respond. He just stared at the road and pretended not to hear anything from his girlfriend.

Abiah felt his atmosphere was strong like he was really disappointed. She swallowed and took a deep breath before speaking again, “Babe?” Navarro still remained silent so Abiah tried once more. “Nav. Navarro,” she strongly uttered.

Navarro looked at her. His eyes spoke confusion, sadness, and disappointment all in one.

“Hey,” Abiah said sweetly, “this has nothing to do with not trusting you, not being comfortable with you, or especially not loving you.”

“Then what?” Navarro silently and coldly said.

“This is the right thing. This is what we must be doing. Right?” Abiah was still calm. She was trying to relay the message peacefully.

Navarro closed his eyes and sighed before shaking his head and nodding. “I understand.” He kept on nodding his head before bidding goodbye. “I have a meeting. Good night, Abiah.”

“Thank you Navarro, Babe. Good night. Please take care.” She stepped out of the car, closed the door then waved at Navarro who drove away speedily.

Abiah knew that her boyfriend’s ‘I understand’ was just to agree with what she said. It was clearly not from his heart—he did not really understand Abiah. She went inside the house and ate dinner with her parents while trying to shoo away the thought that the ‘misunderstanding’ would be a huge problem in their relationship and that maybe someday, Navarro would choose to break up with her because she could not give what he wanted.

Before going to bed, she sent a message to her boyfriend to say good night and another message to her best friend to tell her what happened.

The next day.

Pasta and pastry shop.

Seven o’clock in the evening.

“What???” Jean asked Abiah to repeat what she just said before eating a spoonful of baked mac.

“I said Nav invited me to join their family on his grandmother’s birthday and to sleep there, spending the night in his room... just the two of us.” Abiah repeated before letting out a deep sigh.

Abiah and Navarro’s relationship was going strong and steady although sometimes they still argued on little things that normal couples encounter—just like what happened recently. Obviously, often times, the reason why they started arguing was that Navarro suggested things that were beyond Abiah’s boundaries so Abiah carefully explained to him her stands and principles regarding the things they did together in front of people and the things they did when it was just the two of them. Sometimes Navarro really could not comprehend why Abiah declined his invitations when in fact, she should be excited when they get the opportunity to be physically intimate with each other. He did not know why she always rejected him but then the day always ended with him understanding and respecting his girlfriend’s decisions.

Jean scratched her forehead and drank water before looking straight to Abiah’s eyes. “Okay here’s a silly suggestion. Why don’t you just grant your boyfriend’s wish.”

Abiah had her eyes opened wide because of her best friend’s remarks. “Are you serious?! That’s actually not really silly Jean.” She sarcastically said while shaking her

head out of dismay.

“Hey calm down.” Jean raised her palms towards Abiah while chuckling. “It’s not like you both are going to do something...” Jean stopped for a while, searching for the right words to say, “You know.. IT.”

“What do you mean, not going to do something? He was saying that I will sleep with him in his room in his bed. Me and him. Just the two of us, the same room. Jean do you understand me?” Abiah tried her best to be calm while stating her points.

“Of course! I do understand you. The thing is, why are you thinking that you both will do something? In the first place, you won’t agree if he initiates right?” Jean knew that nothing’s going to change Abiah’s stand that she would—not—never agree on that kind of setup. She firmly agreed that couples who were not married should never sleep in the same room or same bed together just the two of them because...

“Jean, I don’t want to scoop a fire on my lap or Navarro’s lap and expect that nothing is going to happen.” Abiah gave Jean extreme eye contact while explaining. “There’s a perfect time for those things. That’s why I keep on telling him we can go, if we are to travel with friends. Is that wrong Jean?”

Jean kept quiet. She knew what her best friend was talking about. It was one thing Abiah took seriously. She valued purity so much that it made her really careful in entertaining guys who wanted to court her. Now she was in a relationship with someone who kept on asking her approval about that matter.

“You know, like what I always say, I confidently believe that true romantic love will certainly not indulge in intimate touching before marriage. I will never get myself into confined space with Navarro to tempt myself and see if I could resist it or believe that I could.” Abiah shook her head before drinking her lemongrass lemonade.

“I’m sorry Abiah.” Jean held her hand, “I understand you. I didn’t mean to push you into something that you really don’t want to do... something that’s wrong.”

Abiah gave her best friend a genuine smile assuring her that there was nothing to worry about before saying, “I also hope Navarro understands what I’m saying.”

“I’m sure he does or if he still doesn’t understand it now, he will.” Jean assured her. There was a moment of silence between them until Jean asked her an intriguing question, “What if he will still keep on asking you on the coming days, months or years?”

Abiah looked at her and said, “I will still try my best to explain. I will do my part to make him understand that relationships don’t work that way. But after everything and he still insists, I will definitely run away from him. I will not wait for him to touch me the wrong way before saying goodbye.”

“Do you love him?” Jean sincerely asked Abiah.

Abiah stared at Jean for a moment, “I love him. He knows that, you know that, my parents know that and I, myself, know that I love him. But I don’t want this love to be the cause of us falling down.”

Jean stood and transferred beside where Abiah was sitting and gave her a hug.

Chapter Sixteen

Months have already passed after the birthday celebration of Navarro’s grandmother. Abiah remained true and firm enough to her words that she would not stay so she went home and did not spend the night at the Tecson’s residence. Navarro was

really disappointed during that time but he had no choice but to bring her home since Abiah promised her parents—in front of him—that she would be late but she would surely go home. At first Navarro was thinking that maybe it was not yet the perfect time but little by little he started getting irritated and mad every time his girlfriend explained to him that it was wrong and definitely not what they should be doing. However he believed that someday his efforts of convincing her would pay off.

It was another busy day for Abiah in the office but one thing that made it special despite work was that they were celebrating their anniversary. She was talking to a client inside her office when she felt her phone vibrate from her pocket. She ignored it and continued what she was doing. It was not even one minute when her phone vibrated again, but this time it was not just once. It was three consecutive times. She had to take her phone out of her pants' pocket and place it on top of the desk facing upside down so she would not be disturbed.

After an hour, Abiah's meeting with the client finally ended. They were trying to adjust the amount compatible to the client's budget and fortunately they were able to close a deal. Ever since, Abiah wanted to meet the needs of their clients but at the same time, them being able to pay the right amount, so she was very much open for arrangements. Going back, Abiah immediately sat down on her swivel chair and opened the internet browser to locate the website address login for receiving and sending e-mails. She was tapping her finger tips against the glass top of her office table while waiting for the messages to load when she saw her phone and remembered that it vibrated several times a while ago. She immediately took her phone and checked what the vibrations were all about.

Abiah saw messages from her boyfriend.

From: Navarro

Hey Babe! Happy Anniversary! How is your day going? I hope everything's under control. I can't wait to see you later. I have something for you. You will surely love it! Don't stress yourself too much. I love you!

Abiah unconsciously painted a huge smile on her face. She began to feel the urge to finish all her tasks and be with her boyfriend as soon as possible. Still with a huge beam, she started replying to her sweet and thoughtful boyfriend.

To: Navarro

Oh my happy pill! Happy Anniversary! Well, everything's fine here, and there? I can't wait to see you too! I love surprises but I love you more! Drive safely coming here.

After sending the message, Abiah became more focused and inspired to finish all the things that she had to do.

The couple's awaited hour arrived. They agreed that Navarro would no longer go inside the office so Abiah should be prepared anytime her boyfriend arrived. So even

before Navarro messaged her, she was already lying down on the couch waiting for a go signal.

Abiah hurriedly said her goodbyes to everyone and left the office to see Navarro as soon as she received her boyfriend's message. She moved two times faster when she saw Navarro's car parked at the side of the road with its hazard lights flashing on and off. She immediately opened the door and saw Navarro holding a bouquet of flowers.

"Hello my sweetheart!" Navarro greeted her.

Abiah sat down on the passenger's seat, took the bouquet and gave Navarro a quick hug saying, "Aww hello Babe! Thank you so much." She then wore the seatbelt after.

"Ready?" Navarro asked her after.

"Sir yes Sir!" Abiah exclaimed looking at Navarro with a sweet smile on her face.

While on the road, Navarro started giving Abiah hints that made her so much more excited.

"So you already have a hint that I have a surprise for you right?" Navarro asked her.

"Uhum. What is it?? What is it Nav??" Abiah repeatedly asked acting like a five-year-old child eager to receive her surprise.

Her actions made Navarro chuckle, "You are too cute. I'm really lucky that you are my girlfriend."

"I hope you are blessed," Abiah corrected him with a smirk on her lips.

"I am. I am. Lucky or blessed, whatever, it's the same," he shook his head while talking smiling.

Navarro pulled the car over in front of their favorite restaurant where different seafood dishes were served. He was successful; Abiah was so surprised, almost jumping on her seat because of so much excitement to finally eat her favorite lemon garlic butter shrimp. As soon as the car stopped, she quickly opened the door, did not bother to wait for her boyfriend who was still inside the car. Navarro did nothing but to laugh at his girlfriend who was asking him to move faster so he did.

When they were already settled at the table they chose, the waiter approached them, Abiah started telling her order without even checking the menu. Navarro found it amusing, yet cute, that Abiah's happiness was really radiating.

They spent almost two hours in the restaurant and it was evident that Abiah was contented and satisfied with whatever was inside her stomach.

"Finally. It's been a while," she said while rubbing her bloated stomach.

"Are you happy?" Navarro sincerely asked her.

"I am very happy. Thank you so much Babe. You really know what to do when I'm tired," she genuinely expressed.

Navarro just stared at her for a while before he began speaking again, "Well you know what?" He kept the eye contact he had with her before continuing, "It doesn't end here."

Abiah gave Navarro wide confused eyes, "What do you mean?"

"There's more," he winked at her. "Shall we?"

"Huh? What??" She was still clueless as to what the person in front of her was talking about.

Navarro got the attention of a waiter, raised his hands putting out his index fingers

and thumb, “Bill please.”

Abiah kept on asking him what was the other surprise but Navarro did not entertain her. She kept on asking and bugging her boyfriend but he just gave her a smirk—not really giving her an answer until the next surprise was revealed.

They were already in the car when Abiah started thanking her boyfriend instead of being annoyed not knowing what was going to happen next. “Thank you Babe. I didn’t expect that we will celebrate this special day this way. A-I’m sorry? I wasn’t able to prepare something like this. I thought we’re just going to eat dinner knowing our schedules are really tight.”

“Hey, it’s okay. It doesn’t matter. What matters to me right now is that you are with me and I hope you will enjoy the rest of the day.” Navarro took her hand and held it for a while.

“But Nav, I have something for you,” she took a small box out of her bag. “Can you please stop the car on the side of the road for a while?”

Navarro searched for a place where he could stop the car in a legal place so they would not be fined. He then faced Abiah who looked so nervous and shy, “What do you have for me, Babe?”

Abiah handed him the box, “Open it. I hope you will like it. I know you can buy anything you want and maybe this is just a small thing for you but I hope, this small thing will always remind you of me.”

Navarro opened the box and saw a black rastaclat—men’s bracelet that looked braided. He took it outside of the box and studied the bracelet.

“That’s a rastaclat. They say it is a symbol of righteousness, righteousness for yourself and for others,” Abiah explained.

Navarro slowly nodded while figuring out how he could wear the bracelet.

“You want me to help you wear it?” Abiah offered and he gladly allowed her to do it for him. “I hope you will always wear this and remember me saying ‘do what is righteous Navarro’ whenever you see it.”

Navarro looked at his wrist after the rastaclat was placed around it. He gave Abiah a thankful smile before saying, “Thank you so much. This may seem very simple for you but it means a lot to me. Especially that it came from you.”

Abiah felt at ease after Navarro confirmed that he loved the gift, “So where are we heading to?”

He did not say a word but drove the car to where he planned to take Abiah next. It was a short drive from the restaurant, around six to ten minutes. They stepped out of the car after it was parked. Navarro then took out a black handkerchief as a part of his surprise. Abiah allowed him to blindfold her and trusted her boyfriend to lead her wherever he wanted to take her.

“Nav, where are we?” Abiah asked curiously as she felt the cool breeze of air kissing her skin, ‘feels like an air conditioner’s blow’ she thought. Abiah really didn’t have any idea of what was going to happen. All she knew was that she was in an elegant building from what she saw before being blindfolded.

“We are almost there. Be patient my Abiah.” Navarro assured her. That made Abiah hold his hand tightly.

After a few more steps and an elevator ride, Navarro gave her a sign that she could remove her blindfold already.

“I really don’t know if you will like this or not but this is my surprise for you Abiah. I hope you will like it too.” Navarro removed Abiah’s blindfold.

