

NAOMI'S VACATION

by
Bo Lee

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Author's Word

This is a story that just had to be told! Something about a long held phobia and that is intellectually stimulating without having a dictionary to interpret the prose. If you are a homosexual or not, whether you despise or embrace homosexuality, you must read this book! Naomi's Vacation will help you analyze your life from where you stand now and lead you in a new direction where you should be. It is no accident that you are reading this message, and please do not be intimidated by my words. Reading this book is a once in a lifetime chance for you to inhale the truth about everything and I promise that this wonderful story will be a treasure to you in your life. After you finish this book, you will never be the same.

P.S. When you finish reading Naomi's Vacation, share the story and give it to someone who you truly care about.

Bo Lee



NAOMI'S VACATION

A TORRENT OF RAIN WAS POURING down with immense force as if it was driven by a squall. Naomi scurried to get out of the jeep and ran into the bus terminal. The roaring thunder was growling over her head. She trotted through the midsection of the lobby to get away from the shaky glass windows. Rain was coming down harder and beating on the metal roof, sounding like a madman pounding on a hand drum with great anger. It was hard to hear anything. Now she was concerned about the bus schedule, as it might be delayed due to the bad weather.

Tim, her boyfriend, hadn't been able to take her to the bus terminal. He was preparing for an emergency surgery on a new patient, whose life had been

threatened by a massive loss of blood. Instead, one of his assistants had taken her.

Several days before her departure, Tim had reminded her of the region's dysfunctional transportation system. He encouraged her to leave at least three hours early to avoid any unexpected delays.

On her first day in the country, she realized that most of their public transportation was so out of date that it could be seen at America's salvage yards. It was amazing to witness those old vehicles still carrying people around.

She scanned her plane ticket one more time. Her departure from the 00 International Airport was scheduled for 5 P.M. this afternoon. Her bus would depart for the airport at 11 A.M., but it only took three hours to get there. Those three extra hours were in preparation by Naomi, who accepted Tim's concerns.

During her wait for the bus, a little boy, about five or six years old came and stood before her with a sheepish smile and abruptly flashed something before her face. Startled, she looked at the ghastly looking mouse crouched on his palm, as he proudly introduced it to her.

"No, thanks," and Naomi withdrew quickly, giving him a halfhearted smile. She decided to walk around the cluttered lobby while she waited. Some people were lying on the concrete floors, using their

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hefty handmade sacks as pillows. It seemed that most of the people in the terminal were locals who were going to markets or visiting the city for other needs. One woman held five pounds of potatoes on her left side and clutched a variety of vegetables on her right, while glancing at her possessions as if she was watching precious gold.

Everyone's conversation was high octave to match the hideous noise from the roof, yet some people were dozing. *How can they sleep in these conditions?* Naomi thought as she looked up and listened to battering clatter resounding from the roof. Their languid lifestyle seemingly matched the wayward public system, as nobody complained about the bus delay. If the bus arrived on time, everybody would be surprised.

"These people live by float, not by schedule," Tim had told her.

Four weeks of visiting this country had made her deeply homesick. She never thought that returning home would make her this excited. She missed her family. Her father's embrace and tender voice and her mother's signature-recipe homemade chicken soup made her additionally excited to go home. Due to the smell and grease, she never enjoyed her mom's chicken soup before, but eating this strange regional food for a whole month had changed her mind. Just thinking about Mom's soup made her mouth water.

Also, she missed her friends; they had given her a going-away party, even though she was only going to be gone for four weeks. They knew she was a little nervous going to a strange place by herself, so they decided to give her a little encouragement.

Seeing Tim again had been the only motivation for her to come. She had missed him terribly.

Naomi overheard two young white males speaking English as she passed by. "If the bus doesn't come on time, we may have to make other plans."

One of them, the man with black hair, politely stopped her. "Are you an American?" he asked with a smile.

"Yes, I am," she said briefly.

"Oh! Nice to meet you, I am Victor Romano from Atlanta, Georgia." He offered a handshake. "This is my friend, Jonathan Moore, also from Atlanta."

Naomi told them her first name only. Jonathan shook her hand a little too tightly, which made her feel uncomfortable. Victor was a tall man with wide shoulders and thick black hair. His dense bushy eyebrows almost touched his eyelashes and temples. Jonathan was average height, keen eyes, and slender body with light brown hair that curled down to his shoulders.

They were so friendly, it was as if they had known her for a long time. They even threw humorous jokes at her from time to time, but they were worlds apart

from her. She knew her indifferent attitude toward people had offended some, who bestowed upon her the infamous title, "Ice Princess." However, it didn't bother her like it did her mom, Shirley, who defended her daughter vigorously saying, "She's a discreet loving person—just too shy around strangers."

The two men offered to share a beaten, lackluster wooden bench with her. Naomi sat at the corner with Victor next to her, while Jonathan closely watched Victor.

As she listened to their conversation, she noticed that for most of the time, Jonathan was the only one talking. She realized that Jonathan and her mother had one thing in common, they loved to talk. It was as if they came into this world for one purpose—to express their thoughts and feelings. Perhaps Victor was silent because he never was given a chance to talk.

They're very interesting people, she thought.

"What brings you here?" Jonathan asked her.

"I'm visiting my friend," she said briefly.

"Friend—you mean *boyfriend*?"

"Yes." Jonathan looked at Victor.

"What's he doing here?" Jonathan asked her.

"Medical missionary work."

"Wow, he's doing a wonderful thing. You must be proud of him," Jonathan stated, squinting at Victor. "I feel sorry for him that he had to leave this beautiful

lady at home and come here alone,” Jonathan continued, as Naomi saw Victor nudge him.

“What do you do for a living, young lady?” Jonathan asked. He didn’t care that Victor had warned him. He wouldn’t stop questioning until he was satisfied.

“I am a student.”

“Let me guess, you must be a medical student, right?” Naomi gave him a puzzled look, wondering how he had deduced that.

“Are you going to the 00 International Airport?” Victor asked her. He was deliberately interfering with her conversation with Jonathan, as he felt Naomi’s uneasiness toward them. “In case of a bus delay, would you consider taking a taxi?”

She was delighted by Victor’s offer. The reason she had chosen the bus was downright simple—she only had two hundred dollars in her pocket. In her estimation, the taxi rate to the airport might be more than \$200. However, if she could split that rate, she could easily afford it. One more positive would be that she wouldn’t have to deal with a rattling, jolting bus ride, as well as the grimy weather. Also, most of the taxis in the terminal appeared to be clean and decent-looking. They were hoping to have foreigners for as their passengers to provide them with a hefty fare and a nice tip for the day.

She had 10,000 dollars when she left home, given

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to her by her parents. However, the day before her departure, she chose to give away \$9,800 to the local hospital. The rickety 3,000 sq. ft. building was part of a former elementary school facility now called Grace Medical Unit, but only the name was Grace, as there was nothing graceful about the condition of the unit, which was lacking patient beds, orderlies, assistants, equipment and funds.

The air conditioning unit had been running like a weary, plodding old man and finally gave up three days before her departure. When the medical assistants found that the A/C had finally broke, they were about to run off until they learned that Naomi would be providing a new air conditioning unit. They came and hugged her with profuse thanks—some were even in tears. It would have been difficult to work in a hospital environment where they had to work in sweltering conditions. The tension had been high and rarely did anyone smile, even though every room had a rattling ceiling fan. However, with hardly enough power to ward off a sweat—it could only tickle their noses—they could barely breathe.

When Tim's father, Robert, became a medical rescuer, there was no obligation for him to do anything, but he poured the bulk of his personal fortune into upgrading what was absolutely necessary, but it was like pouring water on broken urns. He contacted the Foreign Missionary Association and

requested help from them, which had made for a little improvement.

Medical assistant shortages created physical and mental duress on all the hospital staff. Many times she had seen Robert slumped in his office chair, catching up on sleep he had missed from overnight duty. She had to move away quietly, so she wouldn't disturb him. She highly respected him as a medical doctor whose downright humbleness and hard work motivated her in many positive ways to become a medical doctor someday.

She often had been compared to her father, Bill, who was a well-known, prominent heart surgeon throughout the world. With over 30 years in practice, he had earned fame, fortune, high regard and an impeccable reputation. Naomi was the biggest beneficiary of his fortune. When he had the chance, he shamelessly boasted and bragged about his only daughter, how brilliant and beautiful she was. And he assumed that someday she would be his successor and carry on their three generations of medical dynasty.

On her sixteenth birthday, she had received a \$10,000-Mercedes-Benz, even though she had yet to obtain a driver's license. His global practice made him the richest medical doctor in the world. His clients ranged from high-profile politicians to billionaires to wealthy people who could afford his

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inflated medical fees. However, the unseen waiting list and a higher rate of life extension shaded claims of overcharging. By age 19, she had traveled to 13 countries with her family on behalf of her father's practice. In her spacious bedroom, she displayed a roomful of deluxe, novel souvenirs from all over the world.

For the first time in her life, Naomi was grasping the reality of how much such money could significantly impact people's daily life. While the two men went to look for a taxi, she thought about her own current situation. She was in a foreign country with only 200 dollars cash in hand, so she had to bargain with these two strangers to share a taxi. She laughed to herself.

Not surprisingly, the terminal speaker announced that the bus would be delayed by an hour. She sighed. The timing was perfect. Victor and Jonathan were farther away, talking to some man she assumed was a taxi driver. She wondered if they had heard the announcement. One of Jonathan's arms lay lightly on Victor's shoulders. She had sensed from the beginning that they were different; especially in the way that Jonathan kept looking at Victor. There was no doubt that he was deeply in love with him.

Suddenly she thought about her mother, Shirley. When she was in the eighth grade, one of her father's cousins, Kent, came to visit them. Rumors swirled

about him being gay and having AIDS. When she saw him at the front door, Naomi was astonished by his appearance. A gaunt, ghastly man with dark sunken eyes looked at her and tried to smile. She almost closed the door in his face, but managed to call her mother and tell her that their guest had arrived. When she saw the look on her mother's face, she knew the day ahead of them was going to be bad.

That very first night, Naomi heard her parents arguing over Kent. "Why did you invite him?" Shirley asked her father sharply. Then she added, "I won't be there for breakfast and neither will Naomi."

Early in the morning, when it was almost time for breakfast, her mom called Naomi to her bedroom and demanded that she not attend the breakfast with Kent. "Stay away from him the best you can," she yelled at her as she left the bedroom.

She met her father in the hallway. "It's your decision, Naomi," he said somberly, "but try to make the right one."

When she walked into the dining room, her father smiled at her. She knew that he was proud of her, but she was amazed by the new arrangements at the breakfast table. Everything on it was plastic or paper—paper plates and plastic forks, spoons and knives. Where were their gold-plated dishes, bowls and cups, and the silver spoons and forks? They all had disappeared. She looked at her father, but he

was gently shaking his head, as if to warn her not to say anything.

Their morning maid, Susan, was panicked by her father's alarming complexion, but later he calmed Susan, "Don't worry, sweetie. I know the master mind of this crazy plot."

The breakfast was long and silent. When it was over, Bill went to see his wife in their bedroom. "Look at him," she said with heavy conviction. He definitely has a disease. I only did this to protect our family."

Kent had been planning to stay a few more days, but he left suddenly without saying good-bye.

"Can you blame him?" her father had asked in a weary voice.

Naomi thought about her mother, who seemed to have been unreasonable about Kent. Now how would she react if she found out that her overly protected daughter was going on a trip with a supposedly gay man? There was no doubt that she would despise him without shame.

However, it was a relief for her to travel with a man who had no interest in women. From her childhood memories, when she appeared in a public place with her parents, people came to her like a cluster of metal drawn to a magnet. They stood before her and gazed at her as if they had found a baby alien. Some fondly touched and praised her.

“You’re a doll,” they proclaimed.

She would become agitated and longed for her father to rescue her, but he was like a famous egoistical artist who became overjoyed with public adulation and refused to leave. He grinned and assured her that they would not harm her. When she became an adolescent, the mobs were gone for good, but there was a massive amount of attention from strange men staring at her from a distance.

She was from Italian and Irish heritage. Her thick black hair was from her father and the pure blue eyes, the color of a blue sky on a clear day, were from her mother. She was told the color absorbed you when gazing into her eyes. Her soft milky skin, crystal blue eyes, and long shiny black hair were in perfect harmony. Many commented that it was Perfection.

Naomi’s envious cousin, Mary, teased her many times. She had won several beauty contests, and was never shy to boast of her physical beauty, but had asked Naomi, “Could you teach me how to draw men’s attention?”

Mary’s brother having tired of his sister’s selfishness, told Naomi, “From my perceptive, you are much prettier than my sister and *you* should be the one winning the beauty contests.”

Naomi saw two men coming back to her. “Are you ready for a new adventure?” Victor asked.

“When?” she asked.

“Right now.” he commented.

“Right now—that soon?”

“That’s why we selected a taxi. You can leave any time you want,” Jonathan said smugly.

She quickly grabbed her luggage. “Oh, I forgot to tell you, said Jonathan, “that the brusque taxi driver warned us that it’s only one bag per person,” Jonathan watched her as she struggled to lift her three pieces of luggage.

“What?” She was so astounded and that she dropped one bag on her left foot. The two men laughed so hard that tears filled their eyes. They had been joking about her hefty luggage earlier.

“I am sorry, but that was a joke.” Victor apologized to her, as he wiped his eyes with a big fist.

Now Naomi was having second thoughts about sharing the cab with Victor, because he was too comfortable with her. She didn’t like that at all.

When they realized she wasn’t smiling, the two friends quickly stopped laughing. At that moment their selected taxi, a navy blue sedan, pulled up in front of them. Naomi inspected the car and kicked the tires, but the air pressure was right, so she peeked inside. The leather seats and floors were clean, so she was content, but she couldn’t find any sign that identified the car as a taxi.

“This is an illegal tax,” Jonathan whispered to her.

He must have read her mind.

“Couldn’t you find a legal taxi?”

“Well, we could but this one was in better shape than the others.”

“If it is illegal, won’t we get into trouble?” she said, looking at Victor. She was very concerned about this illegal thing.

“Yes, that’s true, you’re right.” Jonathan admitted as he jumped into their conversation and agreed with her. “As you know, this country has a weird legal system, which is especially tough on foreigners. I heard that an American who was caught using an illegal taxi was convicted, had to stay six months in jail and for an additional punishment by authorities, they gave him a humiliating 100 strokes with a wooden paddle, but the taxi driver received only five days in jail. To me, it’s outrageous.”

Naomi was rigid with fear. But when she saw Victor was laughing and pushing at Jonathan’s back, she knew they were playing pranks with her innocent thoughts again.

Jonathan formed a V sign with his fingers and flashed it over Victor’s head. *Childish*, Naomi thought and was annoyed. “No more jokes, please!” she requested.

She picked up her luggage and walked toward the trunk. The taxi driver scurried in front of her and put her bags into the trunk. Naomi slid inside

into the back seat and closed the door.

Victor glanced inside the car where the most beautiful human ice sculpture sat in the back seat motionless and ready to go. Beside her was an unopened book. He knew now that they were not on her "Favorite Persons" list. *This could be a long three-hour journey*, he thought as he opened the front passenger door of the taxi.

Outside the taxi, Jonathan waved his hand as a good-bye to her. She waved back with a half-hearted smile and quickly opened her book.

"Oh, my gosh!" The taxi driver mumbled and she immediately followed what he was focusing on. Jonathan and Victor were exchanging an intimate hug and a deep wet kiss. Suddenly she felt queasy and wanted to bolt out of the taxi. Instead, she stared at her book with her mind racing. She'd guessed earlier that they were lovers, but she was surprised by their bold public intimacy. She had never seen something like that before, but she felt that \$200-agony again.

"Are you guys ready?" the taxi driver demanded in a harsh voice.

Victor had barely put one foot inside the passenger door, when the frowning taxi driver rushed to shut it. Something was bothering him, but his tone changed quickly as he entered his tax and introduced himself in a polite manner.

“My name is Cosmo and welcome on board.” His voice was softened by a great effort, but he didn’t forget his role as their chauffeur. However, the edge of his lips pulled back, as if he were forcing the smile. Naomi shook hands with Cosmo. His soft hand warmly welcomed her.

