



NOTHING COMES CLOSE

TOLUPOE POPOOLA

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LOLA

“Lola!”

I was walking back to the house as fast as my high heels and tight Ankara skirt would let me when I heard a familiar voice calling out my name. I almost tripped over my skirt and my heart literally stopped for a few seconds. I slowly turned around in disbelief, wondering whether my mind was playing tricks on me. It wasn't, for standing in the shadows of the palm-nut tree, there he was. This man had ripped out my heart and left me standing there looking stupid on his front porch just a few months ago. What did he want now? For what seemed like an eternity I stared at him as if I had seen a ghost. Questions raced rapidly through my mind. How...? What...? In Lagos...? Miles away from our lives in the UK...? How on earth did he find me here? How...?

It all began on a beautiful Friday evening. It was four twenty-five, and I was tapping my foot on the newly polished office floor wishing that the time would somehow move faster. I couldn't wait for my weekend to begin and had stopped listening to the presentation over ten minutes ago. Instead, I concentrated my gaze on the glass of water in front of me, tried to analyse the plate of crisps in the middle of the table, and even tried to figure out if my colleague across the table from me had something done to her nose. I wouldn't be surprised; she was vain when it came to her looks.

Sneaking in a text message under the table, I quickly wrote to a friend:

Stuck in a meeting. Will be late, wait for me! Xxx.

After about another thirty minutes of agonising pain, the meeting was finally over. I quickly said goodbye to my team members and ran up the stairs. Clearing my desk and logging off the computer, I quickly picked up my bag and almost ran out of the glass building. I felt a sense of relief the moment I opened the front door and stepped out into the world. Walking briskly to the underground station, I went past three coffee shops, a pub, the High Street bank and a patisserie. The mid-June sunshine, the noise of Central London traffic, the rush of fellow commuters, and the click of my impatient shoes on the pavement became little pleasures of freedom. I collected an evening newspaper from the ever-so-cheerful

newspaper distributor at the entrance to the station, and went down to join the Central Line.

The tube was hot and stifling, but not too busy. And thankfully, there were no usual train delays that evening. I was glad when I walked out of the West Ham station, and made my way to the third floor, one-bedroom flat I called home.

My friend Titi, from university, was having a birthday party the next day and had decided to make it a weekend fete. Besides me, there were three other girls in our close-knit group – Maureen, Temmy and Funmi. We were going to have a girls' night out tonight, a party tomorrow, and a day at a spa on Sunday. A treat like that was exactly what I needed to get over my office troubles.

I quickly scanned through the mail I had retrieved from the mailbox on my way up to the flat. Nothing in the pile looked urgent or interesting. I dumped the mail on my coffee table and went to take a shower after which I changed into a pair of jeans, an orange silk top with ruffles around the collar, and my favourite gold wedges. Then I styled my long braids, applied fresh make-up and added some accessories to complete my look. After making sure I had packed enough outfits for the rest of the weekend, I sent Titi a text to let her know I was on my way, and skipped out the door.

I arrived at Titi's East Finchley house at twenty minutes past seven.

"Here she is!" Titi called out the moment I pressed the doorbell. She opened the door and gave me a hug. "Come on in."

"Hi babe," I said. "Sorry I'm late; I couldn't get off work early."

With a wave of her hand, Titi dismissed my apology and took my overnight case from me.

"No problem, Lola. Temmy just got here about ten minutes ago too."

"You look nice, I love your dress." I said.

"Thanks, guess who made it?"

"Maureen?" I asked.

Titi nodded and smiled before she took my overnight bag upstairs.

I stepped into the house, once again admiring the interior. Titi was a lucky girl. While I was still living in a tiny flat and paying inflated rent to my letting agents, she was already on the property ladder. Her house was a cosy two-bedroom property, with a huge kitchen, a dining room and a spacious garden out back. I secretly wondered when I would be able to afford a place like Titi's.

“Hey Lola, what’s up?” Temmy’s voice echoed from the living room before I even got a chance to see her.

“Hello ladies!” I said, stepping into the living room with a grin. I went round the room giving hugs. We had all been friends since our days at the university.

“You latecomer.” Funmi teased.

“Sorry Mummy Funmi.” I replied and we all laughed. “You know how it is with work. I hate my job, but a girl needs money to pay the bills.”