As soon as her eyes were able to adjust from the light, Abiah was in complete shock as she saw someone opening a hotel room. The person who assisted them immediately excused himself as soon as they were both inside the room.

“Surprise!” While Navarro was so happy and excited that even his eyes were smiling, Abiah felt as if she was experiencing an ice bucket challenge because her body stiffened as it started to feel cold.

She did not want to assume that Navarro was into doing IT again but she really sensed that she was in trouble. Abiah did not want to beat around the bush so she frankly and quickly asked, “What is this Navarro?”

“Surprise? It is a surprise.”

“Can you make it clearer to me? What is the surprise in this room? The room itself?” she calmly but straightforwardly asked her boyfriend.

“Well yes? I booked a room in this five star hotel, for the two of us.” He confidently said before smashing his back against the soft bed while Abiah was still standing behind the door.

“Excuse me Navarro?” Abiah was trying her best to stay calm.

“What Abiah? Are you going to say something again? Is this wrong again? I am wrong again right?” Navarro bravely expressed.

“This is obviously and clearly wrong.” Abiah was about to leave the room when Navarro ran fast and blocked her way out.

“Hey. Listen to me.” Navarro held her shoulders to get her attention. Abiah gave him a look that she never gave him—‘I’m done with this.’ “Don’t you realize that I always follow you? Every time you say no, I follow. When you say that’s wrong, I follow. It’s been a year and I always follow you. This time, can I ask you to allow me to lead?”

Abiah shook her head while sarcastically laughing, “Excuse me Navarro. I have to leave.”

“No Abiah. I won’t allow you to leave. I know you are just afraid because this is your first time but believe me, this will stay between you and me. You will definitely enjoy and never regret it,” he was trying to convince her.

Abiah closed her eyes and breathed deeply, “I’m sorry Navarro. Please get out of my way.”

“No Abiah. I know you’re just acting like you don’t care at all but I know you do. I know that you want this too.” The persistence in Navarro’s speech made Abiah more irritated and felt disrespected.

“Navarro, I. AM. LEAVING,” she used all her strength to push Navarro out of the way and left the room—the place—as quickly as she could.

Chapter Seventeen

After the incident, Abiah and Navarro’s relationship became as cold as the peak of the winter season.

Navarro felt that his ego was dragged all the way down and stepped on, not just once, but many times. As a man, he felt that he was pleading for something other men

could easily have. But it was so hard for him since he fell in love with a person who made him feel that he did not deserve being gratified by things he truly desired. After that incident, he concluded that his efforts and hard work were taken for granted.

He really felt bad about the matter. Pain and anger were gradually planted in his heart as Abiah rejected all his desires. His mind and flesh were telling him that he deserved better, someone who would allow him to be happy in the way he wanted to be, just like he put effort to make his partner happy. He did not initiate communicating with Abiah. He thought this time Abiah needed to make the first move.

Abiah, on the other hand, felt bad that Navarro did not even attempt to communicate with her after what happened. She found the incident very offensive, not like how her boyfriend intended it to be. She felt disrespected. She even questioned whether Navarro really loved her or was just using her for the things that he yearned for. She did not tell anyone about what happened—not even her best friend. She wanted to understand where Navarro was coming from to know how to handle the situation. She kept on telling herself that, although it happened many times, she knew that her boyfriend had a good heart—he was a good person.

It was Monday—a holiday—three days after what happened during their anniversary celebration. She was lying down on her bed, looking straight at her phone and waiting for the image showing a message notification. Even when she was not looking at her phone—which happened rarely—her ears were getting more sensitive to sounds, causing her to be alert whenever her phone beeped.

“For the last time, last five minutes,” she said, audible enough to hear herself. She already told herself that more than three times, yet she kept on checking her phone over and over again.

A lot of things were going on inside her head. Should she wait for Navarro to talk to her, apologize, and fix the mess he started? Or should she make the first move? But why should she make the first move? She was the one disrespected, right? Maybe she should really wait. But what if she was waiting for nothing because Navarro would not do anything anymore since he was hurt? Maybe she should lower her pride. Perhaps it was the time to humble herself, even though she was the one offended and the one insulted.

She closed her eyes and did the ‘inhale-exhale’ exercise which she always did to help herself think and act the right way.

“Inhale the positive thoughts,” she gasped deeply. “Exhale the negative thoughts,” she blew heavily. She did that several times. With her eyes still closed, she uttered the words, “I know you are with me, Father.”

She then took her phone and pressed the message application. Her fingers automatically typed, “Can we talk?” and sent it to Navarro.

She was very nervous as she waited for a response—she had never been that nervous all her life. Butterflies were flying inside her stomach, her fingertips were becoming cold, she felt like throwing up, and she felt that all her body parts were reacting all together at the same time. She did not know where to focus her attention. After five minutes, she felt that Navarro would never respond to her anymore. She told herself that she had to understand that maybe Navarro was really hurt.

She was slowly accepting the situation when her phone beeped. She checked the phone immediately. Her heart started beating faster... and faster... and faster when she

saw that the message was from Navarro. She immediately opened it and saw what Navarro said.

From: Navarro

Sure. Your village's park. 5:00 PM.

She didn't know how to react. Was this the moment when she had to squeal because she was happy that they would finally be talking to each other again? Or should she feel her heart pounding so fast because she did not know what would happen next?

Before overthinking happened again, she replied, "*Okay. Tak care,*" to her boyfriend.

Abiah started thinking of what to say and how to say it while waiting for the time. Although she still did not have the right words to say, she knew she had to tell Navarro that what he wanted to happen was a great sin that they should never commit. She wanted to fulfill her mission from the very start that she would be a good influence on Navarro, revealing the truth and sharing the Word with him, not allowing him to pull her down.

She started preparing herself around three in the afternoon, not only physically, but also emotionally and mentally. She wanted herself to be able to understand and accept whatever would happen in the conversation. Whether the outcome would be positive or negative, she was preparing herself to apply the art of acceptance. She kept telling herself not to control the situation but to accept it if Navarro couldn't really understand her. The worst thing that could happen was if their relationship had to end instead of trying to solve and create a firm foundation. She did not want to control and dictate to Navarro what he should do. She thought, if it would not really work, again, maybe it was not really the Father's will—or, as what the secular world claimed, not meant to be.

Five o'clock in the afternoon.

A familiar body structure was sitting on one bench in the park when Abiah arrived. She slowly and nervously walked towards that person, the one she loved. The person out of many who reached for her heart and opened its closed door for a romantic relationship. The man who made her believe that someone could be sweet, loving, and caring. The same man who was at that moment breaking her heart into pieces because he was desiring something that was not right.

She walked straight, whispering to her inner self to be brave, firm, and strong. As she reached the bench, she was standing behind Navarro. She tapped his shoulders, which made him look back. Abiah gave him a little smile, but Navarro kept a straight face. She then walked around the bench to sit beside her boyfriend. Aside from the space gap that was between them, there was another gap that made the surroundings very cold—the truth that something about the two of them did not match: their principles.

"Uhm." Abiah killed the awkward silence. "How are you these past days?"

"Good," Navarro answered shortly. "You?"

"Ah—I'm good... I guess." Abiah gave a forced smile.

Abiah was looking at the ground while talking to him as Navarro was staring into the far distance like he was not really listening, but rather, daydreaming.

They were once again surrounded by deafening silence.

When Abiah finally had the courage to be straightforward and tell what was on her heart and mind, she heard Navarro starting to utter words.

“So what are we here for?” he casually and coldly asked.

“We are here to talk about the problem, our problem,” Abiah calmly responded. “What’s the problem?” she asked.

Navarro sarcastically giggled. “No. What’s the problem, Abiah? What’s your problem?” he said ruggedly.

Abiah was shocked for a while, but she quickly regained herself because she knew she had to or else nothing would happen with the conversation. “What do you mean, Navarro? Did I hear it right? What is MY problem?”

Navarro gave her a sharp stare. “You heard it right,” he said, still with a low, cold voice.

“Navarro, I can’t believe you said that. This is not just my problem, Navarro and I don’t want to say it is just yours, either. But obviously, that’s what you are showing me right now. You have a problem. I have mentioned to you already so many times that I do not like it when you are asking me to sleep with you because I will never do it. But what do you always do? You never fail to ask me.” Abiah tried her best to be calm and not let her emotions affect what she wanted to say.

“No, Abiah, you always push me away. That’s how I see it. And if we ask people around us right now, they will surely agree with me,” Navarro said in defense of himself.

“Navarro, I did not push you away, nor am I pushing you away right now. I just want you to understand that what you want is immoral.” Abiah started facing Navarro to explain her point well.

Navarro shook his head with a grin on his face, not accepting what Abiah was telling him.

“You know that premarital sex is wrong, right? And my actions also tell you that I don’t like it. Only husband and wife can fondle each other, not just any couple like us. But why do you always make a way for us to do it?” Abiah continued. “I know you might be telling yourself right now that I am proving that I don’t love you. But, no, it’s the other way around. I love you, I love you, Navarro. I really do, and that is why I am showing temperance and self-control.”

“It doesn’t make sense, Abiah. If you see that I am a bad person, you are free to leave me now,” he carelessly expressed. “You always tell me that. You always tell me what to do. Go to church, join this and that. I did those things because I love you. But why is it that when I am the one telling you to do things, you always reject it? You want to control this relationship, do you? Abiah, do you really love me?”

The words that came out from Navarro’s mouth created a huge question mark inside Abiah’s head. Things were revealed; things were exposed.

“Navarro, you should’ve done those things for yourself, not for me. You should’ve followed what I said because of the relationship you have with the Lord, not with me.” Abiah almost cried while explaining, but she did not, although tears were already around her eyes.

“It was always all about that, Abiah. Everything was always wrong. It’s all because you are an angel, and you want me to become one as well. Aren’t you getting tired, Abiah?” he proudly questioned.

“Oh, no,” Abiah expressed disappointment for all the words that Navarro was saying. “Navarro, if you just listen to me, if you just allow me to explain things to you, if you open your heart for the One who’s knocking on it, you will understand. You will completely accept what I am talking about.”

“I am so tired of this truth you are talking about, Abiah. You are making things so complicated when in fact you can just say that you don’t want me and that is why you always push me away. You know, when you told me that the very first time around, I shouldn’t have expected anything from you.”

Abiah shut her mouth. She really didn’t know how to communicate with a person who neglected and closed his mind to everything that she had to say, a person who just listened to what he wanted. She began questioning herself, if she was to blame in this situation. While there were a lot of things that were popping inside her head, Navarro continued talking.

“I don’t want to hear about that anymore, Abiah. This is our relationship, not other people’s. Here is the case: I always do what you want; I follow what you say. I am just requesting one thing—ONE THING, Abiah... but you never wanted to give it to me. I will ask you one more time. You can take it, or leave it, and we’ll both move on.”

Abiah kept quiet and just listened to Navarro.

“Now, Abiah, for the last time—one last time. Do you want to? Can you do it with me? Can you make me happy?”

Abiah was left speechless while looking straight at Navarro after he said that.

Chapter Eighteen

The tension between Abiah and Navarro became worse after Navarro said those things. Navarro looked firm and strong like he would never regret what he just said, while Abiah was obviously hurt because of the offending words. Abiah sat properly, not facing Navarro anymore while looking at a far distance.

She took a deep long breath before saying, “I didn’t mean to offend you, if that’s what you felt during that time. I can only be sorry if you misinterpreted the things I did. But sorry to burst your bubble, Navarro, because I will never apologize for doing those things. I know you are frustrated that you will never hear me say that I am sorry for choosing to refuse your requests.”

Abiah closed her eyes before continuing. She knew that after uttering the words she wanted to say, she could never take it back anymore. But the thought of doing the right thing was pushing her to be brave and frank.

She opened her eyes and looked at Navarro, who was looking away. “And if you are giving me an ultimatum right now to take your offer or leave you... Navarro, look at me.” Navarro panned his head towards Abiah and caught her brave-looking eyes. “I will not regret to leave you.”

Navarro did not react. He kept looking at Abiah’s eyes for few seconds before giggling and looking away from her.

“Navarro, I am not joking,” Abiah said seriously.

“I am not joking either.” He slouched, sitting comfortably like he was not engaging in a serious conversation. “So is that what you want?” He hid his face—looking down at the ground—because he could not hide the hurt and sadness that he was feeling at the moment.

“What do you mean, this is what I want, Navarro?” Abiah was looking at him, waiting for her boyfriend to look at her.

“This. This break up?” he started to speak in a soft, low voice.

“Navarro, if you will continue to go beyond my limits, if you will continue to disrespect me, if you will continue to devalue my purity, I will... I must say we should end this relationship,” Abiah wholeheartedly told him.

“Okay.”