His small stature was hidden by the tall wide leather seat. Despite his little body, his shiny forehead showed his tenacity and his keen eyes illustrated that he was fastidious person. He had a thick abrasive English accent, but she had no trouble understanding him. It was a relief for them to communicate with him in English.

Cosmo slid down the driver’s side window, without stepping out, raised his arm and stuck a red plastic taxi sign on his roof. Naomi’s muted laughter could be heard as the taxi began moving forward.

The two men began talking, so Naomi grabbed her book and searched for the right page. At first, their exchange was casual and frivolous. Later Victor said to Cosmo as he glanced at Naomi, “If either of you were offended by the incident that occurred earlier, I would like to apologize.”

Naomi was surprised by Victor’s apology, but completely ignored him and kept her eyes glued to her book. “Are you apologizing to me?” Cosmo inquired in an amused high-toned voice. He was

surprised, but content. "Why do you need to apologize? An apology is an admission that you did something wrong. What did you do for which you need to apologize to me?" His voice was sharp and almost relentless.

"In my perception, I might have disturbed someone," Victor stated in defeat, since he had not expected Cosmo's bold answer.

"I am glad you're bringing that up," voiced Cosmo. I'm pleased by your humbleness. Honestly I was shocked. I graduated from a liberal America college and I have studied with the most open-minded thinkers in America. They showed me how to be a true liberal. Nonetheless, what I saw earlier was a shock to me. I've never seen something like that before in a public place."

Naomi was very surprised by Cosmo's bold response.

"I would say, you guys were brave to do something like that in full public view," assessed Cosmo.

He was the brave one, not Victor, Naomi thought. However, Cosmo's straightforward talk made her a little nervous. *Could this be a sign that these two would be brawling on the way to the airport?* she wondered.

"We try hard not to draw attention in public, but sometime it's irresistible," he finished in a slackened voice. Victor's bewildered demeanor showed he was surprised as well.

If so, what had been Jonathan's distinct motivation? she pondered. Her memory flashed back to Jonathan's jealous eyes watching her the whole time the three of them were together.

Victor's sheepish answers loosened Cosmo's intensity. "I understand what you're trying to say," Cosmo's voice was soft and almost sweet. "However, if you don't mind I would like to ask you a vital question." Cosmo was back in the game.

"No, I don't mind. We have plenty of time. At least we have three hours, right? Ask me what you want to know. I hope not to reveal anything that disappoints you," Victor replied nervously.

Naomi had her own suspicions that Cosmo would say anything to jerk the rug out from under Victor, whose apology would allow him to control the game. Apology is a losing game, but Victor unwillingly opened the door to let it in. She wondered if dissent and disagreement would follow, but she bet that eventually Victor would banter with him. Ostensibly, Victor seemed to be a polite, easygoing person who would not bicker with someone whom he had just met. Victor was humiliated right before he apologized to them and even stuttered. Something was bothering him immensely.

On the other hand Cosmo was ready to take something from Victor's humiliation. Naomi couldn't

guess what exactly, but one thing was for sure, it would not be pretty. She could feel that.

When she realized that she had put her foot too close to deep water, she jerked back and promised herself that she would observe, but stay quiet.

“Victor!” Cosmo responded with a deep breath. “What is your notion of homosexuality? Do you think that you were born with it or did you acquire it?”

To her, it was an impulsive inquiry, but she was flabbergasted. She held her book so it almost touched her nose.

Cosmo had poured cold icy water on Victor and for a moment, he was frozen, but then shook it off. “You are asking a rhetorical question,” Victor breathed deeply as he replied, almost like he was moaning. “Your query at this moment is a flourish of dissents and disputes from our society and different organizations” His hovering answer was cut off by Cosmo.

“Victor. I want to know *your* notion of homosexuality, not society’s or any organization’s,” Cosmo said sharply.

Victor was almost twice as big as Cosmo, but Cosmo certainly had him pushed into a corner.

“You don’t have to answer if you don’t want to.” Cosmo certainly was revolving his request and showed him that he wasn’t obligated to respond.

He discerned Victor's personal anguish, but surprisingly, Victor regained his strength back and wanted to continue. *They're back in the game*, Naomi thought.

"I believe that homosexuality began after we were born," Victor said in an amazingly upbeat voice. However, Naomi felt differently. *Victor must have thrown all his guts out before he got into the taxi or perhaps he didn't have any*, she thought.

Cosmos suppressed his smile. He squirmed and adjusted his seat as the car bounced a little. "Does that mean that people choose to be homosexual?" Cosmo's words were amazingly confident.

"However, most homosexuals are totally opposite, aren't they?" Cosmo asked. Consecutive bullet-like questions made Victor pause and the way he looked at Cosmo, it was obvious that he needed more time to consider his answers. Finally Cosmo was insistent on a response.

"That's true," Victor said in defeat.

As she listened to their discussion, she came to her own conclusions that Victor wasn't interested in any role that involved debating with Cosmo. He showed immense respect toward him, but he would not feel comfortable arguing on any level of subjects with him. No matter how aggressive Cosmo became, Victor would not confront him. He'd dodge the bullets any way he could.

Cosmo's aggressiveness had lost its steam, since Victor was unwilling to continue, but Cosmo didn't care. He would still bite at Victor's pants like a mad bulldog and not let it go. After he received Victor's apology, he was invincible.

Nonetheless, she couldn't give Victor any sympathy. "This could be a long, controversial three hours." was Naomi's comment.

"Just one thing, I need to make clear in your mind before any further conversation," Cosmo said. "Respectfully, I would not discriminate against anyone who *chose* to be a homosexual." He emphasized the word, *chose*.

"What makes you so sure that they *chose* to be one?" Victor protested.

"It's very simple—according to the Bible, in HIS very own word, HE called homosexuality an abomination. GOD is not hypocritical. He never is against HIS own word, so how could He tell us that homosexuality is a sin and then turn around and create one? That makes the 'born with' theory blasphemous," Cosmo finished in great confidence.

"I don't think anyone said that GOD *created* homosexuals," Victor said in defense, but his voice was weak.

"Really? Then please tell me, *who* created it?" Cosmo cocked his head and glanced at Victor, who remained silent.

“Let me tell you something extremely crucial,” said Cosmo. “God created the human, along with conception and perception. In a deep human abyss, through the human heart, we are to perceive the difference between right and wrong. The inner voice that we hear telling us this is GOD’S. I’m convinced that deep inside, every homosexual person hears this voice. In other words, they know exactly what they are doing and they know that it is wrong.”

Victor sat silently, not even blinking his eyes.

Looking grim, Victor swung a weak punch at Cosmo, “But the homosexual who doesn’t believe in GOD will have trouble in accepting your religious beliefs and condemnation.”

Cosmo’s face became harder. “Let me clear up one of your remarks. It’s not *my* condemnation. It’s GOD’S,” Cosmo said and then continued, “Are you telling me that all homosexuals are atheists?”

“Of course not—I didn’t say that!” but Victor knew he was getting himself into trouble.

Cosmo continued, “GOD created Adam and Eve. How much more of a clear message do we need to get from GOD? This is my conclusion, that GOD created Adam and Eve and then *humans* created homosexuals,” Cosmo said, looking at Victor.

Victor glanced at Naomi liked a beaten hopeless boxer, who was waiting for his relentless coach to throw in the white towel. However, she was

ostensibly too busy reading her book and didn't even look up at him.

Even though she was pretending to ignore them, she was abreast with Cosmo's Bible quotes and was marching with him. He was a little excessive and somewhat dramatic, but he was being downright rational. He marched to the battleground for his prospective mission field and opened the sprawling dam with purpose. Unfortunately, Victor was wiped away with it.

However, Cosmo wasn't quite finished yet, as he asked Victor, "Do you believe in God?"

Victor responded, "Whatever I say, you'll rebuke me, so I will not say anything in order to protect myself." They laughed.

"I have no authority to rebuke you," Cosmo retorted. "You're *my* master and I'm *your* servant for today. You were lucky, because you didn't happen to pick an untamed, disobedient servant who would have given you lots more grief than comfort," and he started to laugh.

"Oh, no, you're all wrong," Victor replied. "*You* are the one I should call master. You control the wheel and lead us to our destination. At this moment, our lives completely depend on you," Victor said with sarcastic flattery.

"Are you afraid of me because I am the behind the wheel and might dump you somewhere in the

ditch?” Cosmo could hardly finish speaking, he was chuckling so much.

“Don’t worry, my car is too good looking to be in the ditch. Nonetheless, thank you for giving me such power. I must use it quickly before we get to the airport.” Both men had a rowdy laugh.

Naomi couldn’t believe these two had just met. There was something about them, a deep and sticky chemistry that seemed to be created between them. Unfortunately, a shaky bounce and fall occurred during their encounter, but they did not break or crash.

Victor knew in his heart that Cosmo wasn’t bullying him, but was concerned about the life he had chosen. Victor respected that.

“Have you ever been in love with a woman?” Cosmo asked. He obviously still had some thick skin left.

“Are you using that master power again?” Victor laughed.

“No, I just have to ask—have you?” Cosmo said with a sly grin.

“No, I haven’t.” Victor said briefly.

“That’s very sad.”

“Why do you say that?” Victor queried.

“Because...because women are the most beautiful creatures made from GOD’s own hand. But you wouldn’t...” Victor cut him off.

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"I understand what you trying to say but let's not talk about this anymore," and ended with a finality his exchange with the guide.

Suddenly silence engulfed the taxi until Cosmo stopped somewhere in the wilderness.

"If you don't mind, I have to go—Nature is calling me." Cosmo looked around and said, "Anyone else?" When they both declined, he put his jacket over his head and disappeared into the rain-soaked thick scrubs.

"I hope he's coming back." Victor was trying to be humorous.

Naomi raised her head from her book.

"Isn't he an interesting person?" Victor asked her. Naomi nodded.

"Today is a special day for me," Victor stated. "I have been in an interesting discussion with someone I had never met before on everything from religion to divulging personal matters. I feel like I've just returned from combat."

Naomi silently agreed with him. Yes, he had been in combat with a mighty little man. "But you didn't tell him the truth," she gushed out.

"What do you mean by that? I was downright honest with him," opposed Victor.

"Maybe, except for one very crucial subject on which you misled him," she said with conviction.

"Do you mean what I said about homosexuality

beginning after birth?”

“Yes.”

“I....” He stuttered. “I gave him the answer he wished for,” he said grimly.

Their eyes met and she gave him a stoic look. “You are being a hypocrite.” Naomi said and then stared outside to avoid eye contact. Finally she said, “I think he really does care about you.”

Victor was quiet for a while. Then he admitted, “You’re right, I know that, too. Honestly, I really don’t want to disappoint him. However, he was breathing down my neck the whole time and I thought he wanted me to say what he wanted to hear.”

Naomi thought, *Did he blame Cosmo for being untruthful?* But she wanted a waiver, with no more talking, so she didn’t voice her concern.

“Why do you think I believe in the ‘before being born’ logic of homosexuality?” Victor asked gently.

He brought the subject up again, so she had to answer. She did not want to be like him and leave the subject hanging.

“Blaming it on GOD is the easiest way to protect yourself and survive critics, because you think that GOD can’t defend HIMSELF, but you are wrong. HE doesn’t need defending, because HE is on the offensive throughout the Bible.” She looked straight at him.

Victor's face was somber.

"You have no comprehension of homosexuality," Victor murmured.

Naomi suddenly felt ill. "How can I comprehend someone whose life is off-track by choice and who blames someone else for that? Comprehension comes with agreement and recognition." Naomi voice was agitated.

"You detest homosexuality," he said and then regretted saying it.

When she heard that word, she certainly thought about her mother. At some point she acknowledged that she might have been influenced somewhat by her mother, which surprised her. However, although she still believed her mother had treated Kent disgracefully, she had never tried to convince her that she was wrong.

"Naomi, do you believe that homosexuals could possibly go back to being normal?"

It was striking for her to hear him use the word, "normal."

She felt his struggle. Her mind was racing, but her words were calm and focused.

"Of course. Homosexuality is a disease, except that the illness isn't physical but psychological. The only way to be cured from it is to acknowledge that it is an illness." She liked the way that sounded.

Victor was quiet for a while.

“If one human being loves another, how could be that so much of a problem?”

After she heard his mumbling, she knew she was wasting her time and that she was not making any progress. “Please don’t twist my words—you know exactly what I was talking about, so don’t pretend like you don’t.” She leaned her head on the back seat and closed her eyes, so she could stop talking to him.

‘Where is Cosmo?’ she wondered. She couldn’t wait to see him again, so she could gladly pass on the sticky, sweaty relay bar that she voluntarily had taken over from him. She would love to wipe her hands off immediately, as her substitute job was done. Her heart was moved by Cosmo’s determination to convince Victor to achieve a positive impact on his own life, but she was annoyed by Victor’s tactics and how he kept dogging the issues. Cosmo cared about Victor and she wanted to help him, too, which was her motivation was to begin with.

She couldn’t wait to get home. Very soon there will be no more 200 dollars indignation and all the fuss would be gone from her memory.

She saw Cosmo running toward the car. “The rain is getting worse,” he said as he wiped his face and neck and turned on the engine.

“Cosmo, did you said that you graduated from an

American College?" Victor asked him. He was just trying to change the subject.

"I am not finished with you," Cosmo said and grinned.

"Come on, Cosmo. That's enough for me. I had been excoriated and beaten by vicious beasts. I am wounded and bruised all over my body."

"The beasts have included her, obviously. I apologize for my aggressiveness, but I am fully backed by my beliefs," and Cosmo gently patted Victor's shoulder.

"When did you leave America?" Victor was veering away from the other subject and it seemed to be working.

"After my college commencement," Cosmo said briefly.

"If you don't mind me asking, from which college did you graduate?"

Cosmo was hesitant, but then stated, "OO University."

Victor looked at Naomi, but their eyes didn't meet. Victor was surprised and but at the same time, thought, '*What is a OO graduate doing as a taxi driver?*' However, he hid his surprise and remained silent.

"GOD doesn't care from what school I graduated, so neither do I," Cosmo said.

Now Naomi admired Cosmo's humbleness.

“What do you think about America?” Victor asked him curiously.

“I love America, but” he paused. “What happened to America? They abandoned GOD. Look at what happens in their schools. Students are in turmoil these days—massacres in many schools, kids killing their classmates and teachers. The school system will not allow students to mention GOD’s name or pray in their classrooms. Adults withdrew GOD before their children’s eyes and stumbled over their cornerstone, which was originally based on HIM. Their children’s guiding light is gone and these kids are standing in spiritual darkness confused, frightened, and angered. Adults in America are fully responsible for this problem.

“I am truly disappointed by Christians in America. They are slackers and are not doing their job. How could they be silent about all this? Are these the same people who journeyed to other lands to spread the Gospel? America was once the spiritual guru for all other nations, but now America has lost the respect of others. My life has been greatly influenced by American missionaries, who came to my hometown and taught me about Jesus.

“I hope the America people will wake up and realize that without GOD, there is no hope in America.”

When Cosmo finished, surprisingly Victor was

nodding. "Since your graduation, did you go back to America?" he asked.

"No. I haven't. I found a decent job and got married here."

"Do you have any children?"

Cosmo paused and slowly replied, "Yes, I had two sons but last year, I lost the oldest one."

The three were silent. Victor put his hand on Cosmo's shoulder and gently touching him said, "I am so sorry, I don't know what to say. That's tragic..."

"Yes, I thought so at first, too, but it's really not. It's not tragic—it's a treasure. He was a good boy and now he is in Heaven with JESUS." His voice grew brighter.

He touched the handmade wooden cross that hung on his rearview mirror. "This cross was made for me by my son. He loved to carve."

He lovingly touched the cross again. Everyone was quiet at that moment.

"I learned so much from my boy. He taught me something I would never have been able to learn by myself. Let me tell you my son's story. Don't be afraid. It's not sad—it's beautiful." He cleared his throat.

"I have a great fulltime job, but I had to earn more money to pay for my son's enormous medical bills. So I decided to work as a part-time taxi driver

until I had paid off all my bills.”

Finally it was clear to two curious minds as to why a highly educated individual like Cosmo had to work as a taxi driver.

He began his narrative about his past with a calm and resonant voice. Even the intensifying raindrops from the roof couldn't disturb it.