“Babe! I like your top,” Maureen said, getting up from the sofa. “Let me have a closer look.” She was spinning me around trying to get a good look at the top that had caught her interest.

“She’ll be designing something like that soon, you watch and see” Titi said, walking into the living room with a glass of wine for me.

“Thanks,” I said, taking the glass from her. “Maureen, what are you wearing?”

“A dress. I made it myself.” Maureen laughed. I was asking because the halter-neck dress had a very low back and the rest of it seemed to be held in place by a treacherous-looking set of strings.

“I told her that she would have to keep an eye on her outfit all night.” Funmi said. “It looks like it will fall apart any minute.”

“Don’t worry; I know the tricks to pull to hold things in place.” Maureen said, feeling the fabric of my top. “Yes, this is something I can do.”

I twirled around.

“Careful dear, don’t let that wine spill.” Funmi said. We all knew how particular Titi was about keeping her cream rug spotless.

“Oh yeah.” Temmy said. “Titi still hasn’t forgiven me for that cranberry juice incident.”

Done with her thorough inspection of my top, Maureen soon left me in peace and I took a seat on the sofa next to Temmy.

“So what’s the plan for tonight?”

“We’ve decided to go and see a movie.” Titi responded.

“Then go clubbing afterwards.” Maureen added.

“Sounds good to me.” I said.

“Yeah, let’s go out and have fun!” Temmy said. “I feel as if I haven’t been out in ages.”

“You?” Funmi said. “Didn’t you and Maureen attend the premier of that Nollywood movie two weeks ago?”

“Yes we did,” Maureen said. “Temmy just can’t sit still, you know.”

“Two weeks is a long time,” Temmy said. “I’m already bored.”

“I’ll get the chicken from the oven.” Titi said, putting her drink down gingerly on the coffee table and walking into the kitchen. “Let’s eat something before we go.”

“And let’s arrange for a taxi to bring us back here.” Funmi said.

“Okay, I’ll do that.” I offered. “What time should I request pick up?”

“Three O’clock” Temmy said. “From Melbar.”

“Okay, then.” I fetched my phone from my bag to book the cab.

The girls and I woke up relatively early the next morning. At least we considered ten o’clock early, seeing as we hadn’t gone to bed until almost five that morning. Funmi, Maureen and I had shared the guest bedroom, and now we sat in bed with our knees tucked below our chins, laughing and recounting our mischief of the night before. We had the best night of our lives. The night had begun at the movies after which we headed to the bar. Maureen attracted the attention of a certain guy who kept buying us drinks, trying to impress us. That he even felt the need to brag about his high-paying investment banking job was even funnier than the cheap drinks he kept ordering for us. Personally, I wasn’t interested in meeting anyone, and neither was Temmy, so we made our way to the dance floor and left Funmi and Titi to deal with the egotistical drink-buying comedian. The Dee-Jay was hot that night! Temmy and I danced and sang along to the old-school classics and hot new tunes that flowed from the Dee-Jay’s speakers and onto the dance floor. Funmi and Titi eventually moved to a sofa away from the bar and occasionally joined me and Temmy on the dance floor. However, they seemed more content sipping drinks and chatting on the sofa.

By the time we got up to leave I was tired, but thrilled at the good time we had just had.

We were still carrying on about the previous night when Titi knocked on the door to the bedroom and reminded us that she was having a party later in the day. If things were to go smoothly we had to get a move on. We stumbled out of bed,

cleaned our teeth, washed our faces and trooped to the kitchen downstairs to have breakfast.

“I’m starving. Titi what have you got?” Maureen asked, opening cupboards.

“Let’s see, you can have toast, cornflakes or instant oats.” Titi said.

“I’ll have oats.” Maureen said. “I haven’t eaten a proper breakfast in a long time.”

“Why?” Funmi asked.

“Oh, because I sleep and wake up at all odd hours of the day.”

“You need to take better care of yourself.” Funmi said. “No wonder you’re so skinny.”

“Maureen can eat like a horse and still remain a stick.” Temmy said. “I’m so jealous.”

“Yeah, me too.” I said. “I have to work hard to maintain my figure.”

“Since you’re making oats, Maureen, make enough for all of us.” Titi said. “Let me get my list of things we need to do.”

“Miss Organised,” I teased.

“I have to be.” Titi replied. “Okay, here’s the menu. Who wants to do what?”