Abiah was shocked with what Navarro said. He was willing to break up with her. So he would rather choose to end the relationship than change his mind set on going beyond her limitations? Honestly, Abiah was disappointed knowing that.

“Do you want to be alone and think about things before we make our final decision?” Abiah offered, because she herself wanted to think, talk to her parents, and to spend time with God.

Navarro nodded slowly, “Sure.”

Abiah took a long, deep breath while trying her best not to shed a tear. “Okay. I’m going.” She stood up.

Navarro looked at her and offered, “Do you want me to drive you home?”

“No, Navarro. I prefer walking at the moment. Besides, my house is a stone’s throw away. Thank you for the offer. Take care.” She started walking away before Navarro could even say a word. “I need this. I need this,” she whispered to herself.

When she knew that she was already far from Navarro, her eyes started to well up and tears started to fall like they knew it was already safe to cry.

She started sobbing like a lost child in the market. Her feet were uncontrollable. They were moving so fast, like she was a thief and the police were chasing after her. She did not stop walking until she saw a bench far from the road. She sat to take a rest and continued crying. Her uncontrollable emotions made her think of different things.

I never knew that there’s more painful heartbreak than receiving a low grade in school. Now I can completely understand why my parents advised me to enter a relationship only after college or when I am already prepared, not when I am bored and just want one when all my friends have theirs. I thank myself for choosing to focus on my studies when I was young because I cannot imagine myself crying my heart out instead of reviewing for tomorrow’s periodical exam.

I thought—I thought, Navarro is the one, the one the Lord has set for me. I thought I found the man whom I will marry. He’s indeed a loving, caring, and understanding person, a gentleman, full of surprises, a man of his words and a man of wit and intelligence. I never imagined that we would be in this kind of situation. Why does he have to do those insensitive things to me?

I expected too much—I expected that he was growing strong in his faith. I assumed that he was learning from the sermons he heard each week, from the prayers we made, and from the things I said. I anticipated that he would stay the same and would be a person I could be proud of telling the people around me—a person who was not a

believer only because of our relationship, but a true believer. I assumed that I will end up cooking for him and our children in the future.

Now, my heart is breaking into pieces. I am broken, knowing that he will choose to stay away from me rather than change his bad habits. Where did I go wrong? Was I strict enough? Is doing the right thing a wrong decision? I know. I know that people will blame me if we part ways because I am an old fashioned lady. I am someone who can only use my brain in school but surely cannot think well in life.

Abiah felt she came back to reality when her phone started ringing. She took her phone from her bag and saw that someone was calling.

Mom calling...

She had to calm herself to be unobvious that she was crying. She wiped her tears like her mom would see her through a voice call. The phone continued ringing until she answered it when she thought she was ready.

“Hello, Abiah? Where are you darling? It’s already almost seven o’clock.”

She immediately looked at her surroundings and realized that it was already dark. She did not even notice the time.

“Hello? Abiah? Is this you, Darling?” her mom kept saying.

“Mom,” she responded as a confirmation.

“Darling, why didn’t you tell us you were leaving? You made me and your dad worried. Where are you?”

Abiah couldn’t talk. She felt her mouth went dry as she was trying her best to keep from making a sob.

“Darling? Can you hear me? Aren’t you coming home yet?” her mom repeatedly asked.

Abiah closed her eyes and tried her best to speak without sounding like she just cried. She cleared her throat before speaking. “I’m on my way home, Mom,” her voice cracked.

“Are you okay, Darling? Are you crying? What happened to you?”

“I’m—I’m okay, Mom. I’ll see you in a bit.” She ended the call to stop her mom from asking further questions.

While walking, she felt like she was dragging herself home with every step she took. Everything was so hard for her at that moment.

“What happened to you?! Honey, please get a glass of water!” Abiah’s mom said as she opened the door for Abiah. “Were you harmed? Who did this to you?! We can call the police!” Her mom was panicking as she saw her child looking very weak and pale while crying.

Abiah’s mom assisted her towards the living room to take a seat. She also quickly ran towards where the box of tissue was located, took some, and gently wiped the tears on her daughter’s cheeks. Abiah’s dad approached them with a glass of water in hand.

After Abiah drank the water, she gave her parents a forced smile before she spoke a word. “I am fine, Mom and Dad.”

“What are you saying, Abiah? Look at yourself. You are obviously not fine,

Darling!” her mom said, almost crying as well.

Her father quickly searched for anything that could be hurting on Abiah’s body.

“Calm down, Mom, Dad,” she said while sobbing. “I was not harmed. I was not hurt physically. You can check, I don’t have any wound or bruise on my body.”

“What happened to you then?” her father worriedly asked.

Abiah tried her best to calm down first before exposing what happened and what might happen to her in the coming days. When there were no more tears on her face, she started telling her parents what they needed to know.

Her mom was completely shocked by Abiah’s revelation. She saw Navarro as a gentleman, a very kind and upright man, but it was the other way around based on what her daughter said. Like most mothers usually do to protect their children, she wanted to talk to Navarro. She wanted to teach Navarro a lesson and tell him that the things going on inside his head were completely corrupted.

“Where is he right now?” Abiah’s mom loudly asked.

“Mom, please... let’s not do this,” Abiah pleaded.

“Honey calm down. All things are under control,” Mr. Fontinilla was assuring his angry wife.

“We should not just sit down here, Honey.” Mrs. Fontinilla complained.

“We are not just sitting down here. We are going to fix things. But we are not going to make it worse by doing unnecessary actions, okay?” he explained. “So, Abiah, what do you plan to do now?” her father calmly but seriously asked.

Abiah looked at her dad with tears in her eyes before looking down at her tangled fingers. She breathed deeply before saying, “I don’t exclude breaking up with him in my choices to solve the issue, but I want the two of us to think properly after we knew what each other’s thoughts and feelings are. Personally, I want to have my quiet time to know if my thoughts are still right or already wrong.”

“Okay, Darling, I suggest that you take a rest first. Have your quiet time so you can think properly. Then talk to us before doing the things you decide to do, so we can guide you. We don’t want to dictate what you should do but we will correct you.” Her father stayed calm. He knew that anger or hatred was not the answer in the situation. He was not really worried much about it, since he sensed that his strong daughter knew exactly what to do. All he wanted to do was to talk to Abiah before she did her next move.

While her father was composed, her mother still wanted to talk to Navarro about what he did. So Mr. Fontinilla tried to calm her down. “Talking to Navarro at the peak of her emotions is a bad idea,” he thought.

“Honey, it’s okay. We don’t have to talk to him right now. Abiah can handle the situation. She clearly knows what to do. She is a very smart lady. The important thing is that we are with her in this journey. She is Abiah, ABIAH.” Her father placed his arms around the back of his wife’s shoulder to keep her calm and assure her that Abiah was not in trouble.

Abiah ate dinner and went back to her room. After preparing herself for bed, she sat down at her desk. She opened her Bible and found herself reading about Joseph and Potiphar’s wife in Genesis 39. She really could not focus. The blissful moments she had had with her boyfriend kept coming back to her. She could see his smiles, his laughter, the way he held her hand, even the way he was being so sweet to her. She was clearly

being distracted, but she went on and read even though she did not understand what she was reading. However, one verse caught her attention. It was the only verse that she understood.

“She caught him by his cloak and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.”

At that point in time she clearly knew what to do. She recognized that she had to run away even before something else could happen. She suddenly had a clear vision of how to respond to the situation. Although she was still feeling gloomy and bad about what was happening, she found the answer that she already knew but was alluding her in this time of confusion.

Chapter Nineteen

Seven thirty in the morning.
Soulful Snaps Office.

Abiah went on with her daily lifestyle. “Well,” she thought, “This is how life should be. Whatever happens, *life must go on*. Do not let the bad days drag you down or paralyze you from doing what you must do.” With regards to Navarro, she had not met him yet, three days after the conversation they shared at the park. Nevertheless, she already felt a bit better because of focusing on herself and because of the continuous alone time she had.

It was another workday. She stopped by a bakeshop in their subdivision to buy her favorite garlic bread toast. As soon as she arrived in the office, Lyn greeted her and vice versa. Abiah asked Lyn to make coffee for her, and her assistant did so. When the cup of coffee was already on her hand, she enjoyed it with the still warm garlic bread toast she had bought.

She was savoring her seven-in-the-morning breakfast in the office. It was a perfect moment to start the day for her. Before she had her last bite of the garlic bread toast, she heard her phone ting. She did not plan to check it until it made a bell sound once more. She wiped and sanitized her hands with alcohol before holding her phone. She was surprised, happy, and nervous all in one as she saw Navarro’s name on her cellphone screen.

She quickly typed her phone password to check what her boyfriend said.

From: Navarro

Good morning, Abiah.

Are we going to talk? It’s been three days.

Abiah paused for a while after reading the message. She knew she was ready to face Navarro. She was assured that she was already brave enough to express her feelings and thoughts to her boyfriend. Abiah always thought about what she was going through and would be going through at the time she and Navarro would talk to each other. It was not and would never be easy, but she knew she could face it. She knew she was given the courage and the wisdom to face the problem.

Her phone pinged once more.

From: Navarro

Today or on your most available time. Thanks.

She did not bother informing Navarro that she was ready... emotionally, physically, and intellectually ready to talk to him.

To: Navarro

Sure. Today is fine.

She did not wait for Navarro's response. She turned on her computer and started answering e-mails while waiting for the newborn photo shoot in the studio to start at nine o'clock. However, when she was about to open one e-mail, her phone beeped again, so she decided to communicate with Navarro first.

From: Navarro

Okay. Shall we go somewhere else? Coffee shop? Mall?

To: Navarro

Talking in my office will be fine.

From: Navarro

Okay then. See you at five o'clock.

To: Navarro

Noted.

Abiah continued the day without any worry about what was going to happen. She was not bothered at all. Rather she felt at ease and confident that, whatever would happen, she was not fighting alone.

The day went on, and she was able to finish all she had to do for the day. She even answered e-mails from time to time and talked to a few clients on the phone.

It was four forty-five, and she was already waiting for Navarro's appearance. She did not know how she had been able to function well the whole day, but she was grateful for that. She was happy that she had lessened overthinking and negativity in her system.

While waiting for Navarro, she leaned her back against the swivel chair and closed her eyes. She uttered, *"Take control of me. Be in the center of this conversation, my Father. Allow me to speak well and do what is right. Don't let my emotions take over. Control me. Control me."*

She spent a few more minutes in that position with her eyes still closed until she heard three slow knocks on the door. She sat properly, cleared her throat, and allowed the person to enter. "Come in."

The door slowly opened, and Navarro's figure showed. Abiah checked the wall clock and saw that it was exactly five o'clock in the afternoon. She stood up and greeted him with the casual smile that she always gave everyone. "Hello."

Navarro nodded and gave her a sad smile, “Hi, Abiah.”

“Take a seat.” Abiah initiated by walking towards the receiving area of her office.

Navarro sat down on the loveseat couch while watching Abiah approaching him. Abiah did not think twice about sitting on the armchair in front of him instead of sitting adjacent to Navarro. This made the other silently laugh sarcastically.

“How are you?” Navarro asked her, while he was looking directly into her eyes.

Love was still evident in Abiah’s eyes; she was aware of that. Looking at the person in front of her at that moment made her sad that they had to be in that kind of situation. Her smiles could not hide what she was truly feeling because whatever had happened, whatever mistakes the guy repeatedly made, the care, concern, and most especially love did not fade away. She knew eventually she would not feel anything anymore, but she had to take it one step at a time.

“Well, the day was good and very productive. I completed all the tasks I had to do for Soulful Snaps, and I feel so happy about it.” She tried her best to really look glad while looking at Navarro.

“How about outside of work? How are you, Abiah?” he questioned. He was trying his best to get the answer he wanted from Abiah.

“You mean how about the... us?” she straightforwardly clarified.

Navarro just gave her a nod, still not breaking his eye contact with her.

“Well... of course there’s pain in here.” She pointed her heart. “But, it’s okay. I’m still fine. I still feel okay,” she said, smiling. “How about you?”

Navarro gave her a deep sigh. “Well, I wanted to fix things with you.” He paused for a while, looked at his shoes like he was thinking of what to say next. “You know how much I love you, right?”

Abiah nodded her head. “I know.”

“I really love you, Abiah,” he emphasized.

This made Abiah take a long sigh, “Navarro.” He tilted his head up, looking at the beautiful face in front of him. She continued, “Are you really ready for this commitment?”

“I am, Abiah,” he said without thinking twice. He really was. Abiah felt it. She knew he was telling the truth.

Abiah did not break the eye contact they shared. “But, Navarro, commitment is not just all about love.”

He wrinkled his forehead. “What do you mean, Abiah?”