He married his hometown girl, whom he had known since they were toddlers. They lived in a small village where the population was little more than 700. Everyone knew everyone else. When they were toddlers, they played together until their parents called them in for dinner. His girlfriend was a year younger, a prude and a little whimsical, but with a sweet spirit who spread a smile for everybody. By comparison, he always felt like he wasn't good enough for her. As a teenager, she gradually became distant from him. She was more interested in hanging around with girls of her own age and enjoying the enthralling words and affectionate attention from boys. He was bewildered and devastated by her rejection. With many sleepless nights, he pondered over what he could do to impress her. He had excellent grades in school and was an honor roll student throughout all his school years, but that did not seem to impress her, so how he could accomplish this? He remembered she had whispered to him when they

played together that she dreamed that someday she would marry someone who had a nice house with a swimming pool. If he wanted to marry her, he had to be a rich man to fulfill her dreams. How could I become a rich man? He thought about his uncle who went college in America, came home like a triumphant warrior and became one of the highest-ranking executives in the financial company where he was employed. He was the wealthiest man in his town and had a swimming pool. He wanted to be just like him, but one thing would be an exception—his uncle had an ugly, pouting wife. After waiting several more heart-troubling years, he finally enrolled in OO University. Everybody in town was cheering for him. He had made history for his small town.

His beginning was better than his uncle's. Before he left home, he finally had the courage to meet with her. He asked her to wait for him and he promised to be a success and said that he wanted to marry her. She smiled the smile he couldn't get near to for so many years. During his college years, he wondered about her. There was no commitment from her—the only thing he received was her warm smiles. After adapting to a brutal study schedule and dealing with a new culture, he finally settled into his college years. He enjoyed high-grade performance and a full scholarship. As

his graduation neared, he received excellent job offers from several American companies. Although he refused them all, he promised himself that if he couldn't marry her, he would come back for one of the jobs. He went back home and experienced some shaky times in the beginning, but finally was able to marry her. He received a job offer at his uncle's company. He bought a house and later built a swimming pool for his wife. He had fulfilled his promises and he was proud of himself. He had not reached his uncle's status yet, but he had married a pretty wife. After three years of marriage, they became parents—a boy. He was so excited that he cried in the hospital's labor room. Eventually they both cried. She was a good, loving mother. A second child arrived two years after the first, another boy. She cried because she wanted a girl at this time, so they both cried for different reasons. At her baby's nursing, he asked her why she had married him—she didn't say anything, but just smiled. It was the same smile he had received from her just before he left for college. No more questions, he promised himself. Let's me just be happy with her and our two loving sons.

As he was explaining about his marriage and children, his face had become serious. Naomi and Victor knew else something was coming. They were very attentive as Cosmo continued.

"With the two boys growing and my job paying well, it seemed that everything fell in the right direction. However, I noticed my wife's demeanor had changed. She was reluctant to be close to me any more and our communication was becoming shorter and shorter, so I knew something was up with her, but I was afraid to find out. I let it go for a while, as I was busy at work, but when I came home late at night, I could see that she wasn't happy.

One day at work, a friend called me and wanted to have lunch. We met at a small café near my office. He hesitated at first, but then he whispered something in my ears that hit me like thunder. My friend and an acquaintance had spotted my wife with her old boyfriend at the restaurant in the marketplace, looking cozy and affectionate. People began to whisper and gossip swirled around about the two. It seems that the only one who didn't know about this was me. When I got home, I confronted her. I wished to death that she had denied this claim, even if she couldn't tell me the truth, but she said yes, that they were together. I stormed out of the house and drove through the grasslands until darkness stopped me and I stopped at an unfamiliar wilderness. I was alone and wailing and shrieking like a lunatic. Excruciating pain penetrated my broken heart. I was lying on the ground and wanted to die, but vicious wild animals showed me mercy and

didn't even come near. "Please eat me," I pleaded with them. For three agonizing days, I was without food in the wilderness until I finally realized that I had two innocent sons who were being chastised by an unfaithful mother and punished by a father who had run away from his responsibilities.

I thought that I should let her go. She never loved me. She couldn't even say why she had married me. After I made up my mind, a big burden lifted from my shoulders. What is this? Why am I feeling relieved for making this decision? All those years somewhere in my deepest thoughts, I must have realized that she didn't love me. I forced her to marry me. She couldn't say no to me. Suddenly I felt sorry for her. But hereafter, she could have the man she truly loved. When I arrived home, my two sons were waiting for me. They dashed towards my open arms and I hugged them tightly and told them I would never leave them again. They missed me. When I had a quiet moment with my wife, I told her she could go freely and I will take care of our two sons, but the situation had changed—she wanted to stay in the marriage and she asked forgiveness. She promised me that she would never see him again. When I heard her plea, I became angry and my heart was troubled. I didn't want her anymore and I never wanted to see her again. When I looked at her, I

saw a traitor—a perpetrator who had destroyed my life by her unfaithfulness and now she refused to leave me alone."

"Why did you marry me?" I demanded. "You shouldn't marry someone for whom you have no love," I yelled at her.

At that moment I wished she would disappear from the earth. If I could, I would have killed her. I insulted her by vicious words and constantly reminded her of her iniquity. I punished her in all different manners, which made me feel better. Somewhere in my rational mind, I was alarmed by my radical behavior, but I completely ignored it and so it became worse. I even punished her in front of my children. But it didn't matter how vicious I became, she insisted that she would never leave me or my sons and repeatedly kept begging me for forgiveness. That provoked me more than anything else. I wanted her out of my life.

One day my oldest son with a visibly sad face came and stood before me and asked, "Daddy, may I ask you something very important,"

"What is it, son?" I asked.

"Daddy, do you love me?"

I was awed.

"Of course, my son, I love you more than anything else in this world. Why do you ask me such a question?"

He paused and said, "If you love me, please don't hurt Mommy any more. It hurts me when she cries."

Something hit me so hard that I was giddy for a second. I paused and looked at my son, the tears streaming down my chin. As I hugged him tightly, we both cried. At that moment, I knew I was wrong. My son had forgiven his mother, but I had not. When I fought with her, my two sons looked at me in a frightened and eerie way. That hurt me more than anything else, but for that, I also blamed my wife.

As I was hugging my son, one of the Ten Commandment suddenly flashed into my mind, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Breaking one of the commandments had set off a chain reaction in breaking all the others. I hated her so much that I would have loved to kill her. My family and friends treated her like the Scarlet A. They despised her immensely and I cheered them on.

Amazingly, in the most difficult times of my life, I have found merit in the Ten Commandments, GOD'S manual, with the best instruction for our daily lives." He stopped and looked around. But nobody dared to comment.

He continued, "Cupid's broken arrow was repaired gradually. My wife gave it her best efforts to be a good wife. I appreciated her diligence and we were getting along. The storm was settled and serenity

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encompassed our household, but our happiness was short-lived. A relentless tempest erupted in our life and struck my entire family once again. My oldest son was diagnosed with leukemia—the last stage of this illness. I was lost. How could this happen to my son? Why did it have to be him? Why? Why? Why? The doctor had given him six months to live. We only had six months left with him. My wife was devastated and became ill, too. She constantly cried and blamed herself for his sickness.

The realization hit us slowly that we had to prepare for his departure. We spent time with him whenever we possibly could. I was temporarily absent from my job to focus on my son's recovery. I prayed and prayed and prayed. I asked GOD to give him a second chance.

One day I was at my son's hospital bed, praying to GOD. My son's weary hand touched my shoulder and he smiled at me. "Daddy, it's OK. I am ready to go. I am not afraid to die anymore. Last night I met with JESUS and HE assured me that I'm going to go to heaven with HIM. HE showed me where I am going and I am excited to go there. I am more concerned about you and Mom. Please take care of Mom and my younger brother." This was my 12-year-old boy talking. I was amazed by his authoritative demeanor. He gave me a peace that I couldn't imagine having at that time and he

delivered that to me and my entire family. When he died, he was surrounded by his adoring family who loved him dearly. He died peacefully. I have no doubt he is with JESUS, who has a special heart for children. That comforted me greatly. He is in the safest place, where he doesn't have to deal with the pain and suffering and the illness that brought him down with such sorrow and sadness.

Since he passed, his death has had a different meaning for me. Death is not an ending, but it's a beginning. I learned that from my beloved son. I have a special tribute for parents whose children precede them. My cordial heart says vigorously, "Don't be sorrowful—be joyful. They are in a safer place now. JESUS will take care of them."

When he finished, he smiled at us. Naomi was on the verge of tears, but managed not to show it. Victor was quite different, as he wiped his eyes with his big open hands.

"I told you at the beginning, it was a beautiful story." Cosmo looked at Victor and patted his shoulder comfortingly. Silence settled in once more, accompanied by whisper of raindrops tapping on the taxi's roof.

"Tell me about JESUS. Who is HE and why do you rely so much on HIM?" Victor begged.

The silence was broken by that unexpected interrogatory. Cosmo looked at Victor with a big

grin on his face, as if he had half-expected it.

“You want to know about JESUS?” Cosmo saw a yearning in Victor’s eyes. Suddenly his heart was soaked with pity.

“Before I talk to you about JESUS, I want you to know that what I tell you is not my theory or fiction, but it’s the Bible that I’ll be quoting.”

Cosmo took a deep breath, as if a hefty weight were pressing on his shoulders. “JESUS is GOD. He came down to the earth to save our souls.”

“I have heard that many times. Why did HE have to come here? Couldn’t HE have managed that from the heavens?” Victor’s voice was a little agitated.

“GOD bestowed on us the Ten Commandments, the law and the regulations, through Moses. But we failed to follow HIS instructions.

As a result, hell was getting crowded and the heavens were not improving. Therefore, in GOD’s amazing love, HE wanted a face-to-face with us to deliver HIS very own message to save our fallen souls. HE had to come from the Heavens in the form of a human body. HIS earthly name was JESUS and during HIS visit to the earth, HE created the New Testament, the touchable living testimony of GOD’s words. HE ministered before our own eyes and lived with us, breathed with us and even ate with us. Before, HE was an untouchable Heavenly Father, but HE came down to join with

us as our Earthly FATHER, the very touchable FATHER. HE wanted to have a personal relationship with us. Not as the Creator, but as a father of the family. At the dinner table when the father was absent, there is no joy at the table. HE came to earth to fill the empty seat and have a wonderful dinner with HIS beloved family. HE is waiting for us to come and join the dinner with HIM. We are all invited in. Do you want to attend dinner with your FATHER or not? HE is waiting, and now the choice is in your hands.”

Cosmo’s face was beaming, but Victor was perplexed. “Why, did HE choose to be a carpenter?” he asked.

Cosmo smiled and said, “Good question. HE could have become anyone HE wanted to be— king of some country or a highly regarded clerical figure or even the richest man in the world, which would have given HIM a better position to emphasize and induce people to turn to HIM, since humans are prone to turn to power and wealth and high status. So why did HE have to come in human flesh and be born in a stable where the animals live? HE even washed HIS disciples’ feet with water. How could we observe more humbleness? JESUS admitted, “All the birds had a nest but HE didn’t have a place to lay HIS head.” It means HE had nothing as a human being. HE is a failure from a human perspective.

However, I just love that HE chose to become a carpenter. The carpenter's job is to be creative, build something from nothing. How could it be more suitable for HIM than anything else? HE shows and demonstrates HIMSELF to us to be humble. But in human prejudice and proud minds, they couldn't worship and follow a carpenter as their Savior, as a humble mind does. In HIS own measurement, HE wants to know who the truly humble person is. HE is looking for a person with a humble heart who could accept him as HE was and what HE claimed to be. When you accept JESUS as your Savior, everything falls into place. Then you can accept HIS teachings, HIS healing power, HIS miracle performances, and most important, believing that JESUS is our GOD. So if anyone who has doubts about JESUS, they doubt GOD as well. JESUS is GOD and GOD is JESUS. They cannot be separated. The other reason why people refused to believe in JESUS is because HE asks us to repent of our sins. Nobody wants to admit that they are wrong. Pride is the vast enemy of repentance. Humbleness is the best way to be close to JESUS our GOD."

Cosmo's message had been given to them distinctly. Naomi was mesmerized by his conviction. He had accomplished his mission extremely well and with perfection. GOD was with him. Naomi was convinced, but she wasn't sure how much

Victor had grasped from Cosmo's plea. Perhaps he had taken a lot more than he could digest. He was no longer contradictory, but condescending. *Where did this man come from?* Naomi thought. It's like he suddenly fell from the heavens to chat with them. Cosmo's credentials weren't the real issue. Nobody could argue with him but just listen and listen well!

"Soon we will be at the mouth of the mountain." He had changed the subject. He was trying to lift the heavy air he had stirred up.

Naomi looked outside and spotted several people running through the heavy rain. They were all in bare feet and no one was carrying an umbrella. Instead, they just put something over their heads to keep the water out of their eyes.

They are going home, just like me, Naomi thought. It didn't matter who they were or where they came from, home is where everyone wants to be - a safe place.

"How many times have you driven through the mountains?" Victor asked.

"Countless times," Cosmo said.

"I am very glad you have such experience." Victor was relieved.

"I could even drive with my eyes closed." Cosmo grinned.

"That much experience? That's great, but please don't try it right now."

They both laughed.

"I would like to find out more about this gigantic mountain. I only know that it has the highest altitude in this country, right?" Victor asked.

"Yes, it is and not just the highest, but the roughest, most dangerous one as well. The underneath of the mountain is a mystery. It's hard to see through to the bottom of it, because of thick trees and bushes that cover most of it. I am guessing that countless wild animals and the most poisonous of snakes live under the grassland's blanket." Cosmo said.

Victor humorously shook his head. "I might have second thoughts of going through this mountain. May I get off here?" he asked with a laugh.

"It's beautiful on the outside, but deadly on the inside," Victor said, looking at Naomi.

Naomi ignored his comment.

"Are you trying to compare it with women?" Cosmo was trying to get him in trouble.

"No and I will not comment on that. I don't want to get into any more trouble."

They laughed.

"This mountain has an obscured story. Many who passed through on foot have disappeared without a trace. There have been no witness to each incident, but some think that these people disappeared due to wild animals or from attacks by other humans."

“What do you mean by human attacks? Are you implying cannibals?” Victor asked.

“There are many different kinds of indigenous people living in these mountains, so some of them probably are.”

“What do you mean by *probably*? You are not even sure? Cosmo, this is serious—we are talking about humans eating humans.” Victor’s voice reached a higher octave, as he was agitated by Cosmo’s vagueness.

“Calm down, Mr., there is no evidence that cannibals exist. But whoever lives in the jungle very aggressively protects their primitive lands. For example, when the government began their primary construction on the mountain’s roadwork, countless workers disappeared from the site and none of them ever returned. They were fighting a force that was like an insane sniper, hiding in the bushes and snatching intruders like reeling in a fish. These people worship their mountain as a god and they’re determined to protect their god by eliminating intruders.”

Victor loosened up a little and chuckled.

“So now their god has a modern zigzag haircut.”

Cosmo found that humorous, too.

“There was an obligatory government safety code and rules have been posted on the mountain inlet for the sake of travelers.”

“Number one: make sure you thoroughly inspect your car and have plenty of fuel before entering the mountain.

“Number two: if your car breaks down somewhere in the mountain, stay inside it and leave the emergency lights blinking until armed rescuers arrive.

“Number three: keep to the speed limit and reduce your speed on rainy days. There are many treacherous sharp curves that will approach abruptly. When it's wet, it's twice as risky for any reckless driver.

“Number four: do not fall in love with the mountain's beauty, as it could seduce you and kill you, just like a woman.”

After he finished he laughed. “Number four—I made that one up. Ha ha!”

Cosmo was still grinning, but when he looked around, he faced two stiff and unsmiling faces. They were not amused by the mountain's dismal report.

“When did you get maintenance service on this car?” Victor asked and glanced at the gas gauge at the same time. They still had a full tank.

“A week ago. I do believe, I just passed the tire safety inspection.” Cosmo had been watching when Naomi kicked the tires to check the air pressure and quality.

“I can't imagine how any human could survive in this jungle.” Victor said in disbelief.

Cosmo agreed. “People are rough as wild animals

in this jungle, as well as extremely private and eccentric. They were born here and they die here. Their rites and rituals are unimaginably whimsical to the modern mind, but they stick together—their old traditions have been carried on for hundreds of years. As long as they are purposely hiding in the jungle, they could survive for a long time.”

“You are living in a very odd country,” Victor said.

