

A Divine Encounter

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'Get away, man! Mind your own business,' yelled Bianca, at an old man who fitted the description of a hobo to a tee. 'Buzz off!' She instructed, waving a finger.

'I told you, Missy, I'll leave when you tell me what this is about,' he replied nonchalantly, gazing all the way down at the mammoth rocks beneath them. 'What's going on, huh?'

It was nearly 5am at Simmons Town – wet and icy, with soft sunlight seeping in from behind the mountains. Bianca, a plump 42 year old woman, stood anxiously on the edge of a bridge, trembling. She held a bible in her left hand, momentarily using it as a visor against the drizzle.

She'd planned this for months, meticulously. She had prayed, amended her will and left her dad a lengthy note, explaining herself.

What she hadn't anticipated was an interruption from a cheeky homeless chap. This annoyed her to no end – a downright offence.

Dressed in filthy blankets and worn boots, he stood a few meters from Bianca, leaning against steel protective railings, starring up at her. 'Just tell me what the matter is, dear, and I'll be outta your hair,' he said, exposing stained chipped teeth as he spoke.

Bianca fumed, pronouncing each and every word, slowly. 'I ... do not ... have ... any money ... or any food ... or whatever you people want.' Her gaze darted around fearfully. There'd soon be traffic on the roads.

'Just want you to tell me why you're doing this, and I'll be on my way. I don't even care if you jump, quite honestly. I'd just like the back-story,' he claimed, wondering if she'd chosen to wear a maroon tracksuit on purpose - to camouflage the blood splatter. He brushed the thought aside. 'So what's it gonna be?'

'Sir, please. This isn't a joke. Just go on about your business,' she pleaded now, teary eyed.

'You're right, this isn't a joke. Maybe I should call the cops, and see what they think.'

Bianca gave him a threatening look, as if to say, '*I will kill you if you do*'. Out loud she said, 'What the hell is your problem, you dirty hobo? Are you bored or something? Go annoy someone else. Don't you have a rubbish bin to fiddle around in?'

'Ouch! So below the belt,' was his sarcastic response, hopping on the bridge now to sit on the cement structure, closer to her. 'Okay, I'll tell you my story, since you're stingy with yours.' He cleared his throat. 'Right now I'm walking to Aliwal North. Heard they're

looking for truck drivers over there. I've driven trucks all my life – I have a code 14 driver's licence.'

She watched him, puzzled, raising a brow. 'Aliwal North? That's like an hour's drive from here.'

'Yup, and a six hour walk. That's why I'm up so early. Gotta be there by midday.'

She rolled her eyes at the lunacy of it all. 'Why don't you just catch a cab?'

'Cabs cost money.'

'Don't you have a wife or girlfriend you can steal money from, in your case?' She wiped water off her face.

'Nope. My wife passed away in a car accident – both her and our daughter.'

Bianca paused, observing the old man carefully now.

'She was driving, with our three year old in the passenger seat. Head on collision with a cement truck.'

'YOUR wife had a car? Oh please ...'

'Yes she did, as a matter of fact,' he retorted with a look, eyeing her up and down. 'Anyways, that's me in a nutshell. What's yours story? And hurry up please, I've gotta get going.'

'Sir, I'm sorry about your family and all, but I don't wanna to talk about it, okay. Goodbye now. I hope you get your little trucking job. Good luck with ...'

'My wife didn't actually have a car,' he interrupted. 'It was her boyfriend's. She'd left me for another man – a man with cars and things.' He emphasised the words '*cars and things*', clearly still troubled. 'I've been a poor man all my life, my girl. I guess she couldn't take it anymore.'

Bianca found herself engaged in his story now – reluctant, but attentive. She took a step back from the edge.

'So, one day she sent me a text message, saying she was leaving and taking our child with. She apologised, and said she understood if I couldn't forgive her. That was that.'

'And ... and how did you ... how did you deal with the split, or divorce? It couldn't have been easy.'

'Just started going to church and praying, and reading scriptures about grief and loss. I drew nearer to God. I didn't have another avenue to turn to.'

Bianca bit her lip. She took a deep breath and exhaled. 'My husband left me,' she confessed, with tears streaming freely down her cheeks. 'The snake left me for a young ditzzy little girl who I'd introduced him to. Can you believe it? I supported Brian

throughout our whole marriage. I did everything for that conniving dog – taking out bank loans for his failing businesses, trying to get him a real job through my family ...'

'And he still walked out on you.'

'Just like that!'

'That's still no excuse for you to do this, my girl. Committing suicide is murdering one of God's children. So what? You lost your husband ... '

'AND MY LIFE!' She screamed, exposing her tongue and full set of teeth. 'I'm already dead! Yolanda, the tramp that he's been seeing behind my back has AIDS ... or HIV or whatever the hell it is. I didn't tell him that because she'd told me in confidence. We were friends from gym. And then she goes and sleeps with MY HUSBAND!' She yelled, wiping tears and stepping back to the edge. 'Go away, old man. I know you're trying to help, but it's not ...'

He interrupted. 'I see you have a bible there.' His heart raced, nervous about this woman.

'What?'

'Before I go, can I quickly ask you what the Word says about hardships and times like these?'

She stared back at him, blankly.

He spoke as quickly as he could. 'If my memory serves me well, Psalm 34:19 says, the righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all. Don't let satan convince you that you're defeated, my girl – that's his trick. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says, be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking to devour you. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers, throughout the world, is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. You are not alone.'

Bianca fell to her knees and let out a loud cry, howling out. 'I'm sick. I have massive debts. I have no real friends. I'm fat. Men aren't attracted to me ...'

'And now you want to commit suicide and jump straight to hell. You're perfect in the eyes of the Lord, dear girl. You have so much more than other people do. Put yourself in my shoes.'

She turned to him again, glancing down at his torn and rugged rags.

'I'm about to walk for six hours straight, to probably get rejected. I don't even know what I'll eat today,' he confessed, hopping off the bridge. 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to the Lord. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. That's Philippians 4:6-7.'

Who is this person? Thought Bianca, seeing him through different eyes now. She analysed him once more.

'I've gotta go. Remember this - millions of people, all over the world are going through tougher times than you are, and they're living their lives thankfully. Cheers,' he concluded, walking off. 'READ HEBREWS 13:2 WHEN YOU HAVE SOME TIME.' He yelled out, waving her farewell without looking back.

'Wait, what's your name?' Bianca asked, stepping carefully off the railing and jumping back on the pavement. 'WAIT, HOLD UP PLEASE!'

He was gone.

Her gaze swivelled around, trying to figure out where he'd vanished to. The landscape was levelled from either side of the bridge - but he was gone, somehow.

This puzzled the wits out of Bianca.

She opened her bible to Hebrews 13:2, to see what he was referring to:

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing, some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

A stunned Bianca froze.

Her jaw dropped, speechless.

The End.