“Well, it is more than that love you feel for me. It is also about where that love came from. I believe if that love came from the right source, commitment will also revolve around respect, understanding, and everything that’s in between.”

Navarro’s glares started to look strong and intense. “Abiah, I also believe that love and commitment are not selfishness.”

“Exactly, Navarro. Selfishness. We don’t do things just because we want to do them.” She raised her shoulders before continuing, “We are in a relationship; we are partners, right? Then we should make mutual decisions when we do things together. We are not going to force one another.”

Navarro gave her a blank stare like he always did. He did not respond to what she said, so they remained quiet for a while.

“What are you thinking right now?” Abiah tried to break the cold ice surrounding

the both of them.

“I don’t know if this is just me.” He paused, slowly shaking his head from left to right. “I see that you can’t sacrifice to make me happy.”

Abiah giggled, “Navarro, I wanted to make you happy.” She scratched her head before letting out another disappointed sigh, “But is it the only way I could make you happy?”

“You should understand that I need it. I was just asking you something that is normal. It is human nature, Abiah,” Navarro sadly explained.

“Navarro, I already told you my sentiment about doing that. I said, I am doing that after marriage. I told you that I don’t want you making a way or asking me about taking my purity while we are still in the boyfriend-girlfriend stage.”

“I can’t believe you, Abiah,” he said, very disappointed at Abiah’s point. “Are you just testing my patience? Are you trying to see when will I give up?”

“Hmm. Sorry, Navarro. I am not. As long as I am just your girlfriend, I will wholeheartedly turn my back on those things,” she genuinely explained.

Navarro chuckled a fake one. “Tough lady.”

“I don’t want this conversation to just go around the bush,” Abiah expressed.

“What do you want to happen then?” Navarro questioned her. “Do you want us to break up because we don’t have a united decision?”

Abiah looked so tired talking about the matter over and over again. “I think we both need to fix ourselves first. Well, I’m not telling you that you’re the only one at fault. I know that I, too, made mistakes, and I want to improve myself.”

He looked very sad, but he was trying to give Abiah a strong and firm reaction. “Are you sure, Abiah?”

“Well, Navarro, just thinking about us not having the same mindset or belief or principle in life is already a huge problem for me. I can’t force you to change yours, and you can never force me to change mine either.”

Navarro kept quiet.

“I won’t ask you to take me as I am or leave me.” Abiah gave him a genuine smile. “Navarro, I am leaving this relationship.”

“What?” Navarro opened his eyes wide in shock. “Abiah, what? Am I hearing it right?”

She nodded, “You know, I thought this is for our own good. Navarro, this will give you the freedom to find someone who could make you *happy* the way you want and me to absorb the lessons this relationship gave.”

They were still sharing eye contact when Navarro started to have teary eyes. Abiah also started welling up. “You know I love you, Navarro. I am doing this because I love you and I love myself. I hope you always remember that commitment is not just about the love you share with the other person.”

Navarro never spoke a word. He was hiding between his hands, which were covering his face while his elbows were on top of his knees.

“Navarro, I will pray for you. I will pray that you change your conviction and how you see things in life. Purity is very important and must be taken seriously.”

Navarro did not give her any reaction. They both remained silent until Navarro had the courage to say a word. “Okay. Thank you for being honest, Abiah. I am sorry for offending you. As I told you, it is human nature.”

Abiah's inner self was giggling, thinking about how he was still trying to defend himself. Well, she could not do anything about it, "I am sorry too, Navarro. I am sorry for not giving you what you want. I can't be that." She smiled.

They spent a few more minutes being quiet until Abiah saw that it was already almost eight in the evening.

"Do you want to tell me anything else?" she asked him.

"I just want one more favor," he sighed. "Can I drive you home for the last time?" Abiah agreed.

When they were already near the Fontinilla residence, Abiah thought, *"I know this is going to be the last time I'll be in this car. The last time I will see him in this subdivision. The last time I will be this close to him. It is so hard. I still love him, but I have to do this. I have to stand for what is right. I will not go with the flow. I am willing to be broken hearted as long as I follow what my Father says."*

She opened the door of the passenger's seat and banged it carefully to close the door. She bent down a bit to see the person she loved, for the last time.

It was so hard for her, but she uttered the words, again, for the last time.

"Goodbye, Navarro."

"Goodbye, Abiah."

She turned around, and her tears fell down instantly as soon as she heard the car drive off. She was hurt.

Chapter Twenty

Abiah could not stop herself from sobbing as soon as she entered their house. She wanted to look fine in front of her parents, but she was feeling so weak and sad. She was wondering why she felt that way when in fact she wanted it, she initiated it. Her parents approached her to console her. They did not say a word because they already knew. Abiah had told them beforehand about her decision, and they supported her. They didn't want to add to what she was emotionally feeling at that moment, so they let her feel that her they were there for her. Most especially they wanted her to go through the process and not disregard her emotions.

Abiah did not say a word; she just cried her heart out and became transparent to her parents—that was what she was feeling at that moment. She was still sobbing after an hour of crying, but she managed to give a forced smile. She wiped her tears and excused herself from her parents. She knew she needed to take a rest. It had been a physically and emotionally—well, literally, a very exhausting day. Mr. and Mrs. Fontinilla hugged her tight before allowing her to leave. Her parents were really worried, but they also knew it was better than seeing their only child suffer from a toxic relationship.

Abiah took a warm shower and prepared herself for bed. She wanted to distract herself from what was happening. She wanted to read a book, continue watching the series she was into, or whatever—as long as she could forget what just happened. But as soon as she sat on her desk chair, she started crying again. She began talking to God expressing how hurt she was.

She said, *"I don't know why I feel this way. I was the one who wanted this in the first place, right? Why do I feel like this? I am a hundred percent sure that You are with*

me, my Father, but I can't help it. Why are these tears falling? Why is this heart so hurt? Lord Jesus, please help me. My Father, please heal me. Please take the pain away. Please help me see the good in this situation rather than focus on what my emotions are telling me. Please, Lord, control me. Please, oh please."

Abiah wasn't even aware that she arranged herself in bed while still praying and telling the Lord how hurt she was. In no time, she fell asleep asking the Lord to be with her.

It was six o'clock in the morning when she woke up feeling so weary. She quickly told her assistant that she would not be able to work that day. She knew herself that she needed rest. She had been focused on her work, so she thought she deserved a day for herself. She went down to the kitchen, prepared tea for her breakfast, and went back to her room quickly.

She found herself staring outside her bedroom window. She saw a woman with a little boy walking along the street. She remembered the children in the orphanage who expressed how much they loved her. Abiah also quickly remembered Raphael, the little boy who talked to her before leaving the last time she was at the orphanage. The little boy's sweet, small voice echoed inside her head saying, *"I admire you because you are smart, you love and pray for us, and you tell us that we should always do the right thing. You will stay the same, right?"*

She had no idea why she was remembering that. The boy admired her for being smart, and loving, for praying for them and reminding them that they should do the right thing. She repetitively uttered those words without knowing what it meant.

"You will stay the same, right? You love and pray for us, and you tell us that we should always do the right..."

She paused for a while, and she realized she used to tell the children to always do the right thing. There was a sudden pinch of happiness in her heart. She recognized that she did not disappoint them; she did not frustrate Raphael. Telling them that they should always do the right thing was good advice, but being able to apply "doing the right thing" to herself personally even though it hurt at a whole new level—it was being a perfect example for the children. She realized she would be more confident to tell them that they must always be moral in a Christian way. She was not aware that she was already releasing a small smile.

"There's always good in everything that's happening. Thank you, Lord."

Abiah took small steps forward. She went back to her usual daily routine—working with the e-mails and shoots, attending her cell group, participating in church activities, visiting the children in the orphanage, bonding with her parents, taking good care of and sometimes pampering herself, and such. There were still times when she remembered Navarro, but she dismissed the thought. She knew that there was love, but then again, being in a relationship was not just about the love people felt for each other. She knew that Navarro would always have a small space in her heart. She never denied it because Navarro taught her a lot of things. Because of her relationship with Navarro, she learned that she could be firm. It hurt, yes, but her heart was more than happy to know that she loved the Lord more than anything or any person in this world. She kept on praying, not only for her healing, but also for Navarro's recovery from what happened.

As an action to help herself move on, the things in her office were repositioned to have a fresh or new vibe, and it was helpful. She always made herself productive and

worthwhile instead of being stagnant and useless while thinking of the past. It was a great help that her parents talked to her and gave her advice until she fully recovered.

Months after...

Abiah was scheduled to share a message with the cell group she belonged to during the month of February, the month of love. When she was informed about it she did not know what to share. She was going through the Bible to discover the perfect message to share when she thought, "Why not share what she learned from the heartbreak she had?" She would not go through the details since she had no intention to destroy Navarro's image with them. She was so nervous as she spoke, but the words came out clear to the group. She started sharing verses and what she thought of them until she shared her takeaways from her past relationship. She was nervous, but she knew it was the perfect time to share what God had taught her.

"One of the biggest lessons I learned was to be clear with your boundaries. Maybe one of my mistakes with regard to my past relationship was that I was not clear. I expect him to know my boundaries, but I really never talked to him about that in detail. But I thank God for helping me not go with the flow but to stand firm on my boundaries."

When the breakup was still fresh, she always told Jean that she should've made the boundaries crystal clear before saying, "YES," to Navarro. She thought maybe in that way, Navarro could've known if Abiah was the woman he really wanted. She learned that knowing the limitations of your partner would help you move the right way. It would help in being firm with the principle people have individually.

"This is true; being in a relationship is not a game. As a Christian, you should know your restrictions in everything, especially when it comes to sexual touch boundaries. You should know what you must be doing. You should be aware of what God wants you to do."

Since the breakup, Abiah studied the Word more to be fully aware of how she would set her boundaries, and this made her more secure with her conviction. She always told herself that the scripture said premarital sex is wrong. Only husband and wife can fondle each other, not just any couple.

"In a situation where you are tempted, I pray you will be like Joseph, who ran away from the woman who touched him the wrong way. It is difficult, but if you listen to the Lord's voice, it will be easy to say no."

Just as she always said, physical intimacy with the opposite sex before marriage is like scooping fire onto your lap and expecting nothing to happen. You are pulling yourself into temptation, which you should be running away from. Although the breakup with Navarro was so painful for her, she realized that it was better than to keep Navarro, whom she saw as a temptation, tagging along with her as long as she was in a relationship with him. She couldn't imagine herself still being with Navarro and always arguing with him about that matter.

"I just want to remind everyone that we don't know what will happen to us in the future. There is no one hundred percent assurance that your boyfriend right now will be your spouse until it happens, even though that is what we aim for. So, getting physically intimate you're your partner before marriage is nothing but plain foolishness."

Abiah was able to get their full attention as she was speaking from experience

wholeheartedly. There were times that she got teary, but she knew it was not because she had regrets but because she was happy it was over.

While she was speaking, someone interrupted her to ask a question. “How did you run away from that temptation, Abiah?”

She gave her a sweet smile before answering, “Well, I guess, the simple practical step to save you from that temptation is never to get into a confined space alone and lock yourself in with a person of the opposite sex. With that, other desires will not enter your mind. Instead, you kill them.”

Abiah was so happy that she was able to share the lessons from that experience.

“Well that person has been a part of my life, and I’m thankful to him for everything. We must always listen to what the scripture says like, ‘So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.’ Let the words in the Bible be our firm foundation.”

Abiah felt so happy with what she was able to share. She felt that she was able to do her part as a member of that care group. When they were talking to each other, some people shared that they also encounter what Abiah encountered. They said it was so difficult, but God’s love reigns. That was when she felt that she was not the only person on earth to experience that. There are more people who went through and would still go through it.

They were reflecting on the message and Abiah thought...

“Yes, Navarro and I failed to save the love we felt for each other. But it doesn’t mean that we are no longer worthy, because the love of God never fails. The true love we deserve is love that is right, love that is good, love that is Christlike.

“As a Christian who is in a relationship, we should do what is right. We should move out of the relationship if it is no longer healthy and most especially no longer serving the Lord. What I learned from my failed relationship was that the love we must have is moving. Saying, ‘I love you,’ ‘Take care,’ or ‘Eat well’ is not enough. You should learn to move out of that unhealthy relationship, move out from that relationship that is taking you away from the Lord, move out from that relationship that tempts, move out from that relationship that doesn’t prioritize your purity. Yes, you should move! Love obeys. Love respects. Love turns around. Love is not stagnant. Love moves.”

Epilogue

ABIAH’S P.O.V.

“I am not afraid of entertaining guys again, Jean. And I don’t think I am traumatized like what you’re saying. I am happy,” I explained to my best friend. Well, I really am not any of what she said. I am actually enjoying this moment of singleness that I am in.

