

## Missing Onyx

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“It’s too cold for this shit”, Onyx mumbled under her breath. Her ride was already 20-minutes late and it made her hate these long Parent-Teacher Conferences even more. It was bad enough that only 25 families had shown up and now she’d probably end up with a sore back tomorrow.

The headlights from an approaching vehicle caught her attention. She saw the familiar logo, took a relieved breath, and texted her daughter that she was on her way.

“Good evening, ma’am. Are you Onyx Jeffries?” stated the driver.

“Good evening,” she replied nonchalantly, “yes, I am.”

“Sorry I’m late. There was some traffic on the way here.” He was sincere in his apology which ushered Onyx towards forgiveness.

“No need for apologies. I totally understand.”

Onyx had learned that there was no use in expressing dissatisfaction with the service provided by her transportation company. Access Transit was one of the cheapest ways for a person with a disability to travel around the city. The promise of door-to-door service, affordable price, and efficient scheduling made for a good sales pitch, but the execution was much to be desired. He had arrived within the 30-minute window, which was a common practice, and for that she was grateful.

“Ready to get going?”

“Absolutely. I’m a little cold and I need to get home.”

Onyx checked her phone while the driver touched a series of buttons to lower the automatic ramp. She positioned her motorized wheelchair to align with the ramp, secured her phone, and drove slowly unto the platform. The driver secured the seatbelt to prevent her from rolling backwards and fiddled with the buttons until she was leveled enough to enter the van. She entered and parked, before turning off her wheelchair. The routine continued with him attaching various restraints to prevent her chair from moving.

“Alright, Ms. Jeffries. We’re just about done. I just need to get your signature and your fare, then we can get you to that warm bed that’s waiting.”

Onyx looked up at the young man. His youthful eyes betrayed the maturity that he exhibited. She thought about how impressive it was for a young man to be so professional and compose as she finished the paperwork. He reached out for the clipboard and casually walked back to the driver’s seat. Onyx, still focused on how methodical his movements were, was pulled from her trance when her phone rang.

“Hey, baby girl. Got my text?”

Onyx listened as her daughter rambled through the latest atrocity committed by her “teacher who must’ve worked at a torture camp” and smiled silently.

“Tell me the details when I get there,” she said in the most nurturing tone she could find, “we’re pulling off now. He mentioned some traffic, but let’s pray it won’t be too long.”

Onyx hung up after she told Indre to turn the heat up and reminded her that she is loved.

“The way you normally get home is a little backed up. It might take us close to 90-minutes to get there,” the driver called out.

“Oh, no,” Onyx said, “you’ve gotta be kidding me.”

“No, ma’am,” he responded, “I wish I had better news.”

“Aww, man,” Onyx exhaled aloud, “so much for my night.”

“We could try going local,” he said looking through the rear view mirror, “that might be quicker.”

“As long as you’ll try to make it a smooth ride. Those bumps can be brutal on my lower back.” She stared at his face through the mirror, looking for traces of uncertainty in his suggestion.

“I’ll be mindful of the bumps, ma’am,” he assured her, “I’m sure it’s been a long day,” he said with a slight curl of the lip, before making a familiar left turn.

Onyx admired the houses she passed having never gone through some of these streets. It almost felt like she was in an entirely new state and she slowly drifted off into her thoughts, paying less and less attention to the name of streets besides the one with the elaborate ranch house with the beautifully manicured lawn. She wondered what the floor plan was and if the owners would consider selling. It wasn’t long before she leaned her head against her headrest and dozed off.

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“Grandma,” said Indre, “have you heard from mommy?”

“What do you mean?” Panic crept into Mrs. Lewis’ voice as she spoke faster and faster, spewing questions at a rate that was faster than the girl could answer.

“I spoke to her at 8 and she said she was on her way,” said Indre, “but she’s still not here and her phone is going to voicemail. I was just wondering if ...”

“No, I haven’t heard anything.” Mrs. Lewis started speaking quickly again, injecting every possibility and fear between figuring out what to do. “Let me try to reach her and put some clothes on,” she said before hanging up.

