

All the things you are

By Efe

Aaliyah - A scene from a movie

Bustling. Warmth. Coarse skin rubbing against me. Rambunctious and powered on his hands softly slipping in mine. Cobbly. We strolled hand in hand, gazing into each other's eyes. Floating on ecstasy. Soaking in the scorching sun, blessed to be freed from the shackles of isolation. Nothing could top this. He cradles my face in his beautiful hands. We visit shops, buying too much. Then we set up a picnic, aim berries into each other's mouths, miss and laugh because we're deliriously happy. I can imagine us being dual protagonists in a Romcom. Jaunty music playing during our adorably awkward moments, soulful pop music with a splash of jazzy riffing soundtracking our most heartfelt ones. I can't tell where his delicious cacao skin begins and where mine ends. We lay facing each other, giving me the opportunity to admire and investigate his purest, rawest and marvellously unrefined face of pimples that align like a constellation on a beautiful night. His confidence is what makes him alluring and irresistible to the swarm of fans, sycophants and amateur groupies that stalk him across the hallways, like his every post and comment thirsty emojis. I have nothing to worry about, he reassures with his signature confident tone, yet that's all I can do when I cross-examine the ambiguous signs of his dissonant eyes and watch them peering over to his phone. He performs an effortless chuckle I could never evoke. Under his deep brown eyes, he has an icy cold undertone or is it a rich mahogany that is striking and effervescent? With him, I always feel like he is purposefully obscuring the boundaries of the personal and performance. He's like a magician. It may just be the perfect illusion or an allusion to my insecurities, but he feels so real against my beating and aching heart. "Hey." He smiles casually with a rich and buttery smooth tone. The picnic I prepared of ham and cheese sandwiches, vegetarian wings and nuggets and crisps and berries disappears in no time. "Hey." I beam gleefully, my feet wagging. When he smiles at me, I light up.

Rodney - A scene from my nightmare

I can see the way she lights up when I look at her. I love that feeling, I devour that feeling, I crave that feeling and I'm insatiable for that feeling. I've had my fair share of relationships, flings, sloppy and drunken hook-ups and I've even be the object of obsession for three stalkers; no one has looked at me with the admiration she does. I'm afraid if I tell her this feeling will vanish. I was tumbling and turning last night from all the haunting my guilt was inflicting on me. My nightmares were experimenting with scenarios. Suspenseful music plays as