Jean placed her hands below her chin while looking at me like she really doubted everything I said at the moment. She raised a brow at me before saying, “Abiah, did you already forgive Navarro?”

I cannot help but laugh at my best friend’s mini “investigation” right now. I remember after the break up, she kept on comforting me and telling me that I didn’t really need a man because I am strong. She also told me that my decision to separate from Navarro was a very wise decision. However, everything turned upside down months

after. This lady is really so amusing, huh.

I let out a chuckle before answering her question. “Well Jean, I did. I already forgave him. First of all, I forgave him the first time we met. When he said my shots were horrible... do you remember that?” I really can’t prevent myself from laughing because I remember how pissed I was at that moment. Imagine! Somebody just told me that he would never come back to my studio again.

“Oh, yah, I remember. That’s how you guys started, right?” she said, while chewing the last small piece of her grilled cheese sandwich.

I gave her a nod. “I was able to forgive him that time, even though it hurt. So if you were to ask me, I managed to forgive him as well, even before we decided to be apart—well, with His help.” I pointed my index finger up the ceiling before smiling.

“I see.” She took a deep breath before asking me another question out of curiosity. “So you don’t plan to get another boyfriend, Abiah?”

I sipped my sugar-free vanilla latte with soy milk before confidently answering her question. “Well, you know that we don’t just get a boyfriend. We really go through the process of getting to know the person. I think one thing I learned from my relationship with Navarro, that I can apply to my next relationship, is that you should know not only his principles but also vision in life. Is he just going to be with you at the present? Is he just saying he likes you because he wants something from you? What is his real intention? Where is the relationship heading?”

“Well, you will know everything when you are already in the relationship with the guy, right?” Jean told me like she was very sure.

“Hmm. Remember, Navarro and I went through the stage of getting to know each other? Well, I think that was the perfect time to learn those things. Go through deep details. But you are also right. You will get to know him MORE when you are already in the relationship. That’s what happened to us. The problem was I just knew shallow details about him when we were in that ‘getting to know each other’ stage.”

Jean stared at me like she was in front of a speaker in a seminar. Her curious eyes wanted to know more. “So, Abiah, do you still have the set of standards with regards to men?”

What a very nice question. “I actually don’t have a definite one, but as I told you, I learned from the past to really know what you are entering. Of course, the only sure thing is that I really want a Christian man. I think I focused on the thought that, ‘I prayed for him, so I know that the Lord is sending Navarro to me.’ I think I forgot to use the wisdom that the Lord gave me to really think if Navarro was the one. But of course, I know God allowed it to happen because He knew I will learn a lot, and hopefully Navarro learned many things, as well.”

Jean nodded her head like I answered all the questions in her mind.

“So you don’t have to always ask me the question about when I will have a boyfriend again. The perfect time will come. As of the moment, I want to maximize my single season because I know the right man should not be chased whenever you want. The right man will come.”

Honestly, what I experienced was really difficult because I truly loved my ex-boyfriend. I wanted to please him. I wanted him not only to be happy but also to be thankful that I was his girlfriend. So the day I heard him say that being in bed with me would make him happy, my broke. There was really a huge tendency to give in to what

he wanted because I loved him. I wanted to give back, so it was a struggle for me to always run away from him every time he asked for it. I didn't want him frustrated or disappointed, but the right thing prevailed.

If I were to be asked, I would advise the young people today to make sure they are capable of entering a relationship. What do I mean? It doesn't mean if you are in the right age, go for it. It means you are emotionally and mentally stable. Emotions really make you sway, and there's a chance that your mind will play with you. So if you are not stable, don't know your stand, don't know your conviction in the things you do, or don't have a firm faith, you will never know that you are already being dragged down because of the love that you feel towards the other person.

Know what you are doing so you are aware when is the right time to move. Move out of the toxic, dragging, negative relationship that you thought was all you needed. Yup, ladies and gentlemen, love moves.

###

Appendix B

PICTURES

Story Cover



Flyer for Promotion



Pictures Used Each Chapter

	
<p>Prologue</p>	<p>Chapter One</p>
	
<p>Chapter Two</p>	<p>Chapter Three</p>
	
<p>Chapter Four</p>	<p>Chapter Five</p>



Chapter Six



Chapter Seven



Chapter Eight



Chapter Nine



Chapter Ten



Chapter Eleven



Chapter Twelve



Chapter Thirteen



Chapter Fourteen



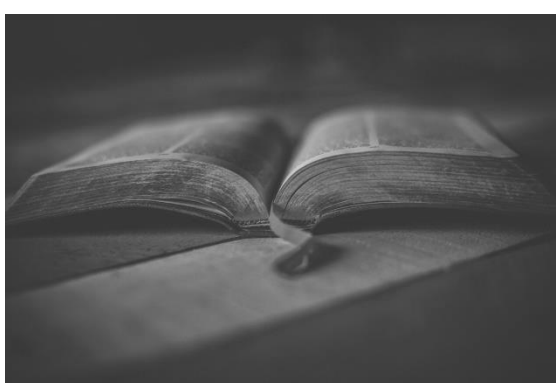
Chapter Fifteen



Chapter Sixteen



Chapter Seventeen



Chapter Eighteen



Chapter Nineteen



Chapter Twenty

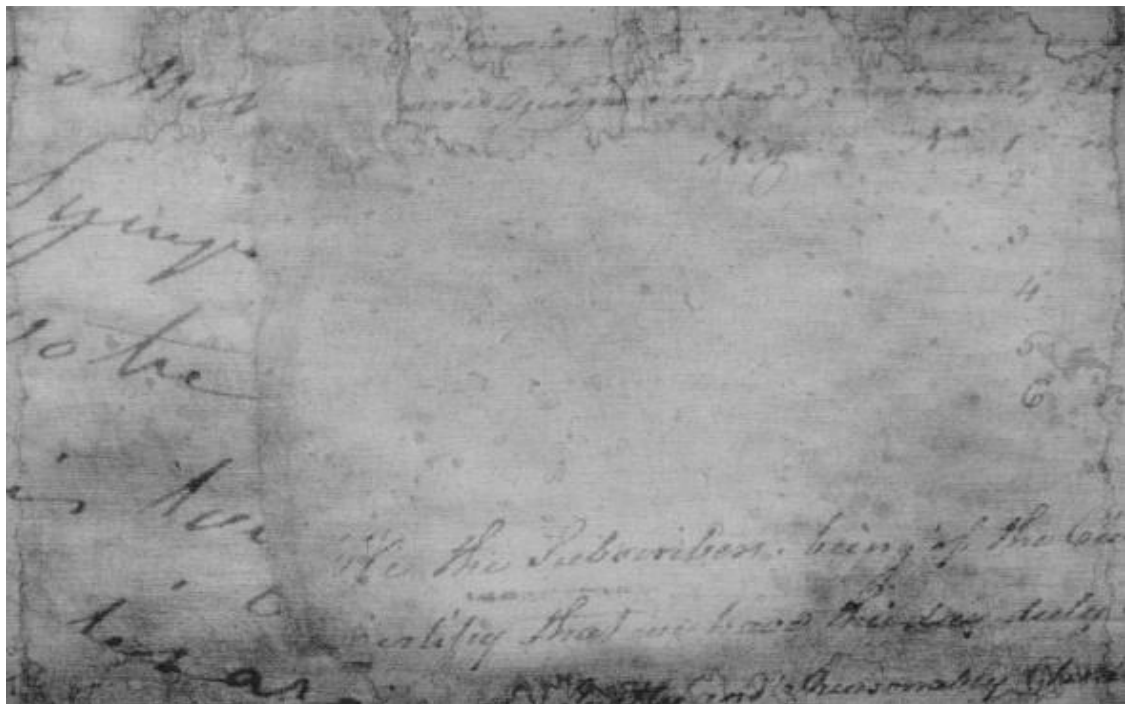


Epilogue

Wattpad Account Display Picture



Wattpad Account Header



Appendix C

VERSION HISTORY

Prologue

Abiah and Jean pass by a coffee shop while waiting for the rain to stop. Jean suddenly asks her best friend why she is not entertaining guys yet. Abiah explains herself but her best friend is not convinced until Jean asks her if it is because of the last relationship she's been to.

Chapter 1

(Flashback starts)

Abiah is introduced. Her small photo studio, Soulful Snaps is presented. Navarro schedules for her sister's studio prenuptial shoot in Soulful Snaps.

Chapter 2

Soulful staff prepare for the studio prenuptial shoot according to what was been discussed. Abiah and Navarro meet for the first time. While in the process of shooting, Navarro starts complaining about some things about the shoot, such as the poses, backdrop and the photographers. Abiah calmly talks to Navarro but the tension grows. The shoot ended with a frustrated Navarro and disheartened Abiah.

Chapter 3

Abiah is still disappointed with all the harsh words she heard from Navarro. She invites Jean for a date and expresses her hard feelings about the customer who pulled her down through the words he expressed. Her best friend jokingly tells her she might have a crush with him. Abiah cringes every time Jean mentions it. While still in the coffee shop, still expressing how she felt about the incident, her assistant calls and tells her about the invitation of a prominent company for a shoot and asks her to be the photographer personally. Abiah confirms as it is a great opportunity not only for her but the whole Soulful Snaps.

Chapter 4

Abiah and the team she brought with her to set up the location of the shoot prepare and travel to TCOM, the company that invited them. They are warmly welcomed and treated like VIPs.

Chapter 5

The shoot started late because of the CEO's son which happens to be, Navarro. Abiah is surprised but she chose to be professional. The shoot is successful as the bosses appreciated her shots. Navarro tried to forgiveness and triedd to ask Abiah to be friends with him. Abiah did not allow him to talk instead leaves.

Chapter 6

Abiah tells her best friend about the incident. Her best friend starts teasing her again but she brushes off the idea. While reading a book, Abiah receives an e-mail from

Navarro asking for forgiveness and invites her to talk to him in person. Shockingly, Abiah agrees to meet him to close the issue.

Chapter 7

Abiah meets Navarro. They both feel awkward at first but Navarro genuinely asks for forgiveness and Abiah wholeheartedly accepts the apology. They both agreed to be friends from that day on.

Chapter 8

Navarro visits Abiah in the office which made everyone surprised. Navarro expresses he was there because of his father's request to formally and personally invite Abiah to join them as an official photographer on the company's anniversary celebration. Navarro also took the opportunity to ask Abiah out, to hang out and get to know each other.

Chapter 9

After errands near Soulful Snaps, Navarro visits Abiah in her office once more but this time not for work purposes. He brings a bouquet of flowers for her. Navarro aimed to invite Abiah for dinner but she has to attend her Thursday cell group. She explains that her Thursday evenings are always occupied and cannot be changed or replaced with other commitments.

Chapter 10.1

Date day for Abiah and Navarro. It is their first time spending a long time with each other. Abiah feels nervous and excited at the same time since she feels this is her first time to go out with a guy with the intention of getting to know each other. Navarro brings her to a park away from the city. The park is nearby a lake so Navarro plans to bring Abiah there and teach her how to fish which is a first time experience for Abiah.

Chapter 10.2

REVISION: Abiah is surprised to find herself in a most famous photo museum in their place, a place she's never been to. Navarro proves how Abiah loves photography by the way she explains every picture to him. He sees how passionate she is and how she still wants to learn more. Abiah unknowingly teaches him how to take pictures.

Chapter 11.1

Navarro teaches her how to fly a kite because the park is wide and only few people visit the place. While they do the activities Navarro prepared, they unconsciously tell stories to each other where they learn deeper things about each other such as their family backgrounds. Abiah goes home before the sun bids goodbye.

Chapter 11.2

REVISION: After the date in the museum, Navarro brings Abiah to a Spanish restaurant which is another new place for Abiah. The restaurant has an overlooking of a lake with a bridge going to the middle part of the lake. After eating, they sat down on the

benches on the middle part of the lake where they shared their views and opinions about love.

Chapter 12

Months passed and their relationship continued. They date, Navarro goes to her office and brings something for Abiah they communicate and they still get to know each other. Navarro visits Abiah's office and offers to give her a ride home. He took that opportunity to ask Abiah to be his girlfriend and finally, Abiah says yes.

Chapter 13

Navarro asks Abiah to ditch the Thursday cell group to go out on a dinner date with him however, Abiah says she cannot and explains why she could not. As a result, they agreed that Navarro will fetch her after the cell group to still have a coffee date with Abiah. He waited but they ended up going to Abiah's residence to have some 'coffee time' with his girlfriend's parents.

Chapter 14

Abiah spent her birthday in the orphanage like the annual celebration she always has. The physical touch they do, such as holding hands and quick hug when they say goodbye were emphasized. Meanwhile, Navarro suggests an out-of-town celebration for the two of them to Abiah in which his girlfriend denied. She suggests an alternative instead.