Mrs. Lewis hated when her daughter worked long days. She knew that there was no bathroom in the building that had wheelchair accessibility and she was familiar with how often Onyx ended up waiting outside alone for her ride. It wasn’t strange that Onyx hadn’t called her yet because she usually called when she got home. She glanced over at the cable box and took note that it was almost midnight. Walking over to her phone, she couldn’t shake the feeling that something was wrong and she needed to get to her granddaughter.

“Indy, did you get your mom yet?”

“No,” Indra said frantically, “I was thinking you were going to say you did.”

“I’m on my way to you. I don’t like this.” Mrs. Lewis was trying to stay calm, but wasn’t very successful.

“Do me a favor,” she continued, “call the company and see how much longer they think it’ll be. Just tell them that her phone is off and that’s why you’re calling. Let’s see what they say.”

“I did that. Her ride was cancelled at six.”

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“Hello, Onyx,” echoed a strangely familiar voice.

As the haze faded from Onyx’ head, she looked frantically around the room that bore no resemblance to any part of her home. She took deep breaths as she reached between her legs in search of her phone; it wasn’t there. The room was warm and dimly lit, making it hard to see any details, but bright enough to determine that she was in a living room of sorts. The bay window above the light colored couch revealed an expanse of autumnal leaves and an enormous bookshelf stood against the adjacent wall. For a brief moment, Onyx wondered what titles were on the shelves. Her breathing turned into heaving when she noticed someone standing behind her.

“Hey,” she yelled, “where am I? What’s going on here?” She tried to suppress her urge to panic, but her efforts were proven ineffective.

“You know who I am, although you don’t know where you are.” The man’s voice was calming, controlled, and nonchalant.

“Listen,” she began to plea, “I really don’t know what is happening right now, but I really need to get home.”

“You are home,” he said as he slowly made his way in front of her.

“What in the fuck’s sake are you talking about?”

Onyx was fine with the occasional prank, but there was nothing to suggest anyone would be jumping from behind a curtain any time soon. She looked intently on his face and tried to recall where she’d seen him before. His voice and something about how he said, “you are home,” brought her back to one of the drivers that dropped off in the afternoons.

“No need to get hostile, my love,” the man spoke reassuringly, “you’ll love it here.”

“Here, where,” she grew increasingly agitated.

“I had you dropped off here after work. I figured it was best that you come home tonight.”

“Home!” Onyx was getting tired of whatever this was. “Help,” she screamed, although something told her it wouldn’t make much sense to waste her energy yelling.

“No one is going to hear you. It’s not that kind of neighborhood. People here mind their business.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I don’t have any nosey neighbors.”

Onyx’ breathing became labored and she started feeling sleepy. She yawned.

“Sounds like it’s time for me to get you to bed, darling.”

“Don’t you dare touch me,” she said in a faint voice.

“Well, you should at least let me get you to the bathroom.”

“Please don’t touch me.”

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Mrs. Lewis jumped out of the taxi cab and made her way to the door of her daughter's house.

Indre was standing in the foyer and quickly opened the door for her grandmother. As if rehearsed, she took the bag her grandmother was holding and walked behind her waiting for her coat. It was obvious that there was something to be worried about. Mrs. Lewis, though usually hyper and dramatic, was both of those things combined with a look of terror.

“Nothing yet, huh?”

“Um mm,” Indre shook her head, “we should call the police.” It seemed like the most logical thing to do at this point.

“Yes, give them a call.”

Mrs. Lewis sat on the couch and dialed her daughter's number again. It went to voicemail.

“Shit, man.”

Indre was giving information to someone over the phone and turned to look at her grandmother in shock. Had it been a different circumstance she would have started laughing and mocking her grandmother's criticism of people who curse. She carried on with her conversation, moving closer to the couch.

“Thank you, ma'am. I'll listen for the door. Have a good night.” Indre hung up and met with a firing squad of questions.

“What'd they say?” Mrs. Lewis was now in full panic mode and looked even more distraught than she did when she first arrived.

Indre summarized the phone exchange and informed her that they dispatched a car before she hung up. She sat down beside her grandmother who was rubbing her hands together and seemed to be praying. Indre put her arm around her shoulder, closed her eyes, and made her own petitions to heaven for her mom's safe return.