“What do you mean by that?” Cosmo looked at him.

“Because you’re a highly educated intelligent person whose modern vehicle has just passed through mountains where uncivilized groups refuse to be exposed to the new era and so live like in a stone age.”

Cosmo agreed. “Are you more afraid of those indigenous people or the wild animals?” He asked Victor.

Victor shrugged and said, “Hard to tell—maybe both. I can’t communicate with either of them, so what’s the difference?”

“Well, at least you could use body language with a human,” Cosmo said.

“Well, body language must not work, since nobody seems to return home,” Victor disagreed.

“OK, we still have ten minutes left before we reach the mountain, so who else can tell a rapturous story that can relieve a boring moment?” Cosmo and Victor were both looking directly at Naomi.

No way, she thought. She protested by saying, "I live a very simple, plain life. I have no story to enrapture anyone's heart." When she said that, she realized that she did indeed live a simple life. She had no heartache or mournful story that would get anybody's attention. Besides, even if she had, why would she expose her personal agonies to complete strangers?

Victor said, "I agree with you, I can see right through you that your life has been an easy one, like smooth sailing, right?"

She nodded.

"Victor! Are you now able to see into people's past?" Cosmo chuckled.

As she had listened to Cosmo's heart-wrenching story of his beloved son's death and Victor's confusing identity and disheveled theology, it had been enough to cause her to look at herself more deeply, as into a microscope. She was an only child from wealthy parents who loved and pampered her unconditionally. She never had to work for her money and her love life had been wonderful. Her 150 IQ was helping her reach the top in schools. With her father's 100% support, she could become a wealthy heart surgeon anywhere in the world. Her future looked bright and promising. The only minor hindrance that flawed her perfect life was that she had been overly protected and controlled by her

naïve parents, who didn't realize that their daughter was a strong-willed woman who would soon be creating her own world without their help.

Since she came to visit Tim just four weeks ago, her perspective of the world had changed dramatically. Her vacation had been delayed and later cancelled by her own decisions. She was prepared to go to famous and historical places with Tim, but she quickly changed her mind when she saw that he was overworked and weary with sleepless, due to the lack of help. She jumped in to help him the day after she arrived. He kept telling her that when the new volunteers arrived, they could go some place and have a pleasant furlough, but they both knew that it wouldn't happen. Tim's appearance also surprised her as well. His clean-cut medical student image had disappeared after the reality hit him hard. His dark brown hair was dangling down to his shoulders, so he tied it back with a rubber band and he had grown a beard as well.

"Jane came to visit Tarzan," Robert teased his son with pride.

Robert himself was acknowledged as one of America's top surgeons who came to coordinate the World Medical Seminary. Somehow he had stepped into this remote region, where he discovered that so many people were dying without medical doctors on hand. He decided to stay for a while to quench

the devastation. There was no commitment—he just couldn't leave. And now he had no plans to leave any time soon and neither did his son. When Tim graduated medical school with honors, he was ready to begin his internship at a hospital only 10 miles from where Naomi lived, but his father had encouraged him to finish his internship under his wings. He was hesitant and even reluctant, but he couldn't say no to his esteemed father's plea.

Robert had missed his son's graduation, but in his letter to him, he explained, "Son, life is precious. I feel badly that I couldn't attend your commencement, but I saved one person's life during that time. Isn't it worth something when you give up something very important to save someone else's life? Join with me and I'll teach you how to sew someone else's wounds."

Tim knew his father would be his best tutor in the medical field and he was.

However, when Tim told Naomi about helping his father, she wasn't happy about it at first, but she knew that his mind was already made up. After he went to Africa, he wrote letters to her twice or more a week. Opening his new letters became her new and exciting habit. For the first month, he wrote about the weather, their strange customs and language barriers. He struggled to adapt to a new environment. He told her that he would love to pack

and leave the place, if it weren't for his father. But after two months, the letter's content changed. He started writing about his patients, especially a little girl named Tawanda. She was eight years old and her parents had died of AIDS. Now she also was battling it.

He was finally connecting with his patients and his surroundings, enjoying his accomplishments.

The day after she arrived, Naomi met with Tawanda. After she had read so many letters about her, she felt as though she already knew her. Tawanda lay on her bed and looked at Naomi with no expression on her face. She had the body of a four or five-year-old. Her bony ribs and shoulders moved up and down as she breathed. Her lips were dry and cracked with rough creases, but she had one special magical feature—her big, dark, black sparkling eyes. When Naomi walked into her room, Tawanda's eyes followed her every move. At first she felt violated, but soon, her tensions were calmed. Tim had told her that Tawanda would not live much longer. One day when Naomi was attempting to take her body temperature, she extended her shaking arm and tried to touch her pearl necklace.

“Do you like my necklace?” Naomi asked her?

She didn't respond—just gazed at the necklace, so Naomi took it off and put it on Tawanda's neck. Instantly, her face became brighter and her face

beamed a smile that she would never forget. The reflection from the pearls shone through her eyes. Whenever Naomi walked into her room, she was holding the pearls with her tiny hands, guarding them as if she would not let anybody touch them.

“Rumors are swirling around the hospital that you are in love with a little angel,” Tim said with a smile. But his smile faded quickly and his eyes were wet.

“I hope she doesn’t die while I’m here,” Naomi said sadly.

Tawanda’s life was like candlelight in the wind. It was hard to predict how long it would last.

When Naomi went to say goodbye to her and tell her she’s leaving, her eyes were full of tears, as she held the necklace in her two frail hands.

Back in the taxi, Victor noticed a sadness about Naomi. “What are you thinking?” he asked her.

“Why do innocent children have to die from AIDS?” But when she said that, she regretted it immediately. Victor was not the person with whom she wanted to discuss AIDS. She was hoping he wouldn’t respond to her throwaway question and, luckily, he didn’t.

“OK, now we’re at the entrance to the mountain,” Cosmo said breaking the silence.

“Caution!” urged a large red-letter wooden post that stood in the rain and welcomed its guests.

Naomi also saw the safety guidelines on the wooden post, which Cosmo had mentioned to them earlier. It stood next to the Caution sign; both signs were dripping with water.

Cosmo's driving was so cautious and deliberate that it was hard to believe he was driving in the middle of a rainstorm. It seemed that reducing speed would be his best approach and his cautious driving diminished their anxiety and nerves. Naomi decided to listen to music. When she searched through her bag for a CD she wanted to hear, she found a white envelope with familiar handwriting at the bottom waiting for her to open. Her heart was pounding a little.

The note tucked inside read: "My dear, Naomi. When the time neared for you to leave, I couldn't sleep much. Time went by too fast and I regret that we couldn't spend more time alone. You came here for a vacation, but instead you worked to help us on the very next day. You were everywhere when needed. You looked so confident when you were in the operating room with my father and me. I have no doubt that you'll be very good doctor, just like your father. I was flabbergasted when you grabbed a mop and cleaned the floor. You did a pretty good job for someone who has had no experience, especially with that enormous fat stubborn mop trying to go in all different directions instead of where

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you intended to lead. After four weeks with you, I saw a different Naomi than I had known before. It was exciting to discover.

I sincerely apologize for ruining your vacation, but the worse part of all was that I couldn't take you to the bus terminal. I hope your parents forgive me for this. However, now I can comprehend more than ever why my father couldn't attend my graduation ceremony. When I decided to go to medical school, he told me something that I'll never forget. He said, "If you can love someone else's life as much as your own, I will support you." That's the best advice for anyone who wants to be a medical doctor. When I came here, I struggled to be fit in. It was like stumbling onto a different planet and I didn't want to be a part of it. Living human skeletons were everywhere, which was directly related to malnutrition. But most disturbing of all were the children dying of AIDS. Just like Tawanda, I was so angry at parents whose reckless behavior had harmed their innocent children. I almost confronted my father about quitting. But one day, I was in Tawanda's room, wiping sweat from her forehead, and suddenly she gave me a big smile that brightened the whole room. I ran out of the room to hide somewhere alone and wept like a baby. At that moment, I found my purpose. Tawanda represented the people who no longer had hope. She thanked me with her

smile. Her smile could have a huge impact on our future medical practice and our lives.

Naomi, thank you for coming to see me.

I miss you already.

Love, Tim.

T.N.

When she saw the symbol, T.N., her eyes filled with tears, as it brought back memories of Tim.

When she met Tim the first time, she was seven years old. She had undergone an appendectomy at the hospital where Robert was chief surgeon and director of the hospital.

Through her father's effort, Robert was in charge of her surgery. Her father, Bill, and Robert were good friends at medical school. After graduating, they were separated in order to pursue their own goals and dreams and gradually drifted apart. When Bill rushed to take Naomi to the hospital, he saw a big photo of a smiling Robert in the lobby of the hospital and they were reunited again.

It seemed that everybody loved Robert. He called her, little darling, which she liked very much. After two days in the hospital, Tim came to her room. He was a tall, freckled, skinny boy with thick metal braces, who hid behind his father. She thought he was ugly. Tim later told her that his appearance had

made him shy and had given him low self-esteem as a boy.

"This is my son, Tim." Robert said as he pulled him forward.

"I know Naomi," Tim said proudly.

"I've never met you before, so how could you know me?" Naomi was unimpressed by this ugly boy who said he knew her.

Bill gently squeezed his daughter's hand. He did that when she was in trouble.

"I see you all the time at the school. I can't believe that you don't remember me." Tim showed his disappointment as a big deal. "Naomi, are you sure you never saw me at school?" Tim wanted to know for sure.

"Young man, I've heard that you're doing well at school." Bill tried to break the tension between them.

"Naomi is doing better, sir." The freckled skinny boy wasn't shy anymore. He was mad. "Don't you remember several months ago when you were in the lunch room, and Jeffrey, the meanest boy in school put a frog down your back and you were so shocked that you slipped and fell on the floor? Remember?"

How could she forget that? It was the most humiliating moment she ever had to endure in front of a laughing crowd. Jeffrey was her nightmare in school. He had constantly teased and hindered her.

She didn't know that Jeffry was whispering that he was crazy about her and that he just showed his feelings the wrong way.

"After you fell onto the floor, I'm the one who pulled you up. You even thanked me, remember?"

Now, she could remember that someone *had* pulled her up from the floor, but she didn't know who it had been.

"Naomi, why didn't you tell me about this before? Who is this Jeffry? I don't believe this thing happened to my daughter at school and nobody told me about it." Her mother, Shirley, was visibly upset.

Thank you for your big mouth. Naomi thought as she looked at Tim. She had images of her mother knocking on the principal's office door loud enough so that the whole school could hear.

"Ma'am, it happens all the time at school, boys playing with frogs and teasing the girls." Tim was trying to fix the damaged he had caused.

So much for that, their relationship wasn't so great from the beginning.

When Naomi got out of the hospital, Robert invited Bill's family to their lakefront house for a barbeque party—more than likely, it was a welcome home party for Naomi. After Bill and Robert were reunited, they became closer than ever and so did their wives. The only person who was displeased

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over the invitation was Naomi. She didn't want to go, but her mother insisted that the party was being held for her. When she went to Robert's house for the first time, she met Amy, Tim's older sister. Four years older than Naomi, her polite, sweet personality clicked with Naomi instantly. They loved to hang around the lake pier with their German shepherd named Sluppy. Naomi loved the stillness of the lake and the sunset, but she was careful not to confront Tim. He got the message and gracefully left them alone.

The first party was pleasant and satisfying, so Bill and Shirley invited Robert's family to their house for the following weekend. Afterwards, they found all kinds of excuses to gather for weekends. Bill and Robert were extremely passionate about their profession and there was no room to talk about other things. Their vigorous and enthusiastic conversations wouldn't stop until the guest wife told her husband it was time to go. Even as a child, Naomi loved to listen to their conversations, which generated in her an immense excitement and fascination. She would rather participate in the medical conference (as the two wives called jokingly called these weekends) than watch a children's TV program. When she sat next to her father and listened, Bill looked at her with fatherly pride and said, "She was born to be a surgeon."

When everyone gathered in Naomi's house on her account, Tim was never absent from the gathering. When he started to play with her golden retriever, Max, they both were easily fired up and ran around the backyard and played fetch games at the tennis court and then finally jumped into the pool together. But all those appearances by Tim would end quickly after an unexpected event occurred.

The last weekend of August, she was at Tim's house with her parents. It was about time to go home as she was talking with Amy in her room. Naomi was looking down at the lake, where she saw Tim standing alone on the pier and looking at her favorite sunset. The blood-red crimson sunset was blanketting the whole lake and him. He looked very lonely.

"My poor brother!" Amy came near her and looking down at the pier said in pity, "Did you know that my brother has had a crush on you ever since he met you at school?"

Naomi's blushed, but then she frowned as she asked, "How do you know that?"

"I'll show you," and she grabbed Naomi's hand and pulled her into Tim's bedroom.

"Look at this! Amy pointed to the wall, where two plain-red papers were pinned to the wall. A big heart was drawn on each side and two letters, T.N., were displayed. "Do you know what those letters stand for?"

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She couldn't say anything, but as she turned to leave, she was startled by Tim's appearance. He was standing in his bedroom door looking at them furiously.

"What are you guys doing in my bedroom? Everybody out! Out!"

After he kicked the intruders out, he slammed the door so he could be alone. Naomi ran down the stairs and begged her parents to go home. After that incident, she never saw him again. He didn't show up at her house and she never spotted him at school—he was avoiding her. Although she would miss playing at the pier and the magnificent sunsets, as well as her good friend, Amy, she quit going to his house.

Afterwards, Naomi's father returned to overseas duty again, so the gatherings slowly drifted away. A year later, Robert's family moved to another city. He received an excellent promotion at a brand new hospital. When Naomi heard that they had to move, she had mixed feelings, both good and sad. The good was that she was liberated from someone constantly watching over her, but the sad was that she did not know where those feelings came from. She couldn't figure it out.

When Naomi had just turned 17, she was a senior in high school. She and her mother went Christmas shopping at the mall approximately thirty minutes

from where they lived. Christmas was just the around the corner and Naomi had hardly done any shopping for her family's Christmas gifts.

She had a long shopping list and was determined that she would not go home until she could erase every item on her list.

She separated from her mother, so they could each give a surprise gift to the other. They were to unite at the spot where a mermaid water fountain was standing, spraying water in all directions. She finished first, but when she arrived at the water fountain, her mother was not there yet. Her feet were sore and her legs were cramped, so she took her shoe off and gently massaged her foot. Suddenly she saw a man standing right in front of her and smiling. She became spooked and hurriedly walked away from him.

He called after her, "Naomi!"

She turned around and looked at him more closely, but didn't recognize him.

"Naomi, it's Tim. I hope you still remember me."

Naomi was astounded by his dramatic transformation. This was Tim? The freckled skinny boy from the past? He was an entirely different person. He had grown into a tall, muscular, healthy, handsome man.

Suddenly, tears were sliding down her cheeks. Now her unfinished puzzle was complete and she

finally had the answer. The skinny freckled boy had never left her heart, but she had been too stubborn and proud to acknowledge it.

“Oh, Naomi, please don’t cry,” he begged, but he was crying as well.

Holding her face with his two bare hands, he gently kissed her forehead.

“You became a beautiful young lady,” he said, looking at her fondly. “Remember the letters, T.N.? I planted them in my heart.”

Naomi put the letter back into the envelope and replaced it deep inside her bag.

Victor and Cosmo must have had enough wrestling with each other. Cosmo was quiet, with not even a little cough, as he was seriously concentrating on his driving. Victor’s eyes were closed and his head leaned against his seat. Naomi suddenly felt tired and wanted to rest, too, so she closed her eyes and tried to take a short nap. Her visitation had been exhausting, like hard labor, as she didn’t get enough sleep the whole time she was there. However, illness doesn’t have mercy to spare; therefore, whoever is on the scene has to cope with it. It doesn’t matter if it was day or night, there was always an ill person who needed immediate emergency medical attention and she was proud to be part of the team that delivered it.

She finally fell asleep.

“Oh, my GOD!” yelled Cosmo, which woke Naomi up.

“Oh, my GOD!” Victor’s screaming quickly followed.

The winding pavement road across from them had been hit by a gigantic red mudslide. After wobbling for a few minutes, the black tar pavement had crumbled into a thousand pieces and was rushing down to the bottom of the mountain. Where the road used to be, there was now only a gigantic red clay hole. Instantly Naomi saw death approaching.