Chapter 15

Navarro's grandmother celebrates her birthday so while sending Abiah home from her office, he invites her to celebrate with them. Abiah gladly confirms her attendance as she wants to see Navarro's relatives and most especially his grandmother. As soon as they reach Abiah's village, Navarro expresses his idea of having an overnight in their home—specifically in his room. Abiah declines once more.

Chapter 16

Navarro surprises Abiah with a hotel room reserved for the two of them and says, "I always follow you, can you follow me this time?" Shocked Abiah who feels disrespected says no and leaves.

Chapter 17

Because of Abiah's constant disagreement with what he wants, he starts getting cold. He feels that he is not enough and Abiah does not love him. Abiah tries to fix things but then, Navarro asks her for an overnight once more.

Chapter 18

The couple decides to give each other space to think about things. Abiah prays and asks God for wisdom and strength to do what is right. She also talks to her parents about the problem she is facing.

Chapter 19

Three days after deciding to give each other space, they agreed to meet at discuss about their relationship. Navarro goes to Abiah's office after working hours to talk to her. Unfortunately, Abiah breaks up with Navarro.

Chapter 20

Abiah is given an opportunity to speak in their cell group. She shares about her experience and tells them that, "Love obeys, love respects and love moves."

Epilogue

(Flashback Ends)

Back to the coffee shop. Abiah finally explains why she is not yet entertaining suitors.

Appendix D

PROCESS DOCUMENTATION

DECEMBER 2019

Week 1-2

1 to 13

- Conceptualization of the story: identification, structuring and development of plot, characters, story title and digital cover.
- Name of characters, places, story title and digital story cover were finalized

14

- Created a Wattpad account (bizarrenotes), made a story (Love, Moves), uploaded a cover picture and wrote the necessary information needed for the story
- Communicated to Ptr. Jordan about the promotion of the story after the prologue was posted

15

- Uploaded prologue

Week 3

16

- E-mailed the Wattpad link and story link to the panel
- Love, Moves ranked number 252 under #loveromance

17

- Uploaded Chapter 1

18

- Proofread Chapter 2

19

- Uploaded Chapter 2

20

- Proofread Chapter 3

21

- Uploaded Chapter 3

22

- Proofread Chapter 4

Week 4**23**

- Waited for negotiations and engagements

24

- Uploaded Chapter 5

25

- Proofread Chapter 6

26

- Uploaded Chapter 5

27**28****29**

Waited for negotiations and engagement from readers and wrote Chapters 7 and 8

Week 5**30****31****JANUARY 2020****1**

- Proofread Chapter 6 again

2

- Uploaded Chapter 6

3

- Proofread Chapter 7

4

- Uploaded Chapter 7

Week 6**5**

- Waited for negotiations and engagements

6

- Started writing Chapter 9

- 7**
- Continued writing Chapter 9
- 8**
- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- 9**
- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- 10**
- Proofread Chapter 8
- 11**
- Uploaded Chapter 8
- Week 7**
- 12**
- Waited for negotiations and engagements
 - Started writing Chapter 10
- 13**
- Continued writing Chapter 10
 - Proofread Chapter 9
 -
- 14**
- Uploaded Chapter 9
 - Started writing Chapter 11
- 15**
- Waited for negotiations and engagements
 - Continued writing Chapter 11
- 16**
- Waited for negotiations and engagements
 - Started writing Chapter 12
- 17**
- Waited for negotiations and engagements
 - Continued writing Chapter 12
- 18**
- Waited for negotiations and engagements
 - Started writing Chapter 13
 -

Week 8**19**

- Waited for negotiations and engagements

20

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Continued writing Chapter 13

21

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Started writing Chapter 14

22**23****24****25**

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Continued writing Chapter 14

Week 9**26**

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Continued writing Chapter 14

27

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Started writing Chapter 15

28

- Continued writing Chapter 15
- *Received a comment—Chapter two*
- *Received a comment—Chapter three (Writer replied)*
- *Received a comment—Chapter five (Writer replied)*
- *Received four comments—Chapter six*
- *Received a comment—Chapter seven (Writer replied)*
- *Received a comment—Chapter eight (Writer replied)*
- *Received a comment—Chapter nine (Writer replied)*

29

- Changed few details on Chapter 10 based on the negotiation made
- Proofread Chapter 10

30

- Uploaded Chapter 10
- *Received a comment—Chapter nine (Writer replied)*

31

- Waited for negotiations and engagements

FEBRUARY**1**

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Continued writing Chapter 15

Week 10**2**

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Continued writing Chapter 15

3

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Finished writing Chapter 15

4

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Started writing Chapter 16

5

- Changed few details on Chapter 10 based on the negotiation made
- Proofread Chapter 11
- *Received a comment—Chapter 10 (Writer replied)*

6

- Uploaded Chapter 11
- Started writing Chapter 17

7

- Continued writing Chapter 17
- Proofread Chapter 12

8

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Uploaded Chapter 12
- Started writing Chapter 18

Week 11**9**

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Continued writing Chapter 18

10

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Continued writing Chapter 18

11

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Continued writing Chapter 18

12

- Proofread Chapter 13
- Waited for negotiations and engagements

13

- Uploaded Chapter 13

14

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Continued writing Chapter 18

15

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Started writing Chapter 19

Week 12**16**

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Continued writing Chapter 19

17

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Finished writing Chapter 19

18

- Waited for negotiations and engagements

19

- Waited for negotiations and engagements

- 20**
- Proofread Chapter 14
- 21**
- Uploaded Chapter 14
- 22**
- Waited for negotiations and engagements
 - Started writing Chapter 20

Week 13

- 23**
- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- 24**
- Continued writing Chapter 20
- 25**
- Continued writing Chapter 20
 - Waited for negotiations and engagements
- 26**
- Waited for negotiations and engagements
 - Finished writing Chapter 20
- 27**
- Waited for negotiations and engagements
 - Proofread Chapter 15
- 28**
- Uploaded Chapter 15
- 29**
- Waited for negotiations and engagements
 - Proofread Chapter 16
 - *Received a comment—Chapter fifteen*

MARCH 2020

Week 14

- 1**
- Uploaded Chapter 16
 - Proofread Chapter 17

- *Received a comment—Chapter sixteen (Writer replied)*

2

- Uploaded Chapter 17
- Started writing Epilogue

3

- Proofread Chapter 18
- Continued writing Epilogue

4

- Uploaded Chapter 18
- Finished writing Epilogue

5

- Waited for negotiations and engagements

6

- Waited for negotiations and engagements

7

- Waited for negotiations and engagements

Week 15

8

- Waited for negotiations and engagements

9

- Waited for negotiations and engagements
- Proofread Chapter 19

10

- Uploaded Chapter 19

11

- Proofread Chapter 20 and Epilogue

12

- Uploaded Chapter 20
- Uploaded Epilogue
- *Received a comment—Chapter seventeen*
- *Received a comment—Chapter eighteen (Writer replied)*
- *Received a comment—Chapter nineteen (Writer replied)*

- Received a comment—Chapter twenty (Writer replied)
- Received a comment—Epilogue (Writer replied)

13

- Identified self as a researcher
- Evaluation started

14

Week 16

15

16

17

18

19

Evaluation, communicated with the evaluators, gathered and analyzed data

- Chapter Version History released

20

21

Week 17

22

23

24

25

26

Evaluation; Communicated with the evaluators, gathered and analyzed data

27


28 to April 04


- Evaluation ended

Appendix E

COMMENTS


Chapter Two




 **gazella_** ...
 Jan 28
 Geez so rude 😞 kudos to Abi for maintaining her composure. It's surely hard dealing with clients like him 😞
 Reply

Chapter Three





 **gazella_** ...
 Jan 28
 We all need a bestfriend like Jean 🤔
 1 Reply

 **bizarrenotes** ...
 Mar 19
 I know right!
 Reply


Chapter Five





 **gazella_** ...
 Jan 28
 The CEO's son staying outside his office just to approach Abiah...
 Coincidence? I think not 😞 Better luck next time, Navarro 🤔 you gotta book more photoshoots to see her again 🤔
 1 Reply


 **bizarrenotes** ...
 Mar 19
 Oops! Navarro, someone knows what you are doing!
 Reply


Chapter Six

 Leave a comment


 **gazella_** ...
Jan 28
Awwww u have a heart of gold ily
Reply


 **gazella_** ...
Jan 28
And btw, smooooth
Reply


 **gazella_** ...
Jan 28
Too cute to ignore!!!!!! He sent u an email, my friend. An email!!! 🤔❤️
Reply

 **gazella_** ...
Jan 28
I can only imagine Navarro's reaction upon seeing you flee, Abiah 🤔 i bet he's thinking about you a lot as well
Reply

Chapter Seven

 Leave a comment

 **gazella_** ...
Jan 28
Ooh chivalry is not dead 🤔
1 Reply

 **bizarrenotes** ...
Mar 19
Indeed!
Reply

Chapter Eight



Jan 28

He went to Soulful Snap's office to personally invite Abiah to the event when he could easily ask someone from the office to do that for him 🙄 or even send an email. oh boy you're head over heels 🙄

1 Reply



Mar 19

"I'm just a hardworking man." -Navarro

Reply

Chapter Nine



Jan 30

Can't wait for the next UD!!

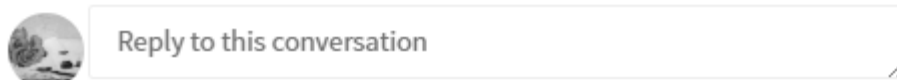
1 Reply



Mar 19

Follow me for notifications!

Reply



Jan 28

I think they should date in a museum!!! I feel like she would totally appreciate it if he brings her there. Girls love it when guys are attentive to their passion & interests. As for Abiah—art & photography. I'd also love to see them try new things which are out of their comfort zones 😊 Feel different emotions all at once. Excited to read the next part!!!! ❤️

1 Reply



Mar 19

Wow thanks for the suggestion. Watch out for the next update.

Reply

Chapter Ten



Leave a comment



_xkseish

...

Feb 05

Maybe they should also date away from the city and talk about personal things.

1 Reply



bizarrenotes

...

Mar 19

Thank you for that suggestion!

Reply

Chapter Fifteen



Leave a comment



_xkseish

...

Feb 29

Daily update pleaseeee

Reply

Chapter Sixteen



Leave a comment



_xkseish

...

Mar 01

Abiah next time he asks you again you should break up w him!!! No questions asked. I wish Navarro will change he's sweet but he should stop trying to take advantage 😞

1 Reply



bizarrenotes


...


Mar 19

:(


Reply


Chapter Seventeen


 Leave a comment

 **_xkseish** ...
 Mar 12
 Stubborn Navarro! Get your hands off Abiah!
 Reply


Chapter Eighteen


 Leave a comment


 **_xkseish** ...
 Mar 12
 I really feel Abiah's struggle. Be strong girl you got this!
 1 Reply

 **bizarrenotes** ...
 Mar 19
 #strongindependentwoman
 Reply

Chapter Nineteen

 Leave a comment

 **_xkseish** ...
 Mar 12
 I stan a strong woman! Heads up Abiah!
 1 Reply

 **bizarrenotes** ...
 Mar 19
 ❤️
 Reply

Chapter Twenty





 **_xkseish** ...
Mar 12
Love, Moves.
1 Reply

 **bizarrenotes** ...
Mar 19
Love truly moves.
Reply

Epilogue



 **_xkseish** ...
Mar 12
I'm so sad this story is only 20 chapters but thank you author. I was inspired to be like Abiah in times I will be tested.
1 Reply

 **bizarrenotes** ...
Mar 19
Thank you so much for reading Love, Moves 💙
Reply

Appendix F

LETTERS FOR INTERVIEW

Experts

Salutations of love and good will from our Lord!

I am Lorraine L. Perez enrolled in Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (APNTS) taking the program Master of Arts in Christian Communication and is currently working on my production thesis entitled Engaging Readership with Christian Literary Narrative on Wattpad.

In relation with the said thesis, a story was posted in the span of three months on the said free online storytelling website, Wattpad. As a next step of finishing the research, it is now in the process of evaluation. One of the methods of evaluating the narrative is an interview schedule or survey on experts or people who are involved in writing literature.

As one of the prominent figures in the said industry, I believe you will be able to help me evaluate the narrative objectively with your expertise and familiarity. Accepting this request will entail reading the twenty-chapter story posted on Wattpad before answering few questions that are fabricated for evaluation.

I hope you will be able to share some time to fulfil this intention. I am more than willing to have the interview or survey finished in your most convenient time from March 17, 2020 to March 27, 2020—Philippine time. You can reach me through responding to this message.