“I’ll make the jollof rice,” I offered.

“I’ll help with the chicken and beef,” Funmi said.

“Put me down for salad and fried plantain,” Temmy said.

“Great!” Titi said. “So that leaves Maureen to make the finger food. I’ve got some filo prawns, spring rolls and stuff like that.”

“Is that everything?” Funmi asked.

“Let’s see, I need to pick up my birthday cake, and get some disposable plates and cups from the supermarket.” Titi said.

“What about music? I can help you sort out a playlist,” I said.

“Thanks Lola.” Titi said. “I think that’s everything.”

She turned to leave the kitchen when I noticed something.

“Hey, Miss Organised, you’ve forgotten something. What about drinks?”

Titi turned around. "Oh drinks have been taken care of."

"Where are they?" Maureen asked. "Let's put them in the fridge now so that we won't forget."

"Oh, they are not here, somebody is bringing them in the afternoon."

At that point we all looked up and turned to face her.

"Who?" The four of us asked at the same time.

"Somebody, a friend of mine is bringing the drinks..." Titi said blushing and lowering her face.

"Who is it?" I asked with feigned and exaggerated curiosity. "Does he or she have a name?"

Titi mumbled something under her breath.

"Say that again." I said, cupping my hand over my ear in a mock attempt to hear her better.

"My friend, his name is Dayo."

"Eh, who is Dayo?" Funmi asked.

"He's this wonderful guy I just started seeing." Titi said, the smile on her face, giving her away.

"Hmmm, *na wa o* Titi," Funmi said. "When did you become so secretive?"

"I'm not! I only just started seeing him two months ago."

"Ohhhh ... so is that why you cancelled on me the last time I asked you to come to the new bar with me? Temmy asked, pretending to be hurt.

Titi didn't respond.

"See, she is guilty." Maureen said.

"You guys let's leave her alone for now." I said "We'll meet the guy today and deal with Titi later."

"So you won't even give us any information?" Funmi asked.

"Alright, alright." Titi finally said. "I met him at a conference. I noticed him right away because he was the only black guy there. Throughout the conference our eyes kept meeting and afterwards, he came to say hello to me and we got talking. He took me out for a drink and we exchanged numbers."

“What does he do?” Maureen asked.

“He’s a lawyer too, it was a legal conference.”

“That’s cool,” Funmi said. “So why the need for secrecy now?”

“Well, since you guys will see him today, I might as well tell you.” Titi paused. “He’s older than me.”

“How much older?” Temmy asked.

“He’s thirty-six.” Titi replied. “So he’s like eight years older than me.”

“Thirty-six! I couldn’t date a guy more than four years older than me.” Maureen said.

“I know.” Titi said, looking downcast. “That’s the only problem.”

“Actually, I don’t see why that is a problem.” Funmi said thoughtfully. “Eight years is not that bad.”

“I don’t see a problem either.” I added. “When you said much older I was already assuming like fifteen to twenty years older.”

We all laughed, and Titi said, “Lola! Fifteen years? He doesn’t even look that old.”

Maureen said, “Okay maybe it’s not so bad. At least he should be more mature than guys our age.”

“Tell me about it.” Funmi said, rolling her eyes. “I could do with a mature guy right now.” Funmi’s last relationship had ended sadly because her boyfriend’s mother did not approve of their relationship and he had refused to stand up and defend her.

“Exactly.” I said. My own ex-boyfriend Gbenga had given me no reason for our break-up before he packed up his things and left to travel the world. He had left me wondering what the hell I had done to deserve that kind of treatment.

“Yeah call him and tell him to bring his single friends along this evening.” Temmy said.

“Temmy! Are you serious?” Titi said and we all burst into laughter. Temmy was the only one among us in a relationship at the moment.

Later that afternoon, we were almost done with the cooking when Dayo arrived. Titi’s living room had been set-up and she was in the bathroom blow-

drying her hair. Temmy was the first to get to the door. The rest of us just stood around waiting to see who this new guy in Titi's life.

"Hello Dayo." Temmy said after she opened the door. "Come on in. I'm Temmy. This is Funmi. That's Lola, and this is Maureen. We've just heard about you." We each smiled, sizing him up as his eyes darted from one to the next while the introductions were being made.

