

# *Heavy Moans, Achy Joints*

BY **SHAHANA HANIF**

“If it turns out that I have an incurable disease or I’m dying, will you still love me?”

Our bodies held on to each other while Twelve-to-Six whispered, “of course.”

That day we didn’t go to our usual spot in Prospect Park to make-out. We would walk deep into what was only greenery because I was always afraid that my father or some Bengali uncle or aunty would spot me without bra and catch a glimpse of my luscious 36 double Ds. I had already gotten caught far too many times, no, not topless, but while locking lips in front of a porch that wasn’t mine or his. Some Bengali lived in it and so word spread quickly. I mean, how was I supposed to know that me kissing some dude was news worth spreading? Why didn’t anyone warn me about being Brown and barred from kissing in public?

After struggling to get up the Bay Parkway station stairs with knees so weak and feet feeling heavy, not from sex because I was saving that, we hugged as if it was my last. I was feverish and fatigued so instead of a steamy French, my lips softly caressed his right cheek. I had never done such a thing before, but I guess I cared about him. I wanted him close.

It turned out that I did have an incurable disease. It’s name: Lupus. Something about it being autoimmune, which I still don’t completely understand, and an undesirable amount of protein now liberated from my body to coexist in urine, explaining kidney failure, sudden weight gain, achy joints, and swollen everything.

It made sense now as to why I couldn’t bend on my knees... to do the deeds... to worship. It was my first time while in Prospect Park on a hilltop of some sort surrounded by unforgiving summer bugs. Knees bent and in excruciating pain. I didn’t know what I was doing. I envied the white women I had watched in porn. They knew how to maneuver the penis so comfortably. Was it learned or inherent? Some of them also wore high heels! I had ditched my volunteer hours at Methodist Hospital to perform like the ladies with voluminous blonde hair, perfectly shaven, and so flexible. No matter how much I shaved, hair specks were very much visible along with a hue darker than the Brown on my skin. Focused but fearful, I pushed him to direct me but I guess his lack of response and happy moans meant I was doing okay.

The ICU became my permanent home for the next three months.

Lupus was serious. Incurable but treatable with high doses of anti-inflammatory medicines, namely Prednisone which turned my slim and curvy figure to a shape so abstract, befitting for the dully printed white hospital gown held together with threads. I wasn't used to so much immodesty.

Completely naked inside, I assured Twelve-to-Six that he could get a feel when he'd visit me. He didn't come until the day of my second kidney biopsy, which was at least a month and a half into my stay at Maimonides. Our midnight conversations, mostly him helping me explore parts that were now swollen and distorted due to the Lupus consumption, my vagina was ugly, also faded and didn't last until six in the morning anymore. He wasn't living up to the codename I had given him.

Because the nights were calmer during my stay, all I could think about was masturbating. Was it wrong for me to want to touch myself while bedridden from disease? I shared these sentiments with my best friend who over the phone asked, "Are you serious, Shahana?!?!?" as if I could no longer be sexual or desire to be sexual because after all, intimacy and disability could not belong together. Right?

Twelve-to-Six called one night asking for "space." I didn't put up a fight.

Two years later, I was living in an apartment close to campus.

Twelve-to-Six reappeared and wanted to visit me. I wore my best wig. It wasn't colored like the natural jet-black he last saw me with, but rather a brunette, long in the back, layered in the front. With it, I was a woman, feminine, confident, able. Chemotherapy had left me bald.

He looked at me diligently. Did he know I was wearing a wig? Did I look different to him? Did he notice the longer, straight strands covering my breasts?

He wanted to hug. I did too. This hug escalated from the living room to my bedroom where I silently became pious and prayed for the wig to stay on and not go lopsided or else he'd know I was hiding a baldhead. "God, I know Lupus might've been a test of faith which I'm doing miserably in, but I've not touched a man in so long, please let this wig stay." Don't touch my hair. No hair pulling please, though that's what turned me on the most. It didn't matter that he didn't want to kiss me on the lips or that our clothes stayed on.

I lay on my back while he on top of me. Our bodies caressed gently. I missed his smell, though he reeked of the chicken wings he had eaten prior to the hug. His hands made way from my cheeks to my breasts, *kameez* on. I moaned longing for more, to get a peek of his thighs and the boner I felt on my body.

He motioned it was time for him to leave. Wig in place, I directed him to the door.

I pulled off the wig and sat on the couch.

"If it turns out that I have an incurable disease or I'm dying, will you still love me?"

"Of course."