I am looking forward to your positive response regarding the matter. Thank you! May the Almighty bless you with more success and vigor health!

Sincerely yours,
Lorraine Perez

Readers:

Salutations of love and good will from our Lord!

I am Lorraine L. Perez enrolled in Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (APNTS) taking the program Master of Arts in Christian Communication and is currently working on my production thesis entitled Engaging Readership with Christian Literary Narrative on Wattpad.

In relation with the said thesis, LOVE, MOVES was posted in the span of three months on the said free online storytelling website, Wattpad. As a next step of finishing the research, it is now in the process of evaluation. One of the methods of evaluating the narrative is an interview schedule or survey on readers

As one of the readers who engaged with the story, Love, I believe you will be able to help me evaluate the narrative objectively. Accepting this request will entail reading the twenty-chapter story, if you haven't completed reading it yet, before answering few questions that are fabricated for evaluation.

I hope you will be able to share some time to fulfil this intention. I am more than willing to have the interview or survey finished in your most convenient time from March 17, 2020 to March 27, 2020—Philippine time. You can reach me through responding to this message.

I am looking forward to your positive response regarding the matter. Thank you! May the Almighty bless you with more success and vigor health!

Sincerely yours,
Lorraine Perez

Hobbyist:

Salutations of love and good will from our Lord!

I am Lorraine L. Perez enrolled in Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (APNTS) taking the program Master of Arts in Christian Communication and is currently working on my production thesis entitled Engaging Readership with Christian Literary Narrative on Wattpad.

In relation with the said thesis, LOVE, MOVES was posted in the span of three months on the said free online storytelling website, Wattpad. As a next step of finishing the research, it is now in the process of evaluation. One of the methods of evaluating the narrative is an interview schedule or survey on readers

As one of the readers who added, Love, Moves in your reading list, I believe you will be able to help me evaluate the narrative objectively. Accepting this request will entail reading the twenty-chapter story, if you haven't completed reading it yet, before answering few questions that are fabricated for evaluation.

I hope you will be able to share some time to fulfil this intention. I am more than willing to have the interview or survey finished in your most convenient time from March 17, 2020 to March 27, 2020—Philippine time. You can reach me through responding to this message.

I am looking forward to your positive response regarding the matter. Thank you! May the Almighty bless you with more success and vigor health!

Sincerely yours,
Lorraine Perez

Appendix G

QUESTIONS FOR PLOT

Thank you for accepting the invitation to evaluate the story *Love, Moves*. The questions are open-ended so it is highly suggested to expound your answers.

Thank you!

1. Was the story introduced efficiently allowing the readers to grasp the fundamental information needed in the narrative? Why?
2. Were the building of suspense and tension at the rising part of the narrative obviously anticipated? Why?
3. Including the events before and after the peak of the story, were the transitions of parts clear enough to indicated changes in plot? Why?
4. Did the fall out of climax reveal where the protagonist failed or succeeded with the mission she has been striving for? Why?
5. Did the conclusion justify the whole story? Why?

Appendix H

INTERVIEW ANSWERS

Expert's Answers

(Word file received via Facebook Messenger)

The questions are open-ended so please expound your answers.

Questions:

1. Was the story introduced efficiently allowing the readers to grasp the fundamental information needed in the narrative?

➤ The prologue and first chapter sufficiently creates a picture of who the main character is and what kind of world she lives in and/or what kind of life she lives, and they adequately present other key characters, except for the “leading man,” who must perforce appear later in the story. Moreover, the introductory chapters strongly imply that the story is going to be about a successful independent woman finally getting into a romantic relationship.

2. Were the building of suspense and tension at the rising part of the narrative obviously anticipated?

➤ Although the rising action was slow to peak, with the main conflict coming up only in Chapter 15 and suddenly climaxing in Chapter 16, it can be said that the suspense and tension were clearly built up in those chapters. In the preceding chapters, the other conflict seems to be whether Abiah would get into a relationship with Navarro, but it does not seem to be the key crisis in the story given that the denouement focuses on Abiah's decision to move away from that relationship and its effect on her. Alternatively, the climax might be Abiah breaking up with Navarro, and the events leading to it are also well-developed in the chapters before it.

➤ The identification of two possible climaxes, however, indicates that the central theme of the story is not thoroughly illustrated or played out in the narrative, and that makes the conclusion problematic. (See answer for Question 5).

*The question is a bit confusing, so I answered what I inferred it to mean (were the suspense and tension obviously built up?). If I misunderstood the question, please let me know; I can update my answer. 😊

3. Including the events before and after the peak of the story, were the transition of parts clear enough to indicate changes in the plot?

➤ Changes in the plot are immediately perceivable throughout the narrative via the division of the story into chapters, as well as the employment of appropriate transitional devices where necessary.

4. Did the fall out of climax reveal where the protagonist failed or succeeded with the mission she has been striving for?

➤ It sure did. ☺ There is no doubt in the denouement that the main character succeeded in her mission. Although she is initially, in Chapter 18, portrayed to be overwhelmingly distressed by the realization that she and her boyfriend do not share the same ideals and, therefore, cannot continue to have a harmonious relationship, she is eventually, in Chapter 19 onwards, portrayed as someone who has moved on with a positive outlook or attitude because she knows she has stood by her convictions and done what is right.

5. Did the conclusion justify the entire story?

➤ If the story were to be simplified into this—a Christian lady is pressured by her boyfriend into premarital sex but she refuses and stands her ground until the end—then it can be asserted that the conclusion logically follows from the premises laid out in the story.

However, I cannot confidently assert that the conclusion justifies the story, or that the story justifies the conclusion. For one, the core of the conclusion is to “move out from that relationship that is taking you away from the Lord,” but that central idea is not developed or even hinted at in the rising action, climax, and falling action portions of the story. An accompanying core idea conveyed in the final chapters is that “love moves” away from sin and towards obedience and respect. It is a lovely spin to the line popularized by a song, but I find that the protagonist’s decision to break up with the boyfriend who insisted on something that would cause her to sin is expected; nonetheless, how she came to that decision is not adequately played out in the rising action and climax.

In addition, the conclusion (particularly after the part where Abiah also prays for Navarro to heal after their break up), as a part of the narrative or as a narrative device, is superfluous because the reader already understands or can deduce most of the ideas its presents based on Abiah’s explanations for her refusal to engage in premarital sex.

*The suggestions for improvement are in small print because the survey/questionnaire does not call for it. ☺ Nevertheless, allow me to give some since I enjoyed reading the story and I think its potential can truly shine if:

✓ The conflict/s were more played up or made more vivid—for example, Abiah could perhaps give in to an intimate/inappropriate touch/kiss and feel unhappy instead of excited afterwards, or perhaps Abiah could be more downcast at her first break-up and maybe bitter

towards the Lord? Haha~ The idea is that if the main character refuses her boyfriend's advances throughout the story and not go through complex experiences and thought process as a result, then the conflict is vague, the protagonist is not so realistic or relatable, and the story can end up as merely a long anecdote for a sermon (presented in the conclusion paragraphs);

✓ The protagonist was characterized as undergoing a change (i.e. if she was a round character instead of a flat character);

✓ The important insights presented in the final chapters were made to be parts of Abiah's process of coming up with a decision to break up with Navarro or if they were incorporated in the rising action and climax of the story.

Hobbyist's Answers

(Answers received via Facebook Messenger)



Princess Key Alabanza

1. Was the story introduced efficiently allowing the readers to grasp the fundamental information needed in the narrative? Why?

Yes: The story gives a clear description of who Abiah is as a person, a friend, a daughter and what people think about her. Also, what she does for a living. Her passion is explained from how it started to the present time of the story.

2. Were the building of suspense and tension at the rising part of the narrative obviously anticipated? Why?

Yes: They were anticipated with the way Abiah becomes conscious when Navarro asks her to have sex with him. It gives a hint that something is going to happen because the idea is not acceptable to the heroine.

3. Including the events before and after the peak of the story, were the transition of parts clear enough to indicate changes in the plot? Why?

Yes: transitions were applied. It was clear enough to show that the plot is going through changes



Princess Key Alabanza

3. Including the events before and after the peak of the story, were the transition of parts clear enough to indicate changes in the plot? Why?

Yes: transitions were applied. It was clear enough to show that the plot is going through changes. This makes readers have a clear flow of thought while reading the story.

4. Did the fall out of climax reveal where the protagonist failed or succeeded with the mission she has been striving for? Why?

Yes: It was revealed that Abiah succeeded throughout her journey in the story. Her reflections and realizations show that she succeeded against temptation and immorality.

5. Did the conclusion justify the entire story? Why?

Both yes and no: It did because Abiah succeeded the mission she's striving for. She fought with temptation and avoided immorality that makes the conclusion justify the story. But it is also did not justify because the story was somehow

+ GIF 📷 Type a message...

5. Did the conclusion justify the entire story? Why?

Both yes and no: It did because Abiah succeeded the mission she's striving for. She fought with temptation and avoided immorality that makes the conclusion justify the story. But it is also did not justify because the story was somehow lacking when it comes to its plot. It took a hard time to take off and and this affected the following parts of the plot. It resulted to succeeding parts being squeezed with the remaining chapters and it affected the better conclusion the story could've had.

a message...

+ GIF 📷 Type a message...

Wattpad Reader's Answers (Answers received via Wattpad)

_xkseish

Yes because I saw the parts that Navarro insisting what he wants is a problem knowing that Abiah is a strong independent woman. That's why I see that every time he ask for a night with Abiah the tension gets bigger.

3. Including the events before and after the peak of the story, were the transition of parts clear enough to indicate changes in the plot? Why?

Yes the transitions were obvious I felt the change before the climax and after when they were still having a happy relationship until the problem came and when they broke up.

4. Did the fall out of climax reveal where the protagonist failed or succeeded with the mission she has been striving for? Why?

Yes because at the beginning Abiah's character is doing what is right and there are also parts in the story that she knows what she should do

Write a message...

2000

Send

_xkseish



Here!

1. Was the story introduced efficiently allowing the readers to grasp the fundamental information needed in the narrative? Why?

Yes I can say that because it made me imagine or get to know the main characters background very well including all the people involved to her.

2. Were the building of suspense and tension at the rising part of the narrative obviously anticipated? Why?

Yes because I saw the parts that Navarro insisting what he wants is a problem knowing that Abiah is a strong independent woman. That's

Write a message...

2000

Send

_xkseish

4. Did the fall out of climax reveal where the protagonist failed or succeeded with the mission she has been striving for? Why?

Yes because at the beginning Abiah's character is doing what is right and there are also parts in the story that she knows what she should do but she's confused and in the end she did what is right. That is why she succeeded the mission of doing what is right and standing firm on her principle like what she always say

5. Did the conclusion justify the entire story? Why?

Yes I think the conclusion justified the story because I expected that Abiah will break up with Navarro. I also thought that she will not follow what she believes because she fell in love. It did not happen but I think the conclusion justified the story.

Write a message...

2000

Send

Appendix I

TAG RANKINGS ON WATTPAD

December 15, 2019 Ranking

< Story Rankings

Love, moves.

Most Impressive Ranking

272 **loveromance**
out of 464 stories



January 21, 2020 Ranking

wattpad Browse ▾ Community ▾ Search Write ▾ **Go Premium** bizarrenotes ▾

< Story Rankings

Love, moves.

Most Impressive Ranking

870 **lovelife**
out of 6.8K stories

Other Rankings

# 33	christianlove	out of 185 stories
# 101	loveromance	out of 481 stories
# 16	navarro	out of 62 stories
# 6	christianlovestory	out of 23 stories

January 29, 2020 Ranking

wattpad Browse ▾ Community ▾ Search Write ▾ **Go Premium** bizarrenotes ▾

< Story Rankings

Love, moves.

Most Impressive Ranking

959 **lovelife**
out of 6.9K stories

Other Rankings

# 26	christianlove	out of 185 stories
# 4	christianlovestory	out of 23 stories
# 94	loveromance	out of 484 stories
# 15	navarro	out of 61 stories

February 07, 2020 Ranking

Love, moves.

Most Impressive Ranking

#837 christian
out of 13.3K stories



Other Rankings

#439 lovelife

out of 6.9K stories >

#783 photography

out of 11.8K stories >

#13 christianlove

out of 185 stories >

#62 loveromance

out of 484 stories >

#8 navarro

out of 60 stories >

#4 christianlovestory

Activate Windows
Go to Settings to activate Windows.

February 15, 2020 Ranking

Most Impressive Ranking

#272 christian
out of 13.3K stories



Other Rankings

#251 photography

out of 11.9K stories >

#860 couple

out of 27K stories >

#245 lovelife

out of 6.9K stories >

#30 loveromance

out of 489 stories >

#14 christianlove

out of 184 stories >

#6 navarro

out of 59 stories >

#3 christianlovestory

Activate Windows
Go to Settings to activate Windows.