“We have just stepped into a cataclysm and we’ll be hit by a mudslide in a minute. Cinch your seatbelts and hold on tight to whatever you can grab. I’ll pray to GOD for you.” Cosmo’s voice was somber, but very clear.

Naomi’s whole body was shaking with fear, but she managed to hold on tightly to the back of Victor’s seat with her open arms and placed her head against it. That’s all she could do. And wait.

In a few minutes the car was wobbling, when suddenly a huge wave of mud and water covered the vehicle and swept it away. At first the car was sliding, pushed forward by an immense force of water, but then it quickly started rolling down the mountain as if it were on a roller coaster.

“Oh, GOD, help me,” Naomi was screaming inside.

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When she could see again, it was apparent that she was going somewhere but she had no idea where. An unfamiliar, narrow road seemed to stretch in front of her to eternity. She looked around cautiously but couldn't see any substance that she recognized like trees, houses, people or animals. However, a warm, bright light like a lighthouse was guiding her down the road.

When she turned and looked back, there was no light—just darkness enveloped her. But when she looked forward, there was that light again, directing her every step.

Isn't this a strange place, she thought.

Suddenly the guiding light began to dim until it finally was gone. Her body was engulfed in the blackness of no light and fear overwhelmed her. Standing in total darkness, she didn't know what to do. Gradually she saw a black dot coming towards her, so she focused on it. In seconds, the dot was multiplied to become countless dots that were getting bigger and bigger as they approached her. As they surrounded her in every direction, she could see that the dots were squirming like hungry reptiles. As they drew nearer, she saw that the dots had become tormented, anguished expressions on human faces staring back at her. She could feel that these beings were in great pain, but when they tried to grab her, she screamed for help.

“Someone please help me!” she begged. Her plea seemed to beckon a dazzling white object to approach her in slow motion. Astoundingly, as the white object passed by, her tormented vision vanished. Now the white object stood directly in front of her, so that all the surrounding objects completely disappeared, too. No doubt, the white object had heard her plea and came to protect her. It seemed to be human, but when she looked closer, she almost shouted for joy. Her grandmother stood smiling before her. But as Naomi tried to get closer, she realized that there was an invisible wall between them and that she was just looking at her from a great distance. However, the fear she had experienced since beginning this strange, unrealistic journey was gone—her grandmother had brought her peace.

“Who were those people? Naomi questioned. “They look so hideous and were in such horrific pain,”

“They are all unselected souls who failed to get into heaven.” her grandmother said.

“Why did they disappear all of sudden when you came close to them?”

“Because they knew that I am with GOD.”

“Are you GOD’s messenger?”

She nodded with a warm smile.

Naomi had so many questions. She believed that

Grandma could give her all the right answers.

“Grandma, who is JESUS?” Naomi said, just as she had personally challenged Cosmo earlier, who was especially passionate about JESUS and homosexuality. She was hoping that she might get a better version of JESUS CHRIST from her grandmother.

“Cosmo was right about everything he presented to you. He was with GOD and he was the one GOD chose to be HIS messenger. What he said was truth and GOD was with him the whole time.”

Naomi acknowledged Cosmo's claim, but she wasn't sure it met with GOD'S standards, even though he said they were based on GOD'S word.

“His claim was the decree authorized by GOD.” Grandma said.

Now, Naomi could fully accept it.

“What about homosexuality? Was he was right about that, too?”

Grandma nodded and said, “Accept GOD's punishment over homosexuality. Cosmo completed his role as a messenger but it wasn't his role to proclaim GOD's punishment. Now it is my turn to tell you what GOD will do with homosexuality.”

Naomi was looking at her intently. She craved to know what was next.

“Homosexuality is the only act in which humans have directly challenged GOD. GOD created the universe, but created humans last, in HIS own

image. HE was satisfied with HIS work, especially with humans. When humans committed sins, HE had an unending love and amazing grace to forgive them when they acknowledged their sins and repented. But one thing that humans must not do is to challenge GOD's creative authority. Humans must not challenge HIS own image. But they did. GOD created two genders, man and woman. When people refuse to accept their own gender and mold themselves into their own creation, the catastrophe will begin. Therefore, whoever challenges GOD'S authority, will suffer huge consequences. The first homosexual act began with shame and was hidden and afraid. But now they have stepped into a different chapter. With society's support and ignorance combined, they have become bolder, more proud and extreme, so that now they want to legalize their sinful behavior. In other words, they want to legalize their own sin. This is when GOD will step in and make a final decision to end the earth. Whoever supports them will take a greater responsibility and GOD will treat them the same way he does homosexuality itself."

Naomi was speechless for a while. She knew what the final decision would be. "What could we do to avoid GOD'S final decision?" Naomi asked in desperation.

“PRAY FOR THEM. GOD will be with them. Prayer is the connection from GOD to humans. When you pray, GOD will give them strength to overcome the obstacles they face.

LOVE THEM. Love them with JESUS' love. True love will always bring them victory.

EDUCATE THEM. Teach them GOD's word. Reveal the truth—they have to know that they created the sin that directly challenged GOD. Problems occur when people embrace homosexuality, but are silent about their sin. Just embracing them will bring encouragement that will block the realization that what they are doing is wrong.

DO NOT LEGALIZE HOMOSEXUALITY. Homosexuality is a sin. Humans could not, must not legalize their sinful behavior. They must not legalize what GOD has called a sin.

SATAN=HOMOSEXUALITY. Homosexuality is the last and only card Satan could play to destroy the human race. Satan encourages homosexuality to increase because he knows how much GOD abominates it. When GOD makes HIS final decision, Satan will be the first one to be destroyed forever and these humans will be next. Satan came from human sin, therefore, they will be destroyed together.

EXPERIENCE THE FINAL DAY. The end of the earth will not be by caused by human war or disease or nuclear weapons, but by homosexuality. When HE makes that decision, there will be no human race remaining on earth. GOD will take away the copy of his own image and remain HIMSELF in HIS own universe.

Grandma paused and took a deep breath.

Naomi was appalled.

Grandma started walking, so Naomi followed behind her.

“Grandma, why this road is so narrow?” It had bothered her from the beginning.

“It shows the accomplishment of your deeds on the earth. You earned a narrow road that you could barely walk through yourself.”

The thrill and guilt of it all overwhelmed her.

When she started to walk again, suddenly there was a massive rainbow in front of her and she heard a voice calling her name. She focused on the rainbow and there was Cosmo inside it, smiling at her. He said, “Now I am complete.”

He waved at her and disappeared with the rainbow. She yearned to follow him, but Grandma stopped her.

“He is with GOD. You must not follow him.”

They continued walking. Suddenly her eyes

spotted a large field filled with unfamiliar flowers and birds and trees surrounded her. She saw children gather laughing and chatting and it sounded like multiple birds singing. She noticed a shiny-bright girl dressed in yellow in the field, stooping to pick up different kinds of flowers. When she stood up, Naomi was startled and called her name, "Tawanda!"

Tawanda came towards her with her arms full of flowers, so many that it looked like flowers were walking all over her. When she stood in front of her, Naomi remembered not to touch, since Grandma had already warned her, so she just stood looking at her and sobbed. Tawanda's face was glowing. This was no skeleton of the little girl she had known. Tawanda looked happy and peaceful.

She opened up the middle of one of the flowers and there was the pearl necklace, which she put on Naomi's open palm.

"I am here to return your pearl necklace. My FATHER told me to give it back to you." When she said that, she gave her a wonderful smile, just like when she had received the pearl necklace. Then she turned and walked away. Naomi watched Tawanda with amazement. She had never seen her walk before. She had always just lain on her bed and stared.

"My only deed to please GOD was the pearl necklace," Naomi decried. Shame was upon her again.

“Go back and give the pearl necklace to the person who needs it the most.”

When Grandma finished speaking, she disappeared. Naomi realized that she was now all alone, so fear came upon her and she closed her eyes in terror. Then she heard someone else calling out her name.

She opened her eyes only to see before her Victor in tears, looking down at her.

“Oh, my gosh. You’re awake!” He grabbed her shoulders and hugged her.

As she sat on the ground, she started looking for her pearl necklace.

“What you looking for?” Victor asked.

“My pearl necklace,” she said and continued searching.

She could see concern on his face, as he inquired, “Do you know who I am?”

Naomi gave him a surprise look. “Not exactly, but I do know your name,” she said.

Naomi’s answer wasn’t good enough for him. “What is your name?” Victor asked her again.

“Naomi,” she said briefly.

“You still didn’t give me my name,” Victor said giving her a serious look.

“You don’t know who you are and now you don’t know my name. It’s very strange,” Naomi said half-joking.

“Come on, Naomi, I am checking on your mental state, so be serious.”

“Victor Romano from Atlanta, Georgia. Are you happy now?” and she laughed.

Victor loosened up, his concerns beginning to diminish.

Naomi tried to stand up, but realized that she was dizzy. Victor pulled her hand to help her up and hugged her again. What could be happier than to see her moving? They had been through a horrifying moment and he seemed to be the only witness to the whole scenario. Cosmo was dead and a strange lady was dying on his arms. He was scared to death for two long tearful days. She was breathing, but not moving. He didn't know what to do with her. He was with her most of the time, but the second day he became skeptical about her condition. He had been roaming around looking for an escape, but he couldn't go too far because she might wake up without him and wander away.

Naomi was touching her forehead. Something was on it.

“Oh, you were bleeding badly, but I couldn't find anything to stop it, so I had to use my shirt sleeve to cover it up.”

At first when Naomi had seen his shirt, she wondered why the left-side sleeve was missing. She noticed that his pitiful face was bruised and swollen

and that his eyes were almost swollen shut. Also, his stylish pants and white shirt were torn, muddy and bloody, similar to her ivory sleeveless dress. She touched her face and felt soreness and heavy swollen eyelids.

Suddenly she remembered the last part of the collision. She felt dizzy again. Victor quickly held out his arm to steady her.

“You have been a coma for two days,” Victor said.

“Two days?” She was shocked, but then she remembered meeting Grandma, Cosmo, the unselected souls, and Tawanda. What was all this about? *Did these things really happen in just two days?* her mind pondered.

“Where is Cosmo,” she asked him and looked around to see where he might be. However, when Victor started wailing, her heart sank. “Where is his body?” she asked.

Victor pointed to a place about thirty feet from them.

Naomi walked slowly toward Cosmo’s body, which was lying on the ground. Victor’s jacket covered his face and the upper part of his body. Naomi lifted the jacket and was startled. He was smiling at her and she almost could hear him saying, “I am complete.” He looked the same as when she had seen him in the rainbow. She quickly recovered him and plodded toward Cosmo’s car, which was in worse

shape than they were. Both sides were caved in and all the glass windows were broken. She could imagine that Victor had to shatter the windows to get both of them out of the car. How horrible a situation that must have been to find that one person was dead and the other was almost gone, too.

She thanked him profusely.

Next, she requested, "Can you open the trunk so I can take my luggage out of the car?" After he opened the trunk, she asked him to look below the board.

Surprisingly they found Cosmo's toolbox. Inside there was a sharp, thick machete and a portable shovel. She was shaking her head. Perhaps Cosmo had been preparing for his own death.

"We need to bury him," she said to Victor. Victor nodded helplessly.

Victor had changed. His bright smile and positive attitude were gone. He looked like an eagle with a broken wing lying on the ground and waiting to die. She was facing a big problem with him. He desperately needed to rebound from this devastation; otherwise, they would not survive.

"When you were unconscious, I was roaming around and I found deep large holes in the ground here. They're all over the hillside, so flooding will never be a problem. One of them would be a perfect place to bury Cosmo."

Victor carried Cosmo on his shoulders and Naomi followed with the shovel. She thought about when Victor was looking for a place to bury Cosmo earlier, she was pretty sure that he had probably been looking for one more spot as well. She wondered how close she might have been to her own death. Life was so unpredictable, as she had just learned.

When they arrived at one of the larger holes, she knew that it was the perfect place for Cosmo. Already four or five feet deep with soft dry ground, it was ready to embrace Cosmo. Suddenly, there were birds of all different kinds, colors and sizes circling around the place. Naomi was so impressed by the sight.

“The birds are singing,” Naomi said to Victor.

“They are not singing, they are crying,” Victor grunted.

Victor used Cosmo’s shovel to dig some more dirt. Then he laid him on the ground. At this point, Victor was sobbing uncontrollably and Naomi wept with him. It was but a short period that they had encountered him, but Cosmo had had a great impact on them both.

“Look at the rainbow!”

When Victor had finished covering the dirt for the last time, he looked at the sky and pointed to a beautiful rainbow that was hovering above their heads. An amazing feeling came over her. Now, she

couldn't deny that what she had been through had been the real thing. Her heart was pounding.

"I didn't see the rainbow when I was digging, did you?"

Naomi didn't say anything.

"A big man lies here in peace."

Victor was writing with his finger on top of the dirt. Naomi was writing next to his, "A big man is now with his heavenly father."

Victor went back to Cosmo's car. Naomi was working on her cell phone as Victor passed by and said, "It won't work."

Naomi took all the stuff out of her luggage. It looked like someone having a yard sale. Victor had told her she could only carry one bag, because they had to prepare for the possibility of a very long walk.

"You could make good money on those designer clothes. Miss Gorilla would be thrilled to wear them and don't forget to take those expensive perfumes. When we have a visitor, you can use them as a bribe," He said mockingly, but it didn't bother her. She finally trimmed her belongings down to one luggage. Then she looked down on the possessions she couldn't carry. She had spent lots of money on those things, but now they were worthless.

When she spotted the white silk scarf her mother had given her, she picked it up, too. She was suddenly choked with emotion as she thought of her

parents who by now must have found out that their daughter was missing. How would they cope with such terrible news? She should have been at home by now. She was certain they would do whatever they could to find her, but searching methods could be terribly dangerous. If Tim told them she went with the bus, they might be looking for her in the wrong place. Did the government know a car that had been swept away during the mudslide? There was no doubt that they knew about the mudslide and that it had caused immense damage to the mountain road. Were more people involved in the mudslide? There were many more questions she could not get answered right away. It was mindboggling, but she couldn't just sit down and try to reason it out. They needed to move on.

Finally, Naomi sat down with Victor and began making plans for their escape. "How are we ever going to get out of here?" Victor asked defeatedly. He wanted to plan, too, but he wasn't sure he could convince Naomi that they could survive in this jungle and escape. His doubting mind was completely dominated by an ominous reality.

Naomi's concerns were getting worse. Victor appeared to have lost the battle before it even started. "With two people willing, we can do it well," she said to him. "If no one comes to rescue us, we can even rescue ourselves."

Victor was astounded by her mindset. *Where did she get this boldness? However, she had no idea what she was talking about.* Nonetheless he had to give her credit for the encouragement that he needed so desperately.

“My major concern is how to find food,” Naomi said.

“If you’re a vegetarian and know how to climb a tree, you are in the right place,” Victor stated. “Food is growing everywhere and is 100% organic. Most of it is hidden by bushes, but it’s not difficult to find. The monkeys won’t be happy with me, because I will be stealing their food. They’re not threatened, but they sure know how make noise. I hope they won’t wake the mountain dwellers when we confront the little devils.”

When he started talking about fruit, her stomach began growling. According to what Victor said, she hadn’t eaten in almost three days. Reading her mind, Victor left in a hurry, promising to bring back food. It didn’t take much time before he was back to give her a handful of berries, nuts and plants, but she didn’t know if they were edible. However it didn’t take her long to put them into her mouth, because she was very hungry. After satisfying her hunger, she named him, Chief Victor. Now he had found purpose and was motivated.

“The first thing we have to do is let rescuers know where we are, so others can find us, too.

To do that, we need to get back to the main road where we were first hit. It's the only visible place on the whole mountain. I don't know how we can get there or how we avoid wild animals and natives, who might want to kill us. However, what I say to you is nothing but speculation. Uncertainty is biting our butt right now," he said in frustration, as he added, "There was no activity on this mountain—that's my main concern. At least we should hear a helicopter or plane or something. It's too quiet; that really bothers me." He made it seem like rescuers may have already given up on them.

"Maybe we're too deep in the woods to be heard. We may have missed all the activity above our heads. However, it doesn't matter, as we will be out of here soon." Naomi's convincing voice didn't impress Victor.

"Oh, did your GOD tell you that?" he smirked.