"Hello." He responded, waving his right hand at us, as if in an attempt to cover us all at the same time, "It's nice to meet you all. Titi has told me about you."

"Would you like something to eat or drink?" I offered.

"No thank you, I'm in a hurry." he said. "I just came to drop off the drinks and to give Titi her birthday present. I have to be somewhere right now, but I'll be back for the party."

"Oh, okay then." Funmi said, sounding somewhat disappointed, "We'll give you a hand with the drinks then."

We all headed outside to help Dayo unload the drinks. I admit I don't know much about cars, but I know a good looking car when I see one, and I appreciated that Dayo had good taste. After we were done putting all the drinks in the kitchen, Dayo dropped a parcel on the table and turned to leave.

"Thank you ladies," he said before heading out the door. "It was very nice meeting you all. I'll see you later. Bye."

"Byeeeeee!" we chorused as Maureen locked the door behind him. She turned around and was the first to offer her opinion of Dayo.

"Hmmm, he seemed quite nice." She opined.

"Yeah, and Titi was right. He doesn't look that old." Funmi said.

As they continued to interject their opinions of Dayo, I ran upstairs to the bathroom to check on Titi.

She hung up the phone just as I popped my head through the bedroom door.

"That was Dayo." she said, looking up. "He said he's dropped my birthday present and he'll be back around eight."

"Great. I'm dying to know what he got you so come and open your present."

"I'll be down shortly. Or wait, come and help me with my hair to make it faster."

"Okay. What style do you want?"

I arranged her hair into flowing curls. She admired it in the mirror and we both agreed that she looked just great.

When we joined the others downstairs, Titi wasted no time in asking the ladies what they thought of Dayo. “So what did you guys think of him?”

“He is good looking.” Maureen said. “And he dressed nicely.”

“He seems nice and laid-back,” Funmi said. “I think he looked confident, like a successful person who doesn’t need to show off.”

“Yeah he’s not trying too hard.” I said. “He’s comfortable with himself.”

“Wow, all that analysis in one brief meeting!” Titi exclaimed. “Seriously, though I’m glad you guys said that because that’s exactly what I see in him too.”

“Then don’t let the age thing bother you.” Funmi said. “If he likes you and you like him too, just relax and see what happens.”

“You might really enjoy his company in spite of the difference in age.” Maureen added.

“Yeah, go for it babe.” I said.

Titi smiled and looked relieved. “Thanks girls. I was worried you would think it was weird or something.”

“Not at all,” Maureen said. “Now let’s go and get ready, your guests would start arriving soon.”

“Yes, we need to hurry because we’ve only got an hour!” I said.

By the time Dayo came back, the party was in full swing. Funmi and I were acting as hostesses, making sure that everyone was having a good time. In between my running around, dancing, and having a good time, I caught sight of Titi and Dayo sneaking kisses when they thought no one was looking. It warmed my heart to see Titi in love, with a decent man at last. She hadn’t always made wise choices in her relationships, which beggared belief because she was such an intelligent person. I smiled and wished her the very best.

“Lola! I need you to help me serve some drinks.” Funmi’s called out over the music.

“I’m coming!” I called back, and made my way to the dining area.

“Two guys just arrived. Check them out.” Funmi said, nodding towards the entrance.

“They’re okay.” I said barely glancing at the people she was talking about.

She nudged me. “Look at the taller one.”

I turned and looked, properly. A tingle travelled up and down my spine. Indeed, the taller of the two guys was handsome. Not only his face or his well-built athletic body, but the way he carried himself as he walked. I wanted to stand and stare at him. It had been ages since somebody had that effect on me. I turned to Funmi, trying not to betray my emotions.

“You attend to them first. I need to change into comfortable shoes.” With that, I disappeared up the stairs to reapply my make-up.

WOLE

“Slam dunk!”

“Great shot!”

I retrieved the ball and bounced it to my team mate Kenechukwu. We were playing basketball with some of the other guys in the gym. I was drenched with sweat but feeling absolutely great. You would never have guessed that I had just recovered from a grim bout of flu. It felt great to be alive and fit again. I ran down the length of the court and threw the ball straight up into the other team’s net again.

“Someone is on fire today.” Mark grinned as he retrieved the ball. He was playing for the opposing team.

“For sure!” I called back.