February 21, 2020 Ranking

< Story Rankings

Love, moves.

Most Impressive Ranking

#24 christianlove
out of 184 stories  >

Other Rankings

#963 lovelife out of 6.9K stories >

#96 loveromance out of 493 stories >

#5 christianlovestory out of 23 stories >

#18 navarro out of 60 stories >

February 28, 2020 Ranking

< Story Rankings

Love, moves.

Most Impressive Ranking

#29 christianlove
out of 184 stories  >

Other Rankings

#4 christianlovestory out of 23 stories >

#103 loveromance out of 491 stories >

#19 navarro out of 60 stories >

March 12, 2020

< Story Rankings

Love, moves.

Most Impressive Ranking

108 christianlove
out of 184 stories



Other Rankings

339 loveromance

out of 499 stories >

43 navarro

out of 62 stories >

19 christianlovestory

out of 23 stories >

March 18, 2020 Ranking

Most Impressive Ranking

419 photography
out of 12K stories



Other Rankings

494 christian

out of 13.4K stories >

338 lovelife

out of 7K stories >

12 christianlove

out of 184 stories >

2 christianlovestory

out of 23 stories >

53 loveromance

out of 501 stories >

8 navarro

out of 62 stories >

Appendix J

THE DIGITAL LOCALE OF WATTPAD

Immediately, as the reader, using a desktop computer, reaches the website of Wattpad, greetings from the online storytelling community welcomes the audience as shown in arrow 5 of Figure 3. The options “start reading” and “start writing” (arrows 6 and 7 in Figure 3) appears just below the greetings. These options bring the user to the designed sign-up page for the new readers. However, a login button (arrow 4 in Figure 3) at the right top most part of the website appears for readers with existing accounts. A search engine (arrow 3 in Figure 3), discover (arrow 1 in Figure 3), which shows a list of genres, and community (arrow 2 in Figure 3) options are also available. The website consents signing up or logging in through one’s Facebook or Google accounts.

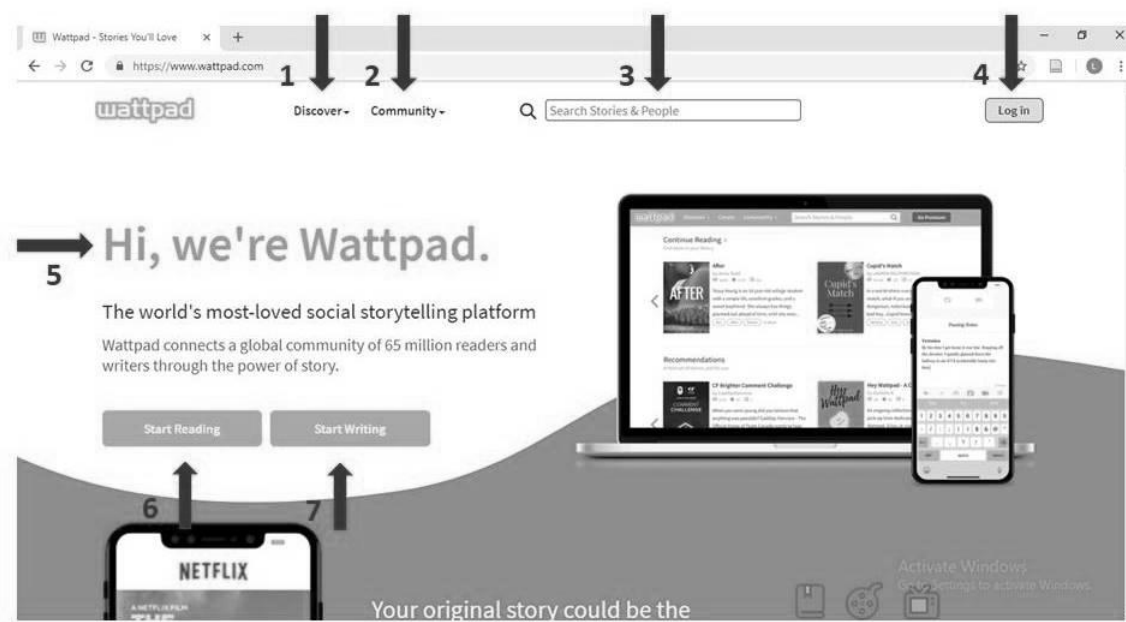


Figure 3: Screenshot of Wattpad welcome page

After securing an account and signing in the free online storytelling website, Wattpad immediately suggests stories in the home page such as Supported Stories (Box 2 in Figure 4), Explore something different (Box 3 in Figure 4), The Featured List, and more. The topmost part of the page shows a banner where the selections Discover, Create, Community, Search engine, and the user’s profile is found (Arrow 1 in Figure 4). This banner is permanently seen by readers whether reading a story, searching for stories, or scanning another readers’ profile. The Wattpad reader has an option to scroll down to find a story or search story title, writer username or words. If users intend to write a story rather than reading, they must click the create button in the banner referring to create.

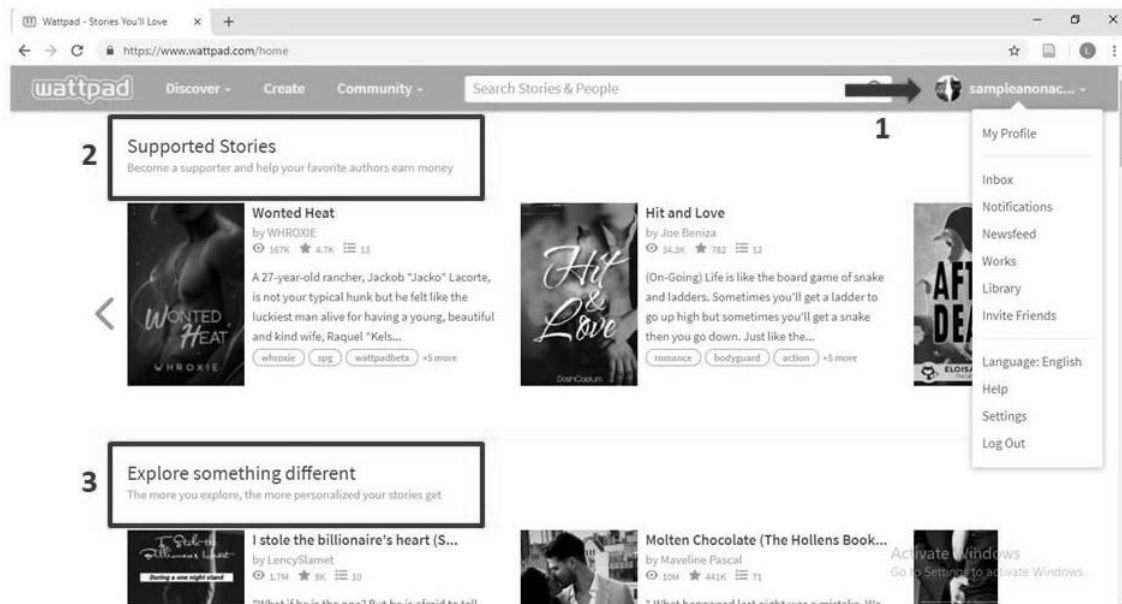


Figure 4: Screenshot of Wattpad home page

Proceeding to the user's profile, under the option 'About' (encircled in Figure 5) shows the works, reading lists, and followers of the person. The reader may describe himself or herself as a reader or writer through clicking the 'add description' button and sharing social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and such. There is freedom to all readers to edit their profile depending on their preference.

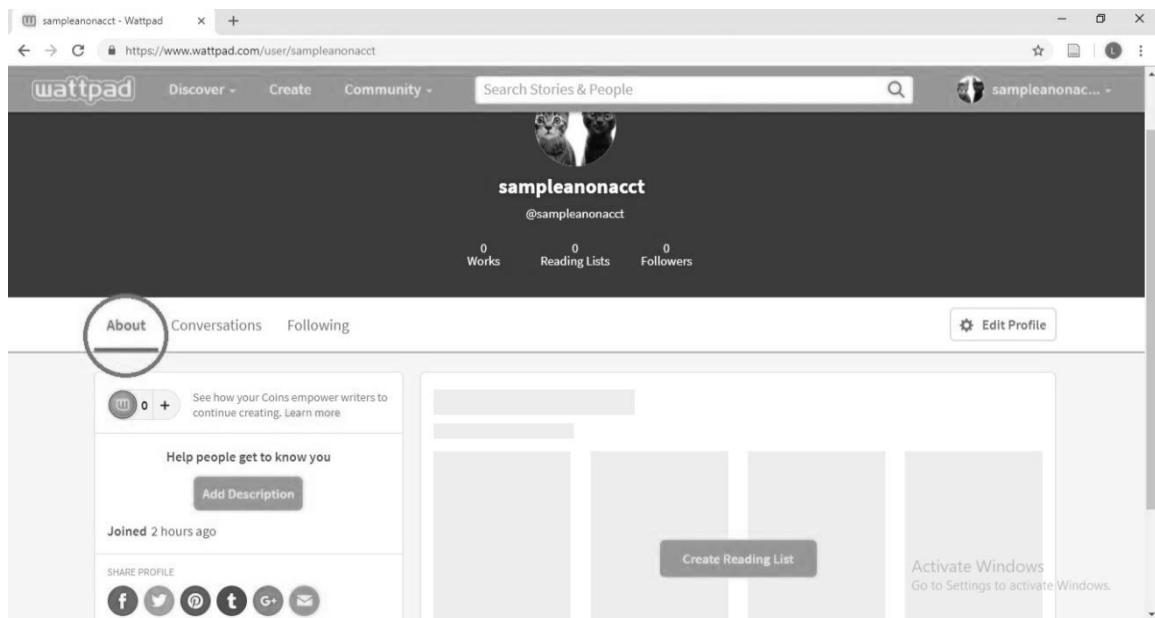


Figure 5: Screenshot of Wattpad user's profile showing 'About' option

The option ‘Conversations’ (Circle 1 in Figure 6) allows other readers to leave messages that are visible to other readers. This characteristic of Wattpad initiates interaction of readers to another. The ‘Following’ (Circle 2 in Figure 6) option simply shows who the user is following.

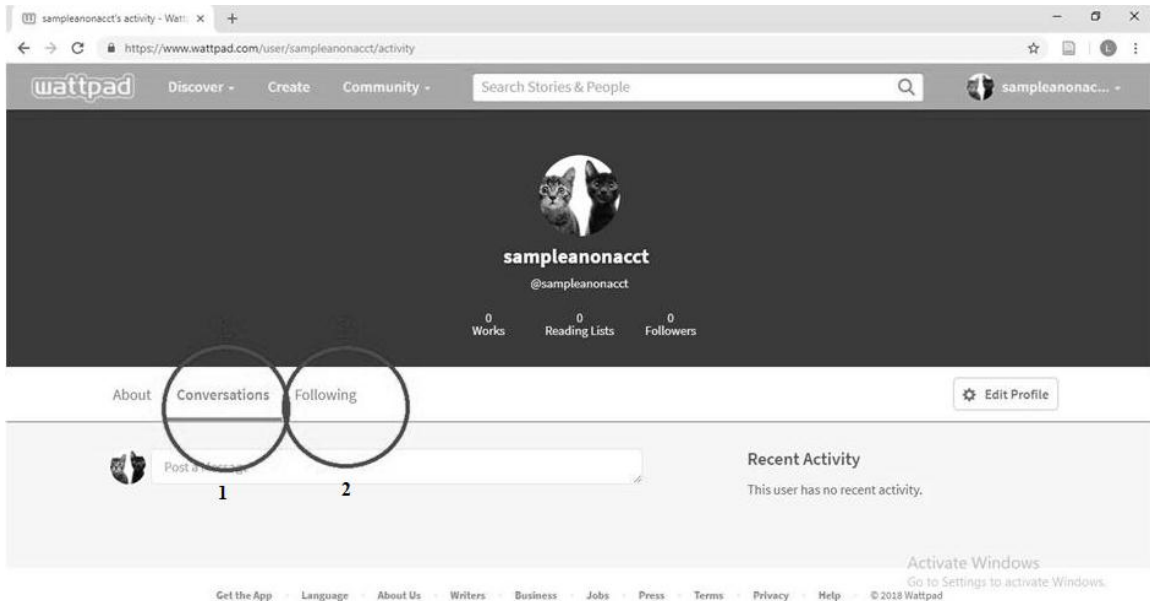


Figure 6: Screenshot of Wattpad user’s profile showing ‘Conversations and Following’ options

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