Naomi ignored his remark. "Do you carry a match or something we could use for fire?" Naomi asked him.

"No, I don't. That's another thing that really makes me mad. I used to smoke but I quit several months ago. I was so proud of myself that I threw away all the lighters and matches that I used to carry. Now, I don't even have a single match that possibly could save our lives."

Victor's bleak statement caused the realization of

their situation to hit hard and Naomi felt her skin tighten even further.

“Oh, my gosh!” Naomi’s delighted voice got his attention. “Do you know what this is?” She was holding up a fat brown paper bag in the air.

Victor was looking at her and waiting.

“I got this bread from the village people where I was staying. They baked this bread only on special occasions.” When the people had first given her the bread, she didn’t know what to do with it, so she slipped into her luggage and completely forgot about it. It was a big deal for them to bake the bread, because the shortage of daily food was a constant complaint. Even though the bread was hard like a rock and had no taste, she just couldn’t throw it away, so she had decided to take it home to show to her parents. Now she was holding the loaf, totally overcome with emotion, about ready to burst into joyful tears.

How could one loaf of bread make her that happy? Victor thought when reality hit him hard.

Naomi broke off half the bread and gave it to him. Then she broke the edge of her piece and started to chew. Her face immediately lit up, almost like an illusion. To him, it was like watching a multi-million-dollar production movie. She had finally connected with the poor people who appreciated her sincerely. *It was worth watching*, he thought.

Suddenly another memory came back to him. When she was in a coma (as he preferred to call it), he had checked her pulse and breathing constantly. This prim, egoistical lady in his arms was lifeless. He thought about how she had treated him and Jonathan, who had disliked her and called her a snob. In Victor's mind, he felt strangely defenseless. When she looked at him like a parasite, he was ashamed of himself. He couldn't fight with her. She enchanted him. *No, she enslaved him*, he thought. But he was OK with it. He had never held a woman in his arms. There was a different feeling that he encountered, a feeling he couldn't really describe. It was an honor to have her in his arms. At that special moment, he treated her like a father holding his sick little girl in his arms. And with the recollection of Cosmo's dying son, he could feel in his heart, how desperate Cosmo must have been. When the second day arrived and Naomi's condition did not change, he panicked and started praying for her just as hard as Cosmo had prayed for his son.

GOD, If YOU are the one that she worships, show me and prove to me that YOU are real and heal her.

After he prayed, he felt something wasn't quite right. He was too arrogant. So he changed his plea to, *OK, I am sorry, I was wrong. Please let her live.*

That's all I'm asking YOU. Then he added, I know YOU don't like me much, but let's make a deal. If YOU let her live, I will worship YOU as my GOD.

After she woke up, he forgot all about his prayer. As he was watching her eating the bread, he realized that something had changed her. At first he noticed that she seemed to be looking at him differently—she even gave him a warm cozy smile. His dumb jokes didn't bother her and his whining didn't irritate her.

"I need to change my clothes," she said, holding up her blue jeans and a long-sleeved red shirt. She wanted to get rid of her damaged ivory dress. It was time for the outdoor outfit.

"Where are you going?" Victor stopped her to inquire.

"I am going to change my outfit," she responded without turning around and kept walking toward the bushes.

"You don't have to hide from me," he said loudly. "Did you forget that I am gay?"

Naomi turned and paused, "Gay and guy? Hmmm, they sound so similar that I am confused." Then she disappeared into the woods.

Victor was stung as if by bees. Yep, her stinger was still working and he already regretted what he had just said to her.

"OK, I am ready."

Naomi was standing there in a perfectly clean outfit. With a cowboy hat, she could be voted this year's Miss Cowboy Girl.

She picked up one black leather piece of luggage, so full it looked ready to burst out. Victor suppressed his laughter, but totally understood her. She had already to give up the expensive stuff of which she used to be fond.

“Victor, before we start this uncertain journey together, I need to remind you of something very important between us. Our first goal is to escape from this jungle without harm. In order to do that, we need to become a well-organized team with respect and trust for each other. I want you to be the leader of this team and give it your best effort to be successful.”

He accepted her offer, extended his arm and shook hands with her. Naomi was content and smiled.

“Let's go, captain—I am ready,” she said with enthusiasm.

Gee, I got promoted to Chief Victor and now I'm captain of the team? Soon I will be King of the Jungle, and he laughed softly. He was honored to have whatever title she gave to him.

They reasoned in what direction they should take their first steps and chose to hike on the hill. It took more energy but it would be quicker to the mountain road, they hoped. Victor took a deep breath,

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marched one step forward onto the hillside and like a novice warrior, grabbed his big knife and put Naomi behind him.

They walked without difficulty for a while, but then, as she was passing through some thick bushes, a rough thorn suddenly caught on her hair and she couldn't move. She tried to get it off by hand, but the harder she tugged, the thorn grabbed her even harder. Finally she called to Victor for help. He quickly ran back to her and took the thorn out of her hair, for which she heartily thanked him.

Next, as she passed a strange berry plant, she saw a snake the size of her thigh, hanging down from a dead tree a few feet in front her. She stopped breathing and froze. There was huge hole in the midst of the tree, so the snake must dwell in that hole. She was so scared that she couldn't even call to Victor, but finally was able to run from the danger. She was sweating heavily as she thought, *I wonder what the next surprise will be?*

They had walked so many miles that her legs were getting stiff, so Victor decided they should rest and have lunch. They found a flat rock just barely big enough for two people to sit on. Victor decided that he would find more food. She could see him in the distance, where he was climbing a tree. He fell onto the ground several times, but finally made it to the top on one of the trees, which he began shaking. She

could hear something falling out of the tree to the ground. Then she heard animals shrieking. Multiple colored monkeys were protesting their intruder. You could hear that they were very upset by their unbearable noisy screeching.

“Be quiet, please,” she whispered to them. She hoped that nobody appeared to check on the sudden noise.

Victor came back with a handful of shell and fruits. She gave up finding a name for each one, but she ate whatever Chief Victor handed her, so that finally her stomach was full.

“I think you made those poor monkeys mad,” she said.

“Well, I didn’t get an invitation to their party, so I just went and introduced myself,” and he shrugged with a smile.

“How was the lunch?” he asked her.

“I don’t know,” she said.

“You don’t know? You just ate three of those whatevers and you couldn’t tell me how it was?” He was laughing.

“I ate them so quickly that I can’t remember how they tasted.”

They both laughed. But at the end of the laugh, they had tears in their eyes.

Except for the snake and monkeys, so far they had only faced very small animals during their hike.

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They seemed to pop out everywhere to surprise them, but did no harm, like the green-colored lizard with a crowned head and a long tail the size of her thumb, who had been looking at her with curiosity. Then, there was the dark-brown toad the size of her hand that sat next to her on the rock and had lunch with them. She hoped they would never face any animals that could harm them.

They noticed that tree trunks were getting thinner, so more sunlight was visible between trees. They hoped that meant that they were about to leave the dense tree area. If they could find the wide open sky, it would be easier for them to figure out where they were and where to go to be found.

“The sun will going down very soon. We must look for a place where we can safely stay for the night.” He wanted to stop before dusk engulfed them.

Naomi was happy to hear that, as her legs were sore and weak. Truthfully, she couldn't go more than another 100 feet. Just up ahead, they found a monstrous rock that stood about thirty feet in height and blocked their view completely. Naomi insisted that it was a perfect place to spend the night to avoid wild animals, but Victor was reluctant at first, because she would have to climb the rock. He climbed first, but there were lots of rough edges on the rock so the climb wasn't much of a problem for him.

When he got to the top he yelled at her. "You've got it lady, come on up. The reservation is filled."

She was glad that she had experienced indoor rock climbing before, because it was helping her greatly. She wasn't as fast as he, but Victor was impressed that she climbed without any help. When she reached the top, there was more space than what she had imagined. There were a few rough spots here and there, but most of the space was flat and ready for the bed.

"I just learned that women have more common sense and are more practical and stronger than men." He had underestimated her ability to climb when she chose the rock. She just smiled.

Naomi found a few holes in the rock, and looked inside to make sure there were no snakes or small animals inside the holes. "And are more cautious," he added.

"Now I understand why men need women," he said.

"You're right, men and women are imperfect without each other." She was obvious, but she wondered how much he might have gotten from that.

Before they went to bed, she sliced the bread and gave it to him. He ate quickly and thanked her, but thinking desolately that the bread would probably be gone after one more meal.

The bread that she had almost thrown away had

become an integral commodity to their survival.

Victor looked for a good spot for sleeping. He found it and placed his cloth on the rock, where he lay and stared upward. She found a spot on the edge of the rock and stretched out her legs. Her whole body was sore and tense.

"I hope your sleep habits are not as bad as mine. I could fall off the cliff overnight," he made fun of her after she sat on her bed opposite him at the edge of the rock. However, he didn't mention any gay jokes again.

Hungry mosquitoes were flying around her body making such a loud noise that it's hard to believe that it came from such a little insect. They were twice as big as what she had known at home.

Even the mosquitoes were different here, she thought.

"Naomi look at me!" he put his travel bag on his head. In the dark, he looked like a big-headed alien standing and looking at her.

"It may look silly but if I don't do this, in the morning my face could disappear."

Naomi laughed. While she was lying down, she saw little sparkling things between the trees. "Victor, I can see the stars from here!" she exclaimed excitedly.

"Yes, I'm looking at them right now, too. It's good for us that the rain might be over so we may have dry weather. That will help us tremendously

in getting out of here,” Victor said. “Life is strange. Who would think that I am lying on a rock in the jungle looking at the stars and becoming excited about it,” he said in calm voice.

They said good night to each other.

Naomi thought that Victor must have fallen into a deep sleep, he was so quiet. She was tired, too, but she couldn't get to sleep right away. She was feeling guilty about intentionally making him distant from her. However, she was grateful for what he had done for her when she had so desperately needed help. She deeply appreciated the fact that he had stayed with her all along. She prayed for his sake. She had never prayed for someone or even for her own sake. Prayer wasn't her daily habit. She felt good and fell asleep quickly.

“Good morning,” Victor greeted her when she woke up. He already had put his stuff into his bag, and breakfast was prepared. He must have gotten up early and gone hunting for food. The breakfast was the last piece of bread with whole berries inside. The taste was delicious. A hungry stomach is the best appetite. When you're hungry, everything tastes good, she learned. He displayed their collection of vegetables before him like a produce stand.

“How was business today?” she said jokingly and he laughed. “What is this?” She was pointing at a long rough-looking root with a few plants on top.

“Oh, that one. I discovered it this morning. It tastes pretty good. It must not be poisonous, because I am still alive.”

Well, one more organic item on the list, she said to herself.

“Let’s get started early today.” Victor was ready to go.

Going down the rock was a lot more difficult than going up. Victor was already down and waiting for her, but Naomi almost slipped a couple of times.

“Just jump from there. I’ll catch you. Trust me,” he said looking up to her. But Naomi took her time and finally got her feet on the ground.

“You don’t trust me,” he grunted.

“You’re right, I don’t trust you to catch a 110-pound object flying through the air—I don’t think so.”

He shook his head and passed before her to take the lead.

The journey was on again.

The adjacent area was quiet. They walked through bushes, trying to make as little noise as possible. When Naomi stumbled and fell, they decided to take a break.

“What will you do first, if you get out of here,” Victor asked her.

She thought about a bubble bath, but instead she

told him she wanted to have a good meal without vegetables.

He laughed. Then Naomi asked him the same question.

“The first thing I would do is to bring a thousand bulldozers up here and clean this place out like shaving a head with a razor,” Victor said seriously.

“You would kill every living thing here.”

“I don’t think any living creature is happy here. How could they be? This is a horrible place.”

Naomi disagreed. “This is their home, like it or not,” Naomi said. “Tell me what you would *really* do when you get out of here. Forget about the bulldozer talk,” Naomi told him.

“Go to the people that I had a problem with and reconcile with them.”

Naomi was surprised. “You seem too nice to have problems with people.” she surmised.

“I have a few and I realized that I was wrong.”

“When did you find out you were wrong?” Naomi asked.

“In here—when I saw my death approaching.”

“Well, tell those people about it when you see them again.”

Victor got up and walked toward her. “You know what, you’ve changed—you changed for good. It was after you came out of that coma. I like the new you.”

Naomi was surprised herself. She didn't realize that she had changed, but she believed that what he saw in her was true.

"I wasn't in a coma. That was different. I will explain it to you when we get out of here. You'll be surprised at what I've been through, you won't believe it."

Before they began hiking again, she was curious about what he had said to her earlier. "How have I changed?" she asked him.

He turned around and grinned. "You smile a lot more," he said briefly.

"That's all? I smiled before, didn't I?" she asked.

"It's a different smile. The old one was a lip smile, but the new one is a heart smile. It makes a big difference."

He almost said how stoic and arrogant she was when he was dealing with her earlier, but he bit his tongue. Now, it didn't matter much.

"Oh, Victor, look!"

She found clusters of wild grapes by her side. She grabbed the vines and cut them off and held as many grapes as she could. She gave Victor three vines to carry.

"I saw this in the supermarket," Naomi said to him.

"What do they call this?"

"Wild grapes."

“Perfect name. I never knew these existed. I was too busy consuming meats and not enough vegetables,” Victor said.

“Well, now you know you should balance your nutritional facts,” she said smiling.

He was eating grapes with seeds. She warned him. The crunching seeds made a noise. “Now, I have a perfect balance of nutrition.”

When they began to walk again, she noticed that he had lost a lot of weight. His pants were hanging loose and barely clung to his hips, but his bruises were lighter and the swelling was almost gone.

As they went deeper into the woods, they stopped at a smaller rock than the previous night. They carried out almost the same routine for as the previous night, and then ate and went to sleep.

This time, she got up before Victor, because she heard something that woke her. She thought she heard a waterfall. The sound was like what she had heard on the mountain during her last summer vacation.

“I hear a waterfall,” she said in excitement.

He listening intently for the sound, but he heard nothing—just bird sounds. “I don’t hear anything,” he said.

“There is a waterfall somewhere in this mountain. Let’s follow the sound,” she said as she forced him to hurry.

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He was skeptical, but they had nothing to lose. They didn't even know where they were yet.

Now Naomi was in charge of their destination. She was going for the sound. Victor had mixed feelings about her claims, but he was reasonable. He couldn't hear the sound but perhaps there was a waterfall. If so, that was a hope he could count on. So far, he could say all these things were superficial. She had been in a coma, so perhaps some memory in her mind was shocked and loosened up. However, he still hoped that she was right.

They had walked many miles without rest. Her face was pink red and her clothes were soaked with sweat, but no waterfall was yet to be found. Dusk would be upon them in less than two hours, but Naomi kept going forward. Now he was concerned about her. Finally she asked him to find a place for the night. She was exhausted and needed to lie down. Naomi was very quiet that night. They had walked more miles than on any other day, but there was no waterfall. He understood how frustrated she could be. The silent night was moving forward.

"Naomi! Naomi!" Victor was calling her name like a madman, but Naomi was so tired, she had to force her eyes open.

"What is all the fuss about?" she mumbled.

"You're right. There is a waterfall. I don't believe it, but you're right."

His voice was so loud that she was concerned about waking all the other creatures who might be nearby. However, she hopped off the rock like a happy bunny and joined him.

“I couldn’t sleep last night. I was up until midnight, and all of a sudden, my ears popped and I could hear the waterfall. I was so excited but I couldn’t wake you. You were too deep in sleep. In the early morning, I could barely see, but I was running like a maniac toward the sound, and less than two miles away, a waterfall appeared right before me. When I stood before it, my emotions overwhelmed me. I am so sorry I doubted you.”

She patted his back.

“Don’t ask me why I couldn’t hear before when you told me,” Victor said, still excited. They were racing each other as they headed to the waterfall.

They skipped breakfast, but there was a lot of energy still there. *Time is of the essence*, she thought.

When the last tall thick bush was shoved away, there the grandest, most breathtaking waterfall of all stood before them. It was more immense than anything Naomi could have imagined. Flying mist was touching her face and dampening her clothes. She stood and took a deep breath as tears rolled down her cheeks. It was amazing to see the open sky without the tall dense trees.

Victor jumped into the water with his clothes on.

She carefully put one foot at a time into the water.

“Come on in, the water is perfect,” he yelled from the waterfall.

The water was cold, icy cold, but it felt wonderful. Victor was already standing in the waterfall with his arms stretched upwards. The tremendous force of the water poured down on him, but he bravely stood in the middle of the mighty force.

When she was completely in the water, she saw Victor was hopping in and out of it, trying to catch a fish as big as his forearm.

If he catches it, that will make one more item on the menu list, she thought.

She finally took the bandage off her forehead. The tightness is gone. She felt liberated.

Victor came out of the water with empty hands. They forgot they had not eaten anything yet. He went to the bushes and changed clothes. Then he said he would go get food. When he was gone, she hurriedly went to the bushes and changed her clothes. While she was waiting for him, she looked at the top of the waterfall and wondered what could be there beyond it. She couldn't wait.

Not surprisingly, Victor brought more food than they could consume in a day. She knew there was lot more food available near the waterfall. All plants love to be near water, as do humans. She hoped that they would not have to face whoever might want to

harm them, but she knew her hope had little merit.

Victor went back into the water and tried to snag a fish again. He used one of his long-sleeved shirts as a net. However, while he was dunking his shirt towards the fish, it got away before he could grab the whole shirt. He looked frustrated by his failure.

“Why don’t you just catch it with your bare hands?” she suggested to him. He immediately threw his shirt down and dashed into the water—amazingly, he caught one. He was so proud of himself, but as he lifted the fish up to show her, to his chagrin, the fish squirmed and got away.

He jumped into the water again. This time, it took a lot longer than first, but he caught another one that was a little smaller. He didn’t lift it in the air this time.

”Necessity is the mother of invention!”

She 100 percent agreed with that. The lack of protein was a problem solved.

“Do you like sashimi?” he asked her.

“What is sashimi?” she asked, as she had no idea what he was talking about.

“Sashimi is a Japanese food. It’s just raw thinly sliced fish that’s served with a Japanese-style dipping sauce.”

“Raw fish? How could people eat raw fish?” but after she said that, she realized she sounded just like her mother who was totally against eating raw fish.

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With her encouragement, their family had never gone near a Japanese restaurant.

He found a little flat rock, which he used to cut the fish in half. She walked away quickly. He used Cosmo's knife to thinly slice the fish. Then he displayed the slices when they were ready to serve.

Naomi picked the smallest one and put it into her mouth with her eyes closed. She had a weird feeling about chewing raw fish, but she carefully shifted the meat into her stomach anyway. "That's wasn't bad at all," she said to him. Next she put a few berries into her mouth to adjust her stomach. After their brunch (as Victor called it), he told her that he needed to look around and figure out exactly where they were. He decided to go by himself. He knew she was exhausted after finding the waterfall. She agreed.

When he left, she waited for a while until she was sure he was gone before taking off her clothes and jumping into the water. Then she used a small towel to rub her skin like she was trying to scrape thick dirt from her body. She could smell her own unpleasant body odor. She could smell Victor's as well. She needed a long deep bath. She scrubbed her skin once more, but she became exhausted quickly.

She was floating on the water like a dry leaf. She closed her eyes and just let her body go. Relaxation finally came and with a special feeling, freedom. She

was finally alone. Everything was quiet. Everything was within her.

But even with her eyes closed, she felt someone was interrupting her privacy. She opened them quickly and there was Victor at the other side of the lake staring at her. She dived into the water and stayed under until she couldn't hold her breath any longer. When she came out of the water to breathe, he was gone. She quickly got out of the water, grabbed her clothes and ran to a nearby bush. This is what she had been dreading all along and now it came back to bite her.

What shall I do now? What will Victor do now?

She couldn't think straight. She could easily feel his burning desire from afar. She could even feel his hard breathing. She thought she had made a valiant effort not to raise the man's desires, not dressing provocatively, keeping her distance from him, never any sexy talk or flirting. He was constantly reminding her he is gay, but she never believed it. This moment was harder than being lost in the jungle.

She finally broke down.

"Oh, Naomi!" Victor was standing behind her in the distance. "Naomi, I am so sorry for my foolish behavior. I didn't mean to spy on you. I came back to show you what I found in the woods," he was so panicky that he stuttered.

"What did you find in the woods?" she responded

quickly to avoid the subject she dreaded to discuss.

“A broken arrow,” and he held it up to show her. “There is no doubt that people live by the water. We were lucky not to be found by anyone yet.”

They concluded that staying by the waterfall for long wasn't a good plan—too much exposure. Until they left the area, they would have to hide themselves at the waterfall like snipers.

“Let's not live by fear. We'll just do our best not to be found. But if they find us, let's see what happens,” Naomi said.

Victor was always amazed by her boldness. This skinny frail-looking lady had more guts than any man he had ever known. He ran into the water to catch another fish.

When she saw him jumping into the water, she thought about how different things would have been if she had chosen the bus instead of a taxi. It would still have been unique, no doubt. However, she might not be here watching a stranger, an inexperienced fisherman, trying to catch a fish with his bare hands.

People live by their choices, she thought.

“Now I'm a professional fisherman,” he said, lifting a fish over his head. The fish was bigger than any others he had caught and had a strange shiny-blue color.

“Did you want some Sashimi for dinner?” Victor

asked. She declined. She climbed the rock for the night and fell asleep quickly.

“Ouk! Ouk!”

A noise came from the bottom of the rock. She looked down and tried to see where the noise was coming from, but darkness completely engulfed the lake area. She could barely see Victor who was squatting in the dark. She jumped down to the ground.

“What’s wrong? Are you OK?” His scowling face was dripping with sweat. He was shivering and throwing up.

“Did you eat that fish last night,” she asked? He just nodded.

He might have gotten food poisoning or was poisoned by the fish, she thought.

She hoped that he had food poisoning. She observed his vomiting, but there was no blood. That was a good sign. She ran down to the lake to get as much water as she could carry and urged him to drink plenty of water to clean his stomach. He followed her instructions very well. She constantly checked the vomit—still no sign of blood. She felt a little relieved. She thought about all the modern medical equipment at home. Now she had to do everything in a primitive way. She was holding his stomach from behind and jerking him to help him throw up. His whole body was a pool of sweat and his face was pale. He lay on the ground and moaned.

He might have eaten a poisoned fish, but she suddenly shivered as she realized that his pain was greater than what people usually suffer with food poisoning. A treacherous thought crossed her mind but she erased it immediately.

“Naomi, I am sorry. I don’t think I can make it,” he said with trepidation.

“Of course, you can make it. Don’t be silly,” she said while wiping his forehead.

“Naomi, I have to tell you something before I die.”

Naomi was fretting. She thought she knew what’s coming, but she didn’t want to be a part of it. “Please don’t tell me anything that would make us uncomfortable. You are not going to die.”

But he had made up his mind. “I fell in love with you the first time I saw you.”

Naomi covered her face with both hands and went down to her knees.

“That was the first time in my life I ever felt real love. It was very special and tremendously different from anything I ever felt before. I am so ashamed of what I have done and what I have been.”

Even though the confession was uneasy for her and she didn’t believe this was his last breath, she had to allow him the privilege of a confession. Although she was extremely uncomfortable, she was still listening.

He tried to vomit again, but nothing came from his mouth. His stomach was empty. She was content. It wasn't a bad sign, but he was still in pain.

"Even though this has been the most frightening time of my life, I am happy to have been with you. I even thought that if we couldn't get out of the jungle, as long as you were with me, I would be OK with that."

At this moment, she would rather be his physician—not his psychologist.

"I'm going to get more water."

His hydration was her concern. When she came back from the lake, he was sleeping, which was a good sign, as he must be exhausted. She determined he might have had food poisoning, but if so, diarrhea would surely follow. She checked his pulse and forehead before she went back to her spot. She was exhausted. *What a night*, she thought. Dawn was crawling onto the lake as she looked over at Victor. He was not moving. She studied the open sky. She couldn't sleep.

When the sunlight came, she walked down to the lake and washed her face. The cold water gave her a fresh feeling. She needed to get some food before Victor awakened. He was doing a good job providing food, but this morning, she was in charge. She found their breakfast in the bushes and small trees. As she poured it into a broken

fruit shell and turned around, she saw something flash through the bushes and then stop. She stood and looked around once more, then turned back to where Victor was lying.

He looked like someone who had just awakened from a nightmare. His hair was messy and his eyes weren't focused.

"How are you feeling," she asked?

"Horrible," he grunted.

"Well, that's normal for someone who had food poisoning in the middle of the night," she said, like she was his doctor.

"That was food poisoning?" he asked.

"I believe so," she said briefly. He combed through his hair with his long fingers.

"I feel so horrible, but not for the sickness, but..."

She cut him off, saying, "I know what you are trying to say. It's done. Let's not talk about it."

She gave him juice from the fruit, which he drank without stopping, he was so thirsty.

After they finished breakfast, he stated briefly, "I need talk to you." She sat across from him and waited.

"It was a crazy night and I truly believed I was going to die. But I'm still breathing and I am embarrassed. If I could, I would like to take back all the things I said to you, but I know it's too late. So I am here to fix the problem that I caused. I

am sorry for being an idiot and I beg you to forget about what I said.”

His eyes were lost somewhere. He couldn't look straight at her.

“You were not an idiot, you were honest. There is nothing wrong with that. And honestly, I was thrilled to find out that you could have feelings for a woman. To me, that's a wonderful thing and I am very happy for you.”

She was prepared and ready to tell him that there was no chance in their relationship, because she loved Tim, but she didn't have to say anything. He knew that he was not for her.

“Did you know that I was an orphan?” he said, changing the subject. She was pleased with his effort and was ready to listen.

He was born in a rural small town in south Georgia, about one hundred miles from Atlanta. His parents were in their twenties and had been married for less than two years. When he was only eight months old, they were killed in a horrible auto accident, so he couldn't remember anything about them. When he was three, his maternal grandparents gave him photos of his parents, which he kept in his bed and slept with every night. His grandparents attended church regularly and practiced their conservative faith, but after his grandfather lost his only daughter in that tragic accident, his faith

drifted away and he stopped going to church. He became bitter and rigid and blamed GOD for his daughter's death. He started drinking heavily and when he became drunk, he pointed his finger at the sky and said some unpleasant things that made Grandma scold him. Victor learned at an early age that GOD is *not* good. HE took his parents away.

After four years with his maternal grandparents, his grandfather died of an unknown cause. Grandmother insisted that he died of excessive alcohol consumption. Victor found him on the bathroom floor, bleeding from his mouth. After his grandfather passed, his grandmother had a stroke that paralyzed the left side of her body. She had to stay in a nursing home, which she hated immensely. After three months there, she died after having a second stroke. He moved to his paternal grandparents, whose financial troubles were more difficult than the other grandparents. They were barely able to make it each month. Instantly Victor was a tremendous burden on them and Grandmother constantly reminded him of that almost every day. He tried hard to make them like him. He was polite and obedient.

Not too long after he arrived, he developed a special bond with his grandfather. He called him Pa Pa—Grandfather liked it very much. Victor enjoyed going fishing with him, where they could get away from Grandmother's scorn and frowns. One

sunny day on the lake, Pa Pa told Victor that the cost of groceries wasn't an issue for them. Pa Pa said Grandmother was jealous of him because Victor spent too much time with him and not enough with her. Pa Pa said the main reason he went fishing all the time was to get away from his wife's complaining. "The woman complains too much," Pa Pa said. Now they knew what to do—go fishing.

But his luck would not last long. Grandfather died in his sleep. He was 75 years old. Only a six-year-old boy could experience the death of so many people. Grandmother told him that he brought them bad luck. She even blamed him for her son's death. Three months after Pa Pa's death, she put him in a foster care program. There he met a lady name Nancy Blake, who was with the State Child Protection Agency. She instantly liked him and took him to her house until she could find a new foster home for him. She had lost her son years ago when he was 16 years old. He had died from an auto accident when he was driving with a group of his friends. She was still grieving and couldn't accept the loss of her son. After three month, she decided to adopt Victor.

Victor was thrilled and couldn't wait to become her legitimate son, but there was a problem. Someone claiming to be his uncle's lawyer appeared in her door telling her that he had been entered into

the legal adoption process by his uncle whom Victor had never seen before. Victor didn't even know he had an uncle.

Later Nancy explained to him that he indeed had an uncle, his father's older brother. His grandparents had no contact with him since he had moved out of the house when he was 18 years old. He was self-educated and a successful businessman who called himself a millionaire and he wanted Victor. Nancy was deeply disappointed, but she did her own research about his uncle's status, and found something odd that aroused her attention. He was a homosexual man living in a mansion with his live-in partner.

She was determined that this could have a tremendous negative impact on Victor and she wanted to fight for his sake, so the custody battle was on. When Nancy's lawyer was in the courtroom before the judge, he cautiously revealed the uncle's dire secret and immediately, the media reacted in a frenzy. Afterwards, the front of the courtroom was a mob of news teams camped out like a bloodthirsty mosquito squad. Upon smelling blood right under their noses, they rushed in and try to suck as much blood as they could.

The gay millionaire—how could they miss it?

One day the judge wanted to meet with Victor for the first time. He came along with Nancy

arm-in-arm. When the mob waiting outside the courtroom saw him, there was shoving and jostling to get close enough to the boy to ask questions that a six-year-old couldn't possibly answer. Finally Nancy's lawyer rescued the shocked little child from the mob and carried him in his arms until they walked into the courtroom. The judge had observed the whole thing and ordered lawyers of both sides not to bring him into the court again under any circumstance.

"I wish I could bomb them," Uncle John whispered to his lawyer as he stormed past the media crews. His lawyers were bewildered and looked around to make sure no one was listening.

"If you want to be a father, you have to act like a good man. Your temper could cause you to lose in court. Nobody will support a violent man," he scolded his grumbling client when they were alone.

"Honestly I wasn't real thrilled to be a father, but now I am. I want to win this game so I can show the world and say out loud, kiss my **."

His lawyer covered his head with his hands. If there hadn't been money at stake, he would have bolted out and said the same thing. However, his client's troublesome personal problems, along with his unethical business practices, had made them both rich. The lawsuit against his client's personal and business interests were stacking up in the court docket, along with an infamously well-known name.

Nonetheless, this case made him nervous. He didn't like what he had to do to win the case, playing the discrimination card.

His strategy was to remind the court that this man was Victor's uncle, a blood relative, and the only family member who cared about him. But the court decided not to let him become Victor's father, because the man is gay. Yet they were willing to let a strange person who has no blood connection whatsoever take care of him. On the record, his uncle has no criminal history and has never harmed anyone. He has perfect credentials pertaining to his personal and business activities. And the most important thing, he *is* an uncle to the child, for goodness sake. The only reason this court is not allowing him to adopt Victor is plain and simple—because he is gay. They were discriminating against him because he wanted to do the right thing for his nephew. Who could said a gay person couldn't be a good father!

The other strategy was using media exposure. When he had an opportunity to talk to the media, which had never been a problem for him or the other side, he would spread the magic word, a three-hundred-million dollar discrimination lawsuit against the state and the biased judge who has never been fair to a gay man. Bigger numbers will return better results. He couldn't wait for the next day to see the

front page of the newspapers. The judge would be sitting on his morning toilet seat, reading the fine news print and cursing.

That's all he had to do to win. Then he could pick up his hefty legal fees and get out of town for a long vacation.

However, he lost his enthusiasm when he saw Nancy sitting across from him with a broken heart, caused by the loss of her only son, and wanting only to be a mother just one more time. That bothered him immensely.

But his client, the wealthy bastard, who had no interest in becoming a father, was fighting only for his ego and wanted to hurt her. He was mad at her because she had revealed his secret.

The verdict was rendered. The judge went home early. He was furious. He was mad at himself after having become engulfed in a power game. He knew he could do better. But he was afraid to be hurt by critics who said he was biased and threatened by the discrimination lawsuit against him and the state.

The judge thought that they were right, that he never understood homosexuality. However, he couldn't control himself, because any time he thought about gay men, he instantly imagined in his mind two men lying together in a sexual act, which gave him goose bumps. That was disgraceful. But he let them win. He walked into his living room,

kicked his dog and now became angry at himself for that. He stomped to the liquor cabinet and took down the whole bottle of unopened whisky, all of which he promised himself would be consumed before midnight and he did.

“Call me any time you want to talk to me,” Nancy said in tears, holding Victor’s two hands. Uncle John grabbed him and shoved him into the limousine.

“I don’t think so, lady, you are now history.” he said to her smugly as he put one foot into his luxurious automobile.

Victor looked at her from inside the limo window as the vehicle pulled away. She was becoming far away from him. She stood like a tombstone.

The first time Victor met his Uncle John, he was intimidated by his looks. He was tall, muscular and had thick arms and he never smiled. When he took him home, he was introduced to two people at first, Donald, his partner, and Donald’s son, Jonathan. Donald gave him a big smile that almost reached to his ear lobes. He kissed his cheek and warmly hugged him to welcome him. Jonathan was two years older than Victor, but he was shorter and thinner and he had his father’s smile.

When Victor was led by Donald through the living room to the kitchen, he was amazed by the spacious size of the house, the shiny marble floors and sparkling chandeliers that hung from the ceiling, and

so many rooms with expensive-looking furniture and art. He loved everything in the mansion. When he walked into the kitchen, the workers clapped their hands to welcome him. He met the kitchen staff, gardeners, a maintenance person and even his new tutors. He felt cozy with a warm welcome from all of them. He was overwhelmed by his new environment. Donald led Victor to his new bedroom. When he walked into his room, his jaw dropped. His bed was three times bigger than Nancy's. A big, long, railroad train was sprawled on the floor, waiting for him to play. There were many boxes full of toys, so many he didn't know which one he wanted to grab first. Everything was exciting—there was even a swimming pool, a tennis court and especially a game room and a small movie theater. Everything was there for *him*.

From his bedroom windows, he could see the front gate straight ahead and he could spot people going in and out of the gate.

Everything here is awesome!

The six-year-old boy's new life had begun so superbly that he almost forgot about Nancy.

In the morning most of the time, Donald was in the kitchen and greeted Victor. Jonathan was the last person to arrive at the breakfast table. His hair was matted and his eyes were barely open. Uncle John's generous heart made possible for everyone to have

breakfast and lunch for free. But strangely enough, he never attended any of the gatherings. On every occasion that he saw Uncle John in the living room or hallway, Victor always became very nervous when he faced him. He asked Victor how he was doing, but he walked away before Victor could give him an answer. Victor tried to avoid him. It was sad for Victor but he knew they were better off not seeing each other. Donald was handling all the household duties and events. Everybody loved his sweet personality. He was dramatic and whimsical at times, but he still could win over the most popular person in the family. When all the workers gathered at the morning table, they were chatting, joking, laughing and eating breakfast together. Victor loved those moments. But then late in the afternoon, all the workers left to go home. When he looked down to the gate from his bedroom window and saw them leaving, loneliness lingered with him until morning arrived again.

Like it or not, Jonathan also became a significant part of Victor's life.

When they were not together, the workers asked, "Are you looking for Victor?" and made fun of Jonathan. There were only two kids living in the house, so Jonathan wanted to hang around with Victor all the time. Sometimes Victor became irritated by Jonathan, but he understood Jonathan's

situation more than anyone else. Jonathan was the family clown that loved to make people laugh. It was nice to be with him. However, when he got older, he was itching to get out of the house and hang around with other kinds of kids and have a different kind of fun. Sometimes he felt like he was trapped inside a house with yellow crime-scene tape wrapped around the outside of the house. He would rather be outside the house with the yellow tape.

When Victor's 16th birthday arrived, everything changed in an unexpected and an unpleasant way.

Everyone was excited about his sweet sixteenth birthday. All the workers were preparing his birthday party, painting and baking and decorating, adding the last-minute touches. The kitchen was crowded with people cheering for his birthday and he was busy opening his presents. The food was good and everybody was happy. He received a Rolex watch from Uncle John and a black four-wheeler from Donald. Almost at the end of the party, Jonathan whispered to him that his present for Victor was in his room and he asked him to go with him.

"How did you like your presents?" Jonathan asked.

"I liked all of them," Victor said.

"Were you disappointed that you didn't get a car from your uncle?"

Victor always hated when Jonathan could read

his mind. "I didn't expect it from him, so there was nothing to be disappointed about. By the way, why do I need car when we have twenty-four hour limousine service?" Victor said simply, to avoid the fuss.

"Liar, liar. I know how much you wanted to have your own car so you could go somewhere freely. I don't think your uncle wants you to have a car because he was afraid you would be exposed to the public. According to my father that was the lawsuit he dealt with before making him paranoid and depressed. That's why you were stuck in this house for ten years.

Victor was numb. He didn't realize something Jonathan had known.

"Here is my present," he said as he gave him a square red envelope that looked like a birthday card.

He opened up the envelope. Ten one hundred dollar bills were inside the envelope.

"One thousand dollars? Where did you get all this money?" Victor asked him, holding the money out.

"Well, you know by now, my father is a rich man," Jonathan laughed.

It sounded like the cash came from Donald, not from Jonathan.

"You can use the cash for part of your down-payment for your future car," Jonathan said.

Jonathan came closer to him and held his two arms tightly.

“I would like to give you a real present from my heart,” And he kissed him, a very wet kiss. It felt like someone had smashed his head with a hefty metal object. The shock left him motionless, but another shock came before he could overcome the first one.

“What are you guys doing?” Uncle John was standing by the bedroom door with his arms crossed over his chest, screaming at them. His face was crimson red and his eyes were burning fire.

Jonathan fled like a frightened mouse having just escaped from a cat’s mouth. Uncle John came closer and slapped Victor’s face twice, so he was knocked to the floor, where he began sobbing.

“When I was away from home, was that what you were doing with him?”

His voice was trembling and his body was shaking.

Victor got up and screamed at him just like his uncle did.

“I learned from you!” he yelled, finally showed the anger and misery that had dwelled within him for so long. He immediately regretted what he had said to him, but it was too late. Victor saw tears flashing through his uncle’s eyes and he left Jonathan’s room in a hurry. When Uncle John left the room, Victor ran into his own room and threw himself onto his bed, sobbing like a lost boy in the wilderness. He could hear Uncle John and Donald brawling. At the end, Donald was shrieking like a little girl.

Darkness was looming over the house and especially on him.

He didn't see Uncle John for two weeks and Jonathan was nowhere to be found. Honestly, he wasn't looking for them. He made a practical excuse for not showing up for home classes. He was in his room most of time and meals was delivered by a greatly concerned chef, Ronny. It was another sleepless night, as he considered leaving this miserable meaningless world. Why does it have to be me who lost his parents at age eight months of age, only to be reared by angry grandparents who left him to other careless grandparents? Then they tossed him into the foster home system just to end up here, where although wealthy, there was no love, only fakery and distrust, it was a disgusting place.

He needed to do something. After the trouble with his uncle, the only thing on his mind was finding Nancy. However, when he tried to call her, he discovered her phone was disconnected, which bewildered him. He searched for an old phone number and found Nancy's brother's number.

"She passed away three years ago. She died from a heart attack, but in my opinion she died, because she was heart-broken twice and she couldn't handle it anymore," Nancy's brother sadly related to Victor.

Again, Victor lost hope. He did not care about his life any more. Let's go with the float. Who cares?

After he finished his story, Naomi was numb.

“What happened to your uncle?”

“He came home three weeks later and filed for bankruptcy protection and died after one year. He had lost everything. Later we found out that he was in debt over his head and was fraudulent regarding his wealth.”

He sounded annoyed, but continued, “The house was foreclosed on by a creditor, so we had no place to go. Donald rented a house, so I lived with them until I went to college.”

“How’s Donald doing?”

She wanted to know what happened after the loss of Uncle John.

Looking at her grimly, he said somberly, “He killed himself when I was a junior in college. I told you that when people get near me, they die. I am a curse.”

Naomi shook her head, “Please, Victor, people die, but that’s not your fault.”

Victor didn’t say anything.

“You need do something for your sake. Forgive your uncle for what he did to you. If not, you’ll chain yourself to this for the rest of your life.”

“I don’t hate him. Honestly, I felt sorry for him. He was a gambler, who gambled with someone else’s life. He was in a contest with Nancy, because she revealed his secret and challenged him. He hated

her so much that he wanted to take away something that was important to her, but he was also trying to ease his own emotions.”

“You surprise me. You have a bright, loving personality, even though you have been through some tough times in your life.”

“That’s not the real me. I am the most miserable insecure person you will ever encounter. My history of rejection frightens me—especially not being loved by my uncle. I was always afraid that people would dislike me. I became a likeable person, so everyone would accept me. That’s a sad life.”

After Victor’s heartfelt story, she came to her own conclusion about how someone’s environment could have a significant impact on that person’s life. She wondered if Nancy had been allowed to be Victor’s guardian, if he would have still been sitting here talking to her about his sad life.

She knew what the answer would be.

When she finished her conversation with Victor, she needed to walk around for a bit. On her way, Naomi saw a thick bush across from her that seemed to move and was making a little noise. It was strange, since no wind was gusting at that moment. At first, she ignored it and just continued to walk some more. However, the bush was moving like someone was walking inside it, so she knew something was there. Perhaps it was a little animal?

She was going to call Victor but then she decided to check it out for herself. She came closer and studied the bush, but could see nothing amiss. But when she walked a little further, she almost shrieked when before her appeared a little naked boy squatting like a monk and looking at her with frightened eyes. She was momentarily speechless, but then she regained her composure quickly as she said to the little creature, “Hi, what are you doing here?”

He was not moving. His big eyes rounded with fright gazed at her without blinking. She extended her arm and gently rubbed his curly hair. Amazingly, he smiled, so Naomi pulled him out of the bushes. The little boy seemed to be about four or five years old with a bare body and he carried a little stick half the size of his height. She held his hand gently, but he followed her without resistance, as she took him back to Victor. However, when he saw Victor, he was ready to bolt, so she hugged him gently until he calmed down.

“What your name?” she asked, but he was quiet, so she asked him again.

“Coona.”

She wasn't sure it was the right answer, but she began calling him Coona.

He had a deep scratch on his right arm that was bleeding, so she put her handkerchief on the arm and tightened it. He looked at his bandaged arm

and then at her and smiled. Naomi smiled back at him.

“Finding him is not good for us,” offered Victor. “Somewhere near here is where his entourage lives. I just hope they’re not cannibals. They will be looking for him and when they find him, they will find us, too.” He was very stressed out by finding this little boy.

She knew that he was concerned, but she couldn’t just throw him out, when he followed every step she made.

“Well, that boy is smart. He’s stuck with a pretty woman,” Victor made a joke.

The little boy was a talker. He talked very fast and used body language of which she could only interpret a little. Coona pulled her hand and took her near the water.

“Do you want to swim,” she asked?

He was pointing at the water and kept talking, so she assumed he wanted to swim. Naomi pulled his hand and both of them walked into the water but when it got to his knees, he stopped and didn’t move and there was fear on his face. *He has never gone swimming before*, she thought. She held his little body in her arms and slowly stepped into the deep water, as Coona clung to her arms. With her two arms supporting his back, she let him float. He finally began to relax and kicked the water while he

was still in her arms. He was giggling and laughing at the same time. Slowly she gave him a swimming lesson, but he was a fast learner. After an hour lesson, he swam the whole lake without her support. She wondered why he was afraid of water. If he lives close by the water, at his age, he should have learned to swim. However, she could see that he was not a healthy boy. He had his own story, but she didn't know what it could be.

When Coona came near her, Naomi lifted his whole body and threw him into the water. He liked it so much that he kept asking her to toss him again and again. His smile was similar to Tawanda. She thought about the pearl necklace, but she didn't have it anymore. She stirred up her bag but she couldn't find anything to give to him. Then she looked at her watch, which was very expensive, but she was afraid she might need the watch. However, in looking at Victor, she noticed that he had one on his arm, too. So when Coona was close to her the next time, she put her watch onto his wrist. His brightened face told her that he loved it.

Their plan was being delayed by this little intruder. She could tell that Victor was concerned about this delay, so she tried several times to let Coona go freely. She said goodbye and kissed him on his forehead and waved her hand in farewell. But when she walked less than ten feet, he was

right there behind her, trying to grab her hand.

“Honey, you can’t come with us,” Naomi said. “You need to go home. Your mommy and daddy will be worried sick about you. Please go home.” Her heart was stirred by his sadness. If she could, she would take him home with her.

Since it was too late to go anywhere, she told Victor that they should stay one more night at the waterfall. He knew better, but didn’t say anything about her excuse.

There was a guest in her house, so he slept next to her that night. She woke several times just to make sure he wouldn’t fall off the edge of the rock. When morning arrived, Victor provided breakfast for three people, so she thanked him profusely. Less than an hour after breakfast, Coona wanted to play in the water again. He was jumped in and called her name repeatedly, “Na Na, Na Na. Na Na.” He couldn’t say her name correctly, so that was way of calling Naomi.

She lifted him in the air and threw him into the water. He ran back to her, giggling and splashed water on her face. But his little chuckle turned into a crowd of laughter. Naomi was frozen by the sight of a large group of people with spears and knives in hands, looking down at her from the hills and laughing. She looked over at Victor, whose face was as white as the cloud over his head.

“Coona!” one tall man yelled at the little boy, who immediately ran into his arms, whereupon the man hit Coona’s tiny little butt several times. *He must be his father*, she thought. He was crying a little, but turned around and ran back to Naomi who was still in the water. He pulled her hand and wanted to play again, but the group was huddled together, having a brief meeting. Afterwards, they all came down from the hill and stood before the two frightened faces of Naomi and Victor.

They were trying to say tell them something, but neither of them understood the message. Naomi focused on their gestures and caught a few things at which she could only guess. They waved their hands in the air and kept saying, “Tu tu tu tu.” To her it sounded like they were making the sound of a helicopter. Why were they talking about a helicopter? Perhaps they knew that Naomi and Victor were lost in the jungle and needed a flight home? Her mind was racing, but she could only guess a little.

The man who had spanked Coona took him out of the water, but he ran back to Naomi and grabbed hold of her jeans. He didn’t seem to want to go with the man. Her heart sank as the tall man grabbed Coona with both his hands, put him on top of his shoulders and then walked away. Coona’s hysterical crying echoed in her ears, but soon his cries were coming from much farther away.

Naomi's Vacation

A young man from the group who was left behind gestured them to follow him. Naomi and Victor gathered all their earthly possessions in their hands and began walking behind him.

“My wild guess is that our lives were saved by a young boy who was crazy about you,” Victor finally had his humor back. “Here goes my other guess—this young man is taking us to a helicopter.”

Naomi just nodded. She couldn't speak, because of her tears.

They followed the young man, but he walked so fast they couldn't keep up with him. They were amazed to see a road appear that was made by human footprints. It was from three to five foot wide and sprawled for unseen miles. They had walked many days and miles in the jungle, so how could they have missed this road? Now they knew how humans could survive in this jungle. They made their own way to survive.

They walked many more miles with the energetic guard. Naomi's leg was cramping and her clothes were soaked with perspiration, but she didn't show it. Even the guard's almost naked body was shining with sweat.

Suddenly, their guide began acting wild and started waving his hand in the air saying, “Tu tu tu tu!” The sound of a helicopter sounded like music to their ears. The young man left them in a hurry to move

to the opposite side of the road, but Victor called him back and gave him his watch and a heartfelt hug. The young man gave him a big smile. "Thank you so much for guarding us," Victor said to him. It didn't matter if their guard understood or not, because what Victor said to him came from his heart.

And then, there was the helicopter, waiting for them.

The pilot came near and asked, "Are you Naomi?" She nodded.

"Welcome home," he said. "Your parents are waiting for you."

Victor came and hugged her. "Welcome home, Naomi."

"Welcome home, Victor."

Then they both cried.

"You are lucky to be alive," voiced the pilot.

"How could you survive in this vicious jungle?" the co-pilot asked Naomi in disbelief. "Thankfully your parents didn't give up on you, but no one else thought you were alive."

"Nobody would believe what happened in the jungle," Victor said to the pilot while looking at Naomi, who just handed him a bottle of ice-cold water.

As the helicopter took off and circled the jungle, Naomi was sitting by the window, looking down on her new birthplace. She had been through

Naomi's Vacation

life-threatening tribulation and had brought forth a miracle.

“I am a broken vessel. Is it possible to fix me?” Victor asked in tears.

“Yes, with JESUS’ love.” She looked at him and gave him a smile, the same warm smile she had learned from Cosmo, Tawanda and Coona.

They both had finally found true love—JESUS’ love.

“Thank you JESUS. YOU are real.”
She praised HIM.

