

WIP

written by

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**FADE IN:**

**INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY**

DEB, 20s, sits at a table, holding a short story she's written in her hand.

The short story has numerous red penned corrections and markings on it. On the back page is paragraph-long feedback from Deb's professor.

Deb hands the short story to her roommate LISA, 20s, who sits beside her.

Lisa flipped through the pages before she put the short story down.

DEB  
They hated it.

LISA  
What did they say?

DEB  
The plot was convoluted; it had too many characters and conflicting storylines. They just didn't get it.

LISA  
Damn, that sucks.

DEB  
You read my story; what did you think?

LISA  
It was good.

DEB  
That's what I thought. It's a story about an alien colonizing a woman's body. It's a metaphor for the insidiousness of imperialism. It literally symbolizes the ongoing colonization of Africa and even the war in Ukraine.

LISA  
I thought it was about an extraterrestrial with mommy issues.

DEB

That was part of the story, but it wasn't the message.

LISA

Then maybe you didn't convey your message properly.

DEB

What do you think I should do to fix the story?

LISA

Don't put this on me. Do what your professor told you to do.

DEB

She's white; she doesn't know how to help me.

LISA

Your professor being white doesn't have anything to do with her being unable to help you write a better story.

DEB

Yes, it does. Me being the only Black student in class is why no one in my cohort gives me feedback during my workshops or even wants to help me proofread my work before class.

LISA

We all have to go through some bullshit. I work at a restaurant. Can you imagine what kind of shit I go through every day?

DEB

No, I can't.

There's a moment of silence as Deb continues to sulk.

Lisa looks at Deb's short story again.

LISA

Let's have some tea. Are you good with chai?

**CUT TO:**

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

Water BOILS in a kettle. Once the water is finished boiling, the kettle CLICKS off.

The fridge shakes as Lisa pulls it open. She takes out a jar of milk.

She places it next to two empty coffee mugs.

Almost ritualistically, she places chai tea bags and sugar in each cup.

She POURS just a bit of water in each cup. Then she fills the rest with milk.

For the final touch, Lisa sprinkles cinnamon inside each cup.

She mixes the cinnamon in her cup.

**INSERT TITLE CARD HERE.**

**FADE TRANSITION TO:**

**INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY**

**CLOSE UP** of Deb pondering the events of the day.

DEB

I think I finally want out of  
academia.

**NEW ANGLE ON** Deb and Lisa, sitting with cups of tea. The horrid short story in front of both of them.

LISA

I doubt it went that bad.

DEB

How do you know? You weren't there.

LISA

Then tell me what happened.

DEB

That's not the point. The problem  
is that you're undermining me, and  
I already go through enough of that  
at school. I'm tired of it.

LISA

You knew what you were getting into when you decided to go into academia.

DEB

I went into academia to make a change.

LISA

Institutions that have existed for centuries don't want to or are willing to change.

DEB

There have been plenty Black academics who've changed the education system.

LISA

Yes, I'm aware of Cornell West and Ramona Edelin's contributions to American education, but you're a writer, and not many of them make that kind of impact.

DEB

What's the point of going into a career you're passionate about if you don't make some kind of impact?

LISA

I became a chef because I love to cook. But work is work; sometimes, it makes me wanna shoot my brains out.

DEB

Work sucks, but we should all strive for more. I don't want to edit my stories to make them more digestible read for white people.

LISA

Art is subjective, but it still has to be coherent.

DEB

(surprised)  
My story didn't make sense.

LISA

If I'm being honest, some parts of it didn't.

(MORE)

LISA (CONT'D)

But I understand what you're saying. You should only do the edits your professor suggested that make sense to you.

Deb doesn't have a comeback.

Deb looks at her short story again.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

**MONTAGE OF DEB REWRITING HER SHORT STORY:**

Deb stands in front of an open window with her short story in hand, reading it through again.

Now, she sits on her bed with a laptop and her short story. She types furiously.

Deb gets distracted and is now on her phone, laughing at Tik Tok videos.

She ends up plucking her eyebrows out of boredom.

Deb is asleep on her bed.

**DUTCH ANGLE AS** she wakes up in a jolt. Deb appears dazed and confused.

She picks up her short story again. Deb has formed a new sense of resiliency.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Lisa and Deb are sitting beside together again.

Lisa is reading her short story. She puts it down when she's done.

LISA

It's insane, but I like it.

DEB

It's not me.

LISA

What do you mean?

DEB

This isn't something I would usually write.

LISA

Are you at least proud of it?

DEB

I don't know. I should just start doing whatever everyone tells me to do. It's easier that way.

LISA

Relax; nobody wants you to be anyone else but yourself.

DEB

I'm pretty sure they do, and I've struggled to live with that reality for a while now.

LISA

When we walk out that door, we all have to be someone we're not.

DEB

We choose to.

(beat)

There's this white boy named Eric in my cohort. All the professors love him. They call him the next Neil Gaiman.

LISA

(confused)

Ok.

DEB

I plagiarized his story for my workshop submission.

LISA

Oh my god. Of course, you did.

DEB

Everyone expects me to be a Joshua Bennett or Alysia Harris, but I suck at writing.

LISA

And I'm no Patrice Clark or Edna Lewis. Honey, we're the farthest thing from Black excellence.

They both laugh.

DEB

My GPA is too low for me to qualify  
for financial aid next semester.

LISA

I didn't know school has been  
that... challenging for you.

DEB

I'm going to have to move back in  
with my mom.

LISA

I'm sorry. I'm sure you'll figure  
it out.

Deb looks at her short story again.

DEB

Yeah, fuck this shit.

She crumples up the short story and throws it away.

CUT TO BLACK.