

Life In All Colors (2022)

Keilani was already running late for class because she had missed her bus that morning. It was her alarm clock's fault since it decided not to go off at the time she had set it for. That morning was very hectic for her trying to gather all her things and literally falling out the door to catch the bus. But without success, so she ended up walking to campus on foot. On her way she quickly made a stop at the campus coffee shop since there had been no time for her that morning to make some herself. She thought that if she was already ten minutes too late, five more minutes wouldn't hurt anyone. Keilani ordered her coffee and waited till the barista called out her name. Grabbing her coffee, she quickly made her way over to the lecture hall. Being twenty minutes late now, she took a deep breath before entering the class. The door made a squeaking sound which led to all the students turning their heads to where the noise was coming from. Standing in the door still holding on to the doorknob with her right hand and her coffee and bag in her left hand, Keilani greeted the students with a warm smile. "Hello everyone! I know I'm late, but I really tried to get here as quick as possible." "Ms. Agrinya, the coffee in your hand says otherwise.", one of the students yelled from the back of the class, laughing. Keilani chuckled lightly and went over to her lectern "Yeah, you are right. But I just couldn't imagine going on with my day without some coffee." She set down her bag next to the desk and sat down in the old leather chair. The students were quiet, waiting for their teacher to start the lecture. Keilani had been an English teacher at Columbia University in New York for about two years. She had moved to the USA to fulfill her dream of becoming a teacher at the age of 20. When she was a little girl back in Nigeria, she used to read a lot of English literature but the characters were mostly white. It was hard to find literature written by African authors. Growing up Keilani had started writing her own stories with also mostly white characters. It wasn't until a few years later that she incorporated African characters and cultures into her writing, but

those stories were never published. Keilani discovered a fondness for English literature, which inspired her to move to America and work as a teacher. And now she was sitting in front of her own class that she was about to teach. “Today I would like all of you to prepare some notes for an essay I want you all to write over the weekend. Please make those notes as detailed as possible so that you don’t have too much work later on. Oh, and also, I want you to write your essay about something that means a lot to you or inspires you.”, Keilani told her class. A few students groaned in annoyance. “I know that you all have better things to do than write this essay, but it is important for you if you want to pass my class. So I can only recommend you do this assignment.”, she responded to all annoyed students. “But before you all start with your notes, I want to tell you something that is important to me and that inspires me. Just so that you all have an idea of what I want you to write.”, she stated. “This has to do with where I come from and how I grew up.”, Keilani said while standing up to walk a bit. “Where I come from, we don’t have good school education. If you want your kids to receive sound education, you need to send them to a private school, but those can be expensive for an average Nigerian parent. The jobs don’t provide enough money for them to spend it on a private school. Most parents don’t even let their children go to school, but rather have them start working at a young age to earn more money and help the family out. That is why most Nigerian children don’t get far in life and only pursue manual labor, since you don’t need too many cognitive skills. My childhood was pretty similar to that of other Nigerian kids. I had the privilege to go to a private school and get sound education, but only because my parents wanted me and my siblings to succeed in life.” Keilani walked up to the window and glanced outside, seeing students rushing to get into their classrooms. She turned back to her class and continued talking. “My parents worked very hard to make this opportunity possible for me and my siblings. I also worked at my aunt’s shop at weekends to earn some money myself. I used that money to buy myself books

to educate myself more. I was always fascinated by English literature. To this day I still have all the books that I bought with 14, because over in Nigeria those books cost a ton. Those English authors inspired me to write my own stories. I only wrote short stories because I liked the concept of them. They are simple but are still able to bring across captivating fiction.” She stopped walking and thought briefly. “You know what!? Instead of a boring essay I want you all to write a short story.” That got her even more groans from the students. “Anyway, where was I? Ah right, so because I liked English literature so much, I decided that after school I wanted to do something just as interesting. And that is why I became a teacher of English literature.” Keilani ended her sentence with a slight smile. “Of course, it wasn’t an easy way since being a woman and African in today’s society can be tough sometimes. I saw a lot of professors who criticized my work and said that it wasn’t authentic enough. Only because I didn’t write about how poor my characters were but rather that they lived in nice urban neighborhoods with beautiful houses.” She sighed. “What inspired me to keep going were all the African authors that made me believe that I could do the same. But I have talked too much already. You may now start taking your notes for your own short story.” The class started to dig out their laptops and papers to start writing.