We played for another ten minutes before the whistle blew, indicating that our booked slot had ended. I tossed the ball towards Kenechukwu and we started going towards the showers, clapping the guys on the back, muttering “Good game guys, see you next week...”

Mark joined us a few moments later.

“Well done Wole.” he said. “Did you overdose on some high energy drink?”

“Naa,” I said. “Just full of beans today.”

“So I see,” Kenechukwu said. “What do you have planned for the rest of today?”

Mark said he was going to see a movie with his girlfriend, Zoe later on that evening. I on the other hand, was thinking of catching up on some work. I had fallen behind on some projects last week because of the flu. But as luck would have it, Kenechukwu had other plans for me.

“Keep the work till later, man.” was what he said. “Since you’re buzzing with so much energy today, you can be my right-hand man.”

“What are you up to?”

"I've got an album launch and a birthday party. Plenty of opportunities to meet chicks."

"I'm not looking to meet anyone." I said. "But I don't mind having some fun this weekend. I can do my extra work during the week."

"Great. Sorry you can't come with us Mark."

"I'll survive without you today. You're becoming a bad influence on me anyway, Kene." Mark said, with a smile.

"Me? I don't know what you're talking about." Kene replied, raising one eyebrow.

"Don't worry Mark. I'll do my best to keep him in check." I said.

"Good luck with that." Kene said, and we all laughed.

I had to admit I was enjoying myself, and I was glad I made the choice to hang out with Kene this Saturday. We were just leaving the album launch. Kene had behaved outrageously, flirting with all the pretty girls, posing for every camera and drinking free alcohol. I stayed sober, just in case I was going to end up being the designated driver by the end of the night. We stepped out of the bar and got into Kene's car that was parked just around the corner and started heading to the birthday party.

"Who's the celebrant?" I asked. "Anyone I know?"

"I don't think you know her. Her name is Titi and I met her through another girl who recently joined our label."

"Is she also in the music business?"

"I can't remember. I don't think so."

The party was already in full swing when we arrived. The house was full of people, many of whom were standing around eating, and talking. A few brave ones had taken to the dance floor in the open space living room. A mixture of the smell of perfume, food and drink filled the air. It reminded me of the house parties Kene and our friends used to throw when we were at university. These were usually parties that happened for no reason at all. When we were in a good mood or Kene wanted to get some girl's attention, we'd just throw a feel good party. And he was good at that; especially when it came to seducing a girl. Once his mind was made up, there was no stopping him.

"Let me find Titi," Kene said to me, his voice raised above the music.

"Sure," I replied.

Kene went through the house, greeting some of the guests while I went to the garden to wait for him. Within minutes, I was accosted by a lady wearing a dress that showed off her curvy body.

“Hi,” she said as she approached, smiling. “I’m the celebrant’s friend. Have you just arrived?”

“Hello. Yes I’ve just come in with a friend.”

“My name is Funmi,” she said, “I’ll get you something to drink. There’s a buffet in the kitchen if you’re hungry, okay?”

“Thanks.”

She went off and a moment later another girl with the most striking eyes I’d ever seen approached me. I was immediately drawn to her, and, judging from that bold yellow dress she was wearing, I concluded that she must be a really confident person.

“Funmi wasn’t sure what drink to offer you, so let me give you the options. My name is Lola, by the way.”

“My name is Wole.”

“We’ve got juice, white wine, beer, punch and –”

“I’ll have the wine, please.”

“Okay, I’ll be right back.” She disappeared through the glass doors and Kene reappeared at that minute with a girl who looked vaguely familiar.

“This is Titi,” he said. “Titi, this is my friend Wole, he’s the one I was telling you about.”

Titi smiled at me and said, “Thank you for coming. You look a little familiar.”

“I think we may have met before.” I agreed. “I can’t remember where though.”

“Well, imagine that.” Kene said, raising an eyebrow in surprise. “It is a small world.”

“Yes it is,” Titi said, giving me another quizzical look. “Well, enjoy the party guys, and I’ll catch up with you again before you leave, huh?”

“Okay, we will.” Kene said.

When she was out of earshot, Kene leaned closer to me and said, “Man, isn’t she something! Shame she’s got some dude hanging around her already.”

“Hmm.” I said, not really listening. I was trying to figure out how I knew Titi.

“Well, maybe she can hook me up with one of her friends instead.” Kene continued. “I’ve already seen some interesting prospects.”

Lola reappeared with a glass of wine.

“Here’s your drink Wole.”

“Thank you. This is my friend, Kene.”

“Hi Kene,” she said.

“Nice to meet you...?”

“Lola.”

“Cool.”

She went away again, and my eyes followed her into the house, the kitchen and back into the living room, where she started dancing. I was so focused on watching Lola that I didn’t hear what Kene said, until he tapped me.

“Go get her, tiger.”

“What?”

“You’re captivated by that Lola chick. Go and meet her, and let me find someone interesting to talk to.”

I laughed, but I didn’t hesitate. I left Kene in the garden and went into the living room to join Lola on the dance floor.

She seemed surprised but she didn’t object when I started dancing next to her. We found a rhythm and began to move in tandem. She was a great dancer, anticipating my moves and stepping to the music. I enjoyed the dance until the music changed and she wanted to get a drink. I followed her to the kitchen so that we could talk. We had to raise our voices to be heard above the music, but I didn’t mind. Eventually I got some finger food and we went to sit in the garden. I was fascinated with the way she smiled and gestured with her hands when she talked. Soon we forgot about the rest of the party and chatted for a long time. Occasionally, Lola had to play hostess, but I followed her around and didn’t let her out of my sight. Usually, I’m the one who has to drag Kene out of functions, but this time was different. He was the one ready to leave when I wasn’t.

I got up to leave, reluctantly.

“It was nice meeting you, Lola.” I said.

“Same here.” she replied.

“I would love to continue this conversation.” I said. “Can I have your number?”

“Sure,” she said, getting up from the garden bench. “Let me get my phone so that I can save yours.”

I watched her go upstairs. I loved the fact that she was direct, and didn’t do unnecessary *shakara* like many ladies.

She came back and said, “Let me have your number, so I can call you.”

I gave her my number and she called my phone.

“There, now you have mine.” She said. “The ball is firmly in your court.”

“I’ll be in touch.” I said, catching a glimpse of Kene looking for me. “Got to go now.”

“Okay, let me go and re-join my friends inside. I expect we’ll start clearing up soon. Bye Wole.”

Kene gave me a curious look when I joined him in the car.

“I thought you weren’t looking to meet anyone?”

I shrugged.

“You can’t plan these things. She was nice, so we’ll see.”

“Well I was on the prowl tonight and I met a tasty one.”

“This guy, when will you change?”

“Hopefully never.”

Kene thankfully wasn’t drunk and he dropped me off at home around four in the morning. I was expecting to be tired and fall asleep immediately but thirty minutes later, I was still lying on my bed fully alert. I tossed and turned for a bit. When I still couldn’t sleep, I got up to search for a blue folder that I kept away from all the other documents in my home office. This one contained stuff that I didn’t want prying eyes to see.

I opened the folder and leafed through its contents: there were old family photographs, newspaper cuttings, personal letters, an official affidavit, and other materials. I kept searching until I found a letter, folded and held together with a paper clip. The letter was dated October 5th 1999 – the day I decided to turn my

life around for good. The day I buried all the ghosts of the former person I used to be, and took an oath to stay on the straight and narrow path. And it was working well for me, so far.

LOLA

I was back in the office on Monday morning, still buzzing from the events of the weekend.

“Good morning Lola.” That came from Faye, my work colleague who sat at a desk opposite to mine. “The trains were a nightmare this morning, weren’t they?”

“Well, my journey wasn’t too bad. How was your weekend?” I asked.

“Oh, nothing interesting. I was knackered on Friday so I stayed in whilst Richard went out with his mates. Same on Saturday. What about yours?”

“I had a lovely weekend. I had a party on Saturday and a day at the spa yesterday.”

“Lucky you! No wonder you’re glowing.”

“Thanks.”

Faye’s phone rang, so she turned to answer it and I faced my computer screen to start my work for the day. I couldn’t hide the smile playing around my lips. I’d eventually found the courage to speak to the “handsome guy” as Funmi dubbed him. And now, I was glad that I did. I had expected him to be arrogant and intimidating when I first approached him, but to my surprise, he wasn’t either of those. He was actually very cool and down to earth. In fact, I ended up spending most of the evening talking and dancing with him. He told me his name was Wole and when I found out he was single, I decided he had the potential to progress to boyfriend level. I was glad he asked for my number when he was about to leave. I hope I’ll hear from him soon.

At lunch time, I took a break from work to get something to eat. I went out to buy a sandwich and decided to eat at my desk, because I wanted to check if Titi had uploaded the photos we took over the weekend.

I logged on to my Facebook account and scrolled down the news feed. I saw photos from my ex-boyfriend’s album, and I took a quick peek at his profile. He had added some new photos of himself on his round-the-world trip. This time, he was in Australia, posing with some new friends on a beach. I sighed and clicked through the album, all the while wondering if it was wise of me to still be friends with him on Facebook. After all, we weren’t really friends anymore in real life.

After a few more minutes of curiosity and self-loathing, I left his profile and went back to the home feed.

I noticed an acquaintance had been tagged in a wedding album. I love weddings so I clicked on a photo of her in a bridesmaid outfit and proceeded to check out the entire album.

“This looks like a lavish occasion.” I thought. “.... Hmmm, I like the bride’s make-up... wow, her jewellery is lovely... although I’m not too sure about her dress ...”

Suddenly I froze and stared. I was staring at a picture that nearly caused me to choke on my chicken sandwich. It couldn’t be. Was it...? There before my very own eyes on Facebook was a groom who looked an awful lot like Titi’s new boyfriend, Dayo. My friend was involved with a married man! My heart sank.

I called Funmi as soon as I finished at work for the day, but she wasn’t picking up her phone. So I decided to drop by her house, because I was bursting to give her the gist of my discovery on Facebook.

Funmi couldn’t believe it.

“You mean that nice guy that we all liked?”

“Yes, the very same one.” I said. “Unless he’s got a twin brother.”

“Men! Why aren’t they ever straightforward? Well, we have to let Titi know about this.”

“I’m going to call her now.”

Funmi nodded and I picked up my phone to call Titi.

It was Friday, and I still hadn’t heard back from Titi after our phone discussion on Monday evening. I imagined that she had gone to see Dayo in order to put an end to their relationship, so I was giving her space to grieve over her new loss.

I was on my way to see Maureen after work. She lived near Spitalfields, so it wasn’t too far from my office. It was such a warm day, so I decided to walk instead of taking the bus.

I needed Maureen’s help with a small fashion crisis. I had a date with Wole! He had called me on Tuesday and again on Wednesday. Both calls had been so

interesting, we simply got on really well. He had asked me if I wanted to see him again, and I'd said yes. So he fixed a time for next Saturday and I was looking forward to it. The only problem was; I had no idea what to wear.

I pressed the buzzer to Maureen's flat. She opened the door herself, two seconds later.

"Lola! I was just about to go out."

"Put that outing on hold for just a minute please, I need your help."

"What's up?"

"I've got a date next weekend, and I'm clueless about what to wear."

"Okay, come back up. I know just the thing."

I followed her back into her beautiful but messy flat. Maureen couldn't keep her flat tidy if her life depended on it. There were shoes, bags, magazine cuttings, sketch pads and all sorts of other junk strewn about the place. One of the sketch pads was hoisted up with a drawing on it.

"Have you been sketching today?" I asked.

"Yeah, I was working shortly before you came." she replied. "It helped to take my mind off issues."

"What kind of issues?"

"My mum, mostly. She still doesn't want me to be a fashion designer. She wants me to go for an MBA."

"That's tough. Haven't you explained to her that you really love fashion?"

"I've explained it so many times. Would you believe she still went ahead and sent me a Business School application form?"

"Oh dear. What do you plan to do?"

"Ignore her, of course. Maybe one day she'll get it."

"I think you're doing the right thing. Perhaps one day when you're famous and making money from fashion design, she'll see that it was the best choice for you."

"Yes, one day." Maureen shrugged. "Anyway, enough about me. Let's have a look at my closet for you."

I followed her into the second bedroom in the flat, which she had converted into her storage space. It was filled with clothes, shoes, belts, all sorts of handbags and accessories.

“One day, I’ll come and raid your stuff.” I said.

“You’re welcome.” she said, her voice muffled as she stuck her head into a corner, looking for something.

“Here we are!” She pulled out a pair of heels, and a red leather belt. “Match these up with a short, fitted black dress and you’re good to go.”

“Aww, thanks darling,” I took the items and gave her a hug. “I appreciate it.”

“You’re welcome.”

We left the closet and went back to her living room.

“By the way,” Maureen asked, “have you heard from Titi?”

“Not since Monday.”

“I gather she’s very angry with you.”

“With me? Why?”

“She said you made up some story about Dayo being married. But apparently she went to Dayo’s house and there was no evidence of a woman living there.”

I couldn’t believe my ears.

“What! That girl! I *saw* the wedding photos. Did she actually *ask* him?”

“I don’t know. Lola, are you sure about what you saw?”

“Yes.” I replied firmly.

“Okay then. I hope she knows what she’s getting herself into.”

“I hope so too.” I said, even though I was furious. I got ready to leave.

“Thanks again for the shoes and belt. I’ll shoot now, so that you can go out.”

“Okay dear.”

I was fuming with anger the entire train ride home. *Titi is such a silly cow. Is Dayo such a smooth player that she cannot open her eyes? I wonder about that girl sometimes.* This wasn’t the first time she’d been involved with a dubious guy. During our university days, she had gone out with one of those dodgy-looking fraud guys. That story was even a funny one! The bloke was spending over six hundred pounds a night in clubs every weekend and Titi never questioned where

he was getting his money from, seeing as we were all full-time students at the time. When he failed his exams and dropped out of university, she started crying. The tears dried up quickly when she found out that he had forged her signature and swiped all the money she had in her bank account, before disappearing into thin air. I was just dumbfounded. How can somebody be so gullible? Thank God for Funmi, she is the patient type, so she can sit down and listen to tales of woe. As for me, I've said my piece about Dayo, I think I'll just close my big mouth and mind my business from now on. When she gets her heart broken yet again, I would be proved right.

I called Funmi as soon as I got home.

"Funmi guess what, Titi is telling everyone that I'm a liar."

"Calm down Lola. She's told me her own version of events."

"I don't believe this. Is she really going to keep dating him? Knowing he might be married?"

"Well, I can't say. But please don't let it ruin our friendship."

"Hmmm, you're telling me? Someone is accusing me of lying and you're telling me not to spoil things?"

"Maybe you should call her to hear what she has to say."

"No, I'm not calling her."

"Okay, send her a text."

I thought for a second.

"Alright, I might do that."

"Thanks darling. By the way, that album listening party I was talking about is coming to the O2 Academy soon and I want all of us to go."

"When is it?"

"There are only two performances, one next Saturday and one on Sunday."

"Which one should we see?"

"Saturday works better for most of us."

"Ok I'll be there, text me the details."

"I'll text you before I sleep this evening."

I hung up and promptly put thoughts of Titi out of my head. I remembered my upcoming date with Wole. Now that I have my outfit sorted, I thought of where I would like him to take me. Perhaps we should go and see a play, and have dinner at that new French restaurant in Covent Garden. That would be nice. Ok, I'll need to do my hair sometime before next weekend. Gosh I'm excited already!

My phone beeped. It was a text from Funmi.

The listening party is next Saturday, 7.00pm @ the O2 Academy. Pls book tickets online. Looking fwd to seeing u there! xxx

Oh snap! The listening party is on the same day as my date with Wole! And I had more or less promised Funmi I would be there. Which one should I cancel now? Sigh. Does this mean I have to postpone meeting up with Wole? Unless... unless... maybe I can get him to come with me. But wait, I don't want him to hang out with all my friends just yet. Oh this is hard!

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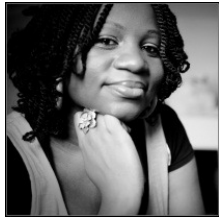
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About the Author



Tolulope Popoola is a writer, blogger and voracious reader. She was born in Lagos, Nigeria. She moved to England for her university education where she studied BA Accounting and Business Economics and a Masters in Finance and Investment. But she never lost her love for reading, and as time went on, she began to wish for a different career path. She started writing a blog in 2006, which rekindled her love for writing and telling stories. She took a few writing classes, created an online fiction series called *In My Dreams It Was Simpler* and started writing both fiction and non-fiction for magazines. In 2008, she left Accounting to concentrate on writing full-time. She writes short stories, flash fiction, and articles for many print and online magazines. ***Nothing Comes Close*** is her first novel. Tolulope lives in London with her husband and daughter.

You can interact with Tolulope online via:

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