

Las Reinas

Her coiled black hair fell just above her shoulders with piercing hazel eyes that glowed against her soft coffee skin. Reina. She never talked to me. She always brushed me off like a fly, so I decided to try harder at school.

"Hey, beautiful. I've been tryin' to talk to you the whole summer, I'm Raheem, remember? Well, I think you would look so good next to me." I smiled.

"Next to you? Like an accessory? I'll pass." She rolled her eyes and walked away. *What was her problem?* I began walking through the hall when a group of my friends fluttered around me, teasing.

"Raheem I still don't get why you waste your time on that girl, she thinks she all that cause she has a nice body or whatever," Huey teased. It was true. No hourglass could compete with her figure. All the guys wanted to get with her. They would whistle and stare at her, making dirty comments and she would just walk away.

I tried to talk to her again. As I approached her at her locker, I looked her up and down, licking my lips. Reina rolled her eyes and tried to walk away. Before she could, I gently grasped her arm. "Hey, why you always like that? See where I come from, when someone gives you a compliment you thank them." She took a deep breath before she spoke.

"That was not a compliment."

"Sorry your highness. I forgot the rose petals that I'm apparently supposed to shower you with. You're stuck up. This is why I'll never get married to a black girl." Her face remained the same, as if what I said was nothing out of the ordinary. She looked at me with disappointed eyes.

"Remember that you're black yourself, and so is the woman who gave you life. I pray that one day you will understand the difficulties of not only being a woman, but being a woman of color in a society that will only look past our skin if we have the desirable body."

Before she left, I noticed the books she was holding. Calculus, Advanced Functions, and Canadian Law. Come to think of it, she was always reading. Even in the summer she was always buried in some book. I never knew what book it was; I never asked.

That night, as I was brushing my teeth before bed, I thought about what Reina said. *The difficulties of being a woman.* As if guys don't go through things. I bet girls don't have to spend time building up the nerve to talk to a guy only to be shot down every single time.

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That year was the last year I talked to Reina. It was obvious she wasn't into me. At first I was bummed about it, but watching my beautiful wife Xiomara walk down the aisle at our wedding, made me glad that I struck

out with Reina all those years ago. Later, my daughter was born. Aminata was like a rose in my garden full of weeds. She was beautiful, but most importantly, she was smart.

After work one day, I went to go pick Aminata from school. I looked out the window and saw a boy trying to talk to her and noticed her expression. A familiar blank, uninterested look followed by an eye roll I knew all too well. I watched as she made a gesture towards her Spanish textbook, kissed her teeth and stormed away. She threw herself in the car, tears building in her eyes.

“What’s wrong? That boy obviously liked you,” I asked.

“You wouldn’t understand. He only cares about my body,” a tear fell down her cheek as she twiddled her thumbs in her lap. “He and his friends are always whistling at me, thinking that it flatters me or somethin’. I have so much more to offer but they don’t care. It’s so hard dad, cause I’m either too black to be white or too white to be black. Society rejects me. Those guys reject the deeper parts of who I am, and only want my body but then tell me how they still don’t wanna end up with a black girl. It’s just easier to push boys away so that they don’t make me feel worse than I already feel. It’s hard being a girl, but the added pigment to my skin makes it ten times harder,” she cried. I turned towards her.

“Mina—”

“—I guess I can’t blame them for not wanting a black girl like me. Look at me daddy. Look at my gigantic lips, my nappy hair, and my skin; would *you* want me?” she asked looking me in my eye. My heart felt like it was being ripped out of my chest. I put my head on the steering wheel, crying in my arms. I didn’t know what to do. I wanted to tell her that it wasn’t true, that she’s worth more. How could I bring myself to speak such words when I treated Reina and many other girls the exact same way? Silence flowed throughout the car. I took my head off of the steering wheel and drove with haste.

“Dad, where are we going?” she asked, rushing to put on her seatbelt. I continued to drive, ignoring her question. I drove to the closest Farmer’s Market. After buying her a beautiful bouquet of yellow roses, I wrote her a message to answer her earlier question.

*Amo todas las partes de tí,
el cuerpo y la mente del alma.
Te quiero mi reina.*

I love all parts of you, soul, body, and mind. I love you my queen.

I looked her in her water-filled eyes, and wiped a fallen tear.

“Just like these yellow roses, you are different than the traditional red rose, but that doesn’t mean you aren’t beautiful. You are a queen, and never forget that. I’ll never forget it either. I love you.”