After her three lectures that day Keilani gathered all her stuff and threw away her now empty coffee cup in the trash can on her way out. She headed towards the entrance and stepping outside, a gust of wind combed through her curly hair, making the leaves around her dance in circles. Keilani took a deep breath which felt nice, since it filled her lungs with some fresh air. The chilly autumn weather felt pleasant on her face compared to the hot, nitrogenous room she had just been in. The atmosphere outside was just perfect. Birds were chirping lightly in a tree nearby and the sun was covered by clouds. Wrapping her scarf tighter and closing her jacket, she started walking over to the small café on campus where she met her friend twice a week during her

free period to catch up on life. Keilani enjoyed this time since she didn't have any family living in America. Nora and Keilani had been friends pretty much since Keilani had moved to America. They instantly clicked because both of them loved Virginia Woolf. It started to drizzle lightly which made Keilani walk faster. However, when she arrived at the café rain had started pouring down and she was now drenched to the bone. Quickly opening the door, Keilani looked around to find her friend sitting at a corner booth, typing something on her laptop. Keilani walked up to the table and asked jokingly: "Is this seat taken?". Nora looked up from her laptop and instantly smiled when she saw Keilani's face. "There you are, Kaykay!", she said excitedly and stood up to pull Keilani into a hug. "Ahh, you're all wet!", she laughed. "I've missed you! I mean, we haven't seen each other for only one week but I missed this beautiful face of yours." Keilani laughed, "I've missed you too, stupid!" "Hey, I'm not stupid!", Nora frowned. They both sat down at the table, where Keilani took off her scarf and jacket to hang them over the chair next to her. She then waved over a waiter so they both could order their drinks. "What can I get you guys today?", the waiter asked politely. "I'll take a cappuccino and she'll have a latte macchiato.", Nora said before Keilani ever had the chance to open her mouth. The waiter noted down their order, nodded, and went on to the next table. Keilani looked at her friend with a smile "So, how have you been doing this last week?" "Oh, it was so stressful at the company. All these clients that constantly want your attention and help. And then my boss wanted me to drive up to Melville to pick up some materials that were delivered to the wrong address.", Nora complained with a frown. Keilani laughed, "Isn't that your job to help the clients.?" "Yes, but still, I didn't have the motivation at all this week." "Yeah, I know what you mean. I also didn't like this week. I had to attend a few seminar meetings and corrected a lot of exams.", Keilani said and leaned back on her chair. Nora closed her laptop and looked up. "That is why I love our little gettogethers. It is my down time where I can just fully relax and be myself."

“Yeah, me too!”, Keilani agreed. The waiter came back with their two coffees and placed them on the table. “Thank you!”, Keilani said smiling at the waiter. “Yes, thank you very much“, Nora added. Keilani took the spoon from the saucer and started stirring her latte macchiato before slowly taking a sip. “Ahh, that tastes so good.” She held onto her glass because it felt nice and warm in her hands. Nora also picked up her cappuccino and took a sip with a grin on her face. “This is just the perfect thing for weather like this.”, she stated, and Keilani nodded in agreement. “Besides work, have you been up to anything new? Oh, and have you read the new book by Virginia Woolf that I recommended to you?”, Nora asked curiously. “No, nothing new, just the same old stuff as always. And yes, I did read *The Voyage Out*. It was such a good book. I especially liked the part where she wrote “They all dreamt of each other that night, as was natural, considering how thin the partitions were between them, ...”.” “... and how strangely they had been lifted off the earth to sit next each other in mid-ocean, and see every detail of each other’s faces, and hear whatever they chanced to say.” Nora finished Keilani’s sentence with a smile on her face. “I liked that one, too.” They looked each other in the eyes and silently sat there like that for a few seconds. Keilani tore her gaze away from Nora and nervously took another sip from her latte macchiato. All of the sudden she felt really hot. She felt the heat rise in her cheeks which made her more nervous because she didn’t want Nora to see her blushing. Keilani quickly looked down into her lap where she was fiddling with her fingers. Nora didn’t seem to notice how flustered Keilani had gotten because she had just started talking about something that happened at work. Keilani didn’t really listen because she was trying to regulate her heart rate. Truth is that Keilani had a little crush on Nora, but she couldn’t tell her since she didn’t want to ruin their friendship. When Keilani first moved to New York, she didn’t have a lot of friends. It was hard for her to get used to all the new places and new people. But one day, when Keilani was out at the supermarket buying groceries, she bumped into Nora. At

first Keilani was scared that Nora might be angry with her, but when Nora turned to look at Keilani she smiled and made a joke about how Keilani looked so scared. From that moment on they had been inseparable. They started to find a routine and hang out every chance they got. And after a while Keilani noticed that she started to like Nora more than just a friend, but she was too afraid to ever say anything because she didn't know how Nora might react if she found out. Nora also was Keilani's first girl crush or crush in general since Keilani had never actually liked anyone in that way before. All the guys from her hometown never really struck her eyes and at that time Keilani didn't know that she could also be attracted to girls. She had never learned about different sexual orientations in Nigeria, over there it was a tabu subject. "... and that is why I despise him even more now." She heard Nora finish her sentence. "What?", Keilani asked, confused, while looking up again. "I said that I despise my boss even more now since I had to drive down to Melville in my free time to get his stupid stuff. He could have gotten it himself or get his secretary to do it, but no, he had to choose me, knowing damn well that I already had enough on my hands.", Nora repeated, slightly angry, staring off into space. She looked back at Keilani: "Is something on your mind? You seem distracted." "Oh no, I'm fine. It's just ... I ... well ... I'm tired.", Keilani lied. "And I've just remembered that I was planning on going back home during fall break. Which I now realize is in, like, a week from now. And I still have a lot of packing to do and also more exams to take with me to be corrected. It is definitely not going to be like a vacation, but I'm happy to see my family again.", she sighed. "Yeah, I understand. That will be stressful, but I'm happy to help you pack and prepare everything that you need for your trip.", Nora responded with a warm smile. "Thank you! I will definitely need all the help I can get.", Keilani said, laughing. "I will miss you a lot, you little rat. I wish I could just climb into one of your suitcases and come with you." "I mean, technically you could come with me. I don't have anything against it and my family probably won't mind either. It

would be so much fun and a lot less intimidating if you were there with me.”, Keilani said. “Really!”, Nora screamed in excitement. “Shhh! You’re being too loud.” Keilani laughed. “Yes, sorry. But I’m just so excited! That would be so awesome if I could come with you.”, Nora said with sparkling eyes. “I think it will be no problem arranging for you to come with me. I will inform my family. They will probably be excited to see a real American girl.”, Keilani laughed out loud. “Ah, yes, that would be amazing! I can’t wait to see the town where you grew up and by the way, I have never been to Africa before. This is such a huge thing for me.”, Nora screeched out of joy. “Yeah, I am a little nervous thinking about going back home. I mean, I haven’t been there for like at least ten years. My younger sister Celestia is now all grownup and an adult. My older sister Amaris probably has her own family and house by now. We sadly never really stayed in touch since I moved here.”, Keilani admits saddened. “I’m sure everything will be just fine, and your family is going to be so happy to finally see you again after such a long time.”, Nora said reassuringly. A certain panic was spreading in Keilani. She wasn’t sure why exactly, but the thought of seeing her family again hit her deep in her guts. Her relationship to her family was never really bad during her childhood, but there were conflicts from time to time, especially over money issues since they didn’t have a lot. Also Keilani and her sisters never really had a strong bond. They all had their own friends and hobbies. It made Keilani sad because she always wanted to get along with her sisters. She felt judged most of the time basically having to fight for her family’s approval, especially when she decided to move to New York. That is why Keilani wasn’t exactly sure about how they were going to react, if they found out about how she had been living her life so lavishly. Since Keilani had moved to New York, a lot of things in her day-to-day life changed. Back in Nigeria her family would always try to provide food for everyone. Sometimes there wasn’t enough to feed every member of the family which is why Keilani often had to go to bed with an empty stomach. But now that she was living in New York, she

never had to think twice whether there was enough food for her. In Nigeria, it was also not common to go out in the evening to have dinner in a restaurant, which was something that Keilani was doing pretty often when she had a long workday and didn't feel like preparing her own food. She would go out and grab a pizza or a burger at some fast-food restaurant. Keilani now felt a sort of guilt and she didn't know why. She felt that she shouldn't have to feel bad about living her life so comfortably. It just scared her a little how much she had changed since moving to New York. The Keilani that had arrived in New York about ten years ago wasn't the same Keilani that was sitting in this café with her best friend right now. Staring out of the big cafe window watching the rain drops race each other painfully slow down the glass, Keilani took a big sip from her latte macchiato. With her other hand she tapped her fingers on the wooden table. Nora had opened her laptop again and was wildly typing something with a concentrated face. "What are you doing over there?", Keilani asked, snapping out of her little stare. "I was just writing a list of what I need to pack when we fly to Nigeria. Any recommendations regarding what I should definitely bring?", Keilani let out a small laugh. "I see you're being a step ahead of me already. I haven't even decided yet what to pack. But to you I definitely recommend bringing a lot of sunscreen and a good pair of sunglasses. Also make sure your clothes are not too tight fitting, you will enjoy every little breeze that comes your way. Trust me.". "You're right. Those are some important factors I need to take into consideration. With my luck I will be sunburned the second we land.", Nora said jokingly. The two were sitting in the cafe a little longer, just chatting, joking around, and enjoying each other's company before Keilani had to make her way back to the university and Nora had to drive back to her workplace. On their way out of the café they hugged each other goodbye and before Keilani was out of Nora's reach, she yelled "I will call you later tonight." Keilani turned to walk in the direction of the university's entry.

It had stopped raining and the sun was peeking through the clouds which made the pavement shine brightly. Keilani had to squint her eyes just a little to see where she was going. She heard the birds singing their happy little tunes again which made her smile. This was her favorite type of weather. Maybe because most of her life she lived in a hot climate in which even moving one's little toe made one sweat. And also the fact that in Nigeria there wasn't really such a thing as seasons. It was just hot all the time. Keilani remembered her first winter in New York as it was yesterday. She was so in awe with the snow and all the Christmas lights being put up all around the big city. Her favorite thing though must have been the big Christmas tree and ice-skating rink. In Nigeria they didn't have ice skating rinks or Christmas lights hung in the city or at least not in the town where Keilani was from. Keilani was in front of the entry way now where she mentally prepared herself for the seminar she was about to attend. She hated those types of meetings. They usually were about irrelevant stuff that could have been communicated in an e-mail. Walking up the stairs to the meeting room Keilani bumped into one of her colleagues. "Hello, Darcy! How are you?", Keilani asked in a polite way. "Oh, hey there! I'm doing fine, just a bit tired. What about you?", Darcy answered with a tired smile. "Me too. Do you have any idea what this meeting is about?". "Yes, I think the headmaster mentioned briefly that it concerns an event. They are looking for someone who will plan the entire thing.", Keilani rolled her eyes "Let's hope this whole thing doesn't take too long.". Darcy was one of the colleagues that Keilani could stand. She was always very joyful and trying to make Keilani laugh. Not only that but she was also the one that welcomed Keilani when she was new at the university. They instantly got along pretty well which is why they both liked to gossip about the other teachers. It was hard for Keilani to feel at ease and somewhat fit in with all the other people. That is why Keilani appreciated Darcy for being so friendly with her. They both continued walking up the steps and down a long hall up to a big old wooden double door which

led to a conference room. Darcy opened the door and walked in after Keilani. In the middle of the room there was a big conference table with at least thirty chairs that were mostly taken. The afternoon sun was shining low through the big, dirty windows that had old curtains hanging in front of them. At one of the tables ends a big monitor and a white board were standing. Most of the teachers sitting at the table had their notebooks and laptops out which indicated that they were supposed to take notes. Keilani let out a sigh before she and Darcy searched for a place to sit. They decided to sit on the window side so that the sun would not blind them. It took a few minutes for everyone to take a seat and set their stuff up. After a few moments of subtle chatting, the headmaster Mr. Willard cleared his throat to get everyone's attention. "Hello everyone! You may or may not know why I asked you to be here today.", he paused and looked at the tired faces that were sitting in front of him. "Well, me and Mrs. Schmidt had an idea to throw a charity event after the fall break. That way our school can brush up its image and we may get even more applications." He continued talking for what felt like half an hour to Keilani. She was drawing little doodles on her notebook, not really paying much attention to what Mr. Willard had to say. All of a sudden, Darcy jabbed her elbow into Keilani's ribs. Keilani looked at her with a face that said "Ow, that hurt!", but Darcy just pointed her finger to the front where Mr. Willard was standing, looking at her. "Ms. Agrinya, did you hear what I was just saying?", he asked with an unreadable expression. "No, I'm sorry. I was just taking some notes for some work I have to do later.", she lied. "What was it you said?" Keilani tried to sound as interested as possible. "I said that I would like You to do us the favor and plan and host this charity event.", Mr. Willard said with a straight face. "Really?! Why me, if I may ask?", Keilani said in a confused way. "Well, we need someone young and enthusiastic to present us. Not only that but I have faith in you that your organization skills will help us create a beautiful charity event.", he announced. Keilani was shocked, she didn't know how to react. "But I have

never organized such a big event or an event at all. Shouldn't someone who is more experienced prepare this whole thing?". "No, I think you will fit this role perfectly. Adding to that, this way you can make some new experiences and learn a lot. It will benefit you a lot.", he said with a smile that looked like it was forced to seem sincere. Keilani didn't know what else to say so she just nodded and sunk back into her chair. "How does he know I won't mess this up? I don't want to be known as the person that ruined a charity event.", she whispered, turning towards Darcy who had a compassionate facial expression. Darcy looked at her with a somewhat worried look. "I know you can do this, don't worry too much!" She tried to sound as convincing as possible, but it didn't really work. Before Keilani faced her notebook, she had one more question to ask Darcy. "What is this charity event even going to be about? I zoned out back there." Darcy started to look uncomfortable." Well, this charity event is for poor African children that need food or clothes ..." Keilani suddenly realized why the headmaster wanted her to plan and host this event. She tuned out what Darcy continued to say because she was too focused on the fact that her boss had just chosen her for this event because she was black. Sinking further into her chair, Keilani couldn't believe that he would do such a thing. It took her a few seconds but now it all made sense. She was pretty much the only black teacher at the university. They probably want her to host the charity event so that the university and the headmaster would be in a better light. The university was trying to pretend that they were all supporting their black employees. For the rest of the meeting Keilani didn't listen at all to what Mr. Willard had to say. She just hoped that it would be over as soon as possible. All she wanted to do was get out of this room, this building and be in the presence of all her other colleagues who seemed to think Mr. Willard's idea was great. When the meeting was finally over, Keilani rushed out of the conference room, not wanting to spend another second breathing the same air as everyone else in there. Quickly making her way down the stairs, Keilani heard Darcy calling

out her name and then saw her running to catch up with her. “Hey, are you alright? I know that this situation was very tough in there.” “I’m fine.”, was all Keilani could bring across her compressed lips. “Hm, okay. If you want to talk about it, I’m here for you.”, Darcy said quietly with a heartfelt smile. “Thanks, Darcy, but I don’t feel like talking right now. I think I’ll just go home.”, Keilani answered, her eyes glued to the ground. “Alright. Have a nice evening. And please, don't take Mr. Willard’s words too much to your heart.”, Darcy said in an encouraging tone. Keilani just nodded and headed for the entrance, her head still down gripping on to her notebook that she hadn’t put in her bag because she had rushed out of the room too quickly. She could feel tears starting to form in her eyes, burning and making it harder to see. Literally running to her car now Keilani tried to fight these tears from spilling, but without success. The moment she sat in her car, she couldn’t hold back her tears. They were streaming down her face. Keilani buried her face in her arms that she had crossed on top of the steering wheel. From time to time she had experienced racism here and there, but it never occurred to her that her own boss might say something racially motivated towards her. She always thought of him as the sweet old man that was friendly to everyone. Wiping the tears from her now puffy eyes, she inserted the car key and started the engine. During her drive home Keilani kept thinking about what she should do. She knew that she definitely couldn’t get out of organizing the charity event. Her problem now was to educate herself on how to plan and host this big important event. Being absorbed in her thoughts she didn’t notice that she had already arrived at her apartment complex. Tired from the long day and the crying, Keilani dragged herself out of the car and made her way towards the elevator. Standing in the elevator on her way up to the fourth floor Keilani was searching for her keys that were hidden somewhere deep inside of her bag. Finally, fishing her keys out of the bag, the elevator came to a stop and a few seconds later its doors opened. Keilani slowly walked up to her apartment and

unlocked the door. Inside, she let her bag and jacket slide off her body. Too exhausted to pick them up and put them in their place, she sat down on her soft sofa. Not a minute had passed by, when Keilani's phone started to ring. Picking it up she saw that it was Nora who was calling. "Hey.", is what Keilani said with a tired voice. "Hey, KayKay! How was work?". Keilani dreaded this question. She really didn't want to talk about what had just happened. But, on the other hand, that was her best friend on the phone. She would notice if Keilani kept anything from her. With a sigh Keilani answered, saying "To be honest, it was kind of awful.". "Oh no, what happened? Is everything alright?", Nora asked, concerned. "Well, my boss wants me to plan and host a charity event.", Keilani took a deep breath. "That doesn't sound too bad. Doesn't that mean he has trust in you with big things like that?", Nora asked in a confused tone. "Yes, it does, but the charity event is for African children in need." Keilani paused and listened for a reaction from Nora, but the other end of the phone was quiet. So Keilani continued, "... and I think that he only chose me to organize this whole thing because of my skin color." Keilani waited a few seconds for Nora to process what she had just said." Oh, KayKay, I'm so sorry. I know that this is hard for you right now. You probably felt violated because you thought that he wanted you to organize it since he trusts you and not for a different reason. That is so messed up.", Nora said in a sad and angry tone. "Yes, I never thought that Mr. Willard would turn out to be this way.", Keilani said in a disappointed tone. "Do you want me to come over and bring some pizza? We can just relax and talk or sit in silence, watching a movie. Maybe that will take your mind off this whole situation. How does that sound?" Keilani chuckled "Yes, that would be perfect.". "Okay, I'll be there in half an hour. You can pick out a movie that we will watch.", Nora said before hanging up. "I will see you in half an hour.", Keilani said quickly.

Not even half an hour later Nora was standing in front of Keilani's door, holding two hot pizzas in her hands. "Let me in, those ones here are burning

my hands.”, Nora screeched. Keilani stepped aside, letting Nora through to the kitchen where she put down the pizzas. “What movie did you pick?”, Nora asked, opening the pizza cartons, thereby allowing a tasty smell to be emitted. “A classic. *Clueless*.”, Keilani said with a smile. “Uh, I love that movie.”, Nora burst out in excitement, now putting a few slices of pizza onto two plates. “I know.”, Keilani responded, happy to have made the right pick “I do, too!” They sat down on the cozy sofa with the plates and drinks that Keilani had already prepared. The movie was playing in the background while they both were enjoying their pizza and joking around. This was exactly what Keilani needed right now. After they had finished their pizzas, Keilani made herself comfortable in Nora’s arms. Nora started to play with Keilani’s hair which made her even more sleepy. “I’m really glad you’re here with me.”, Keilani said, looking up at Nora, sleepy. “Always.”, Nora replied with a smile, looking back at Keilani. They both stayed like that for a while until Nora bent down to Keilani to give her a slow kiss. Keilani was shocked, not moving for a second. Nora pulled away, looking at Keilani with a concerned look “I ... I am so sorry.”. “No. Don’t be.”, Keilani said, reassuring her with a smile. Grabbing Nora’s face with both of her hands, she leaned in to give her another kiss. Butterflies flooded her stomach, making her cheeks turn red from the heat inside her. They both pulled away, putting their foreheads together, looking into each other’s eyes. “Wow. Didn’t expect that.”, Keilani admitted, giggling. Nora started to laugh, “Me neither.”, she added. Lying closely next to each other like that, not saying another word, Keilani slowly faded off to sleep. She wanted to be worried about what might happen if her family found out that she had just kissed a girl, but in this moment she didn’t care. She was too exhausted and didn’t want to spend another thought on what might happen in the future. All that she wanted was to be in this moment. Right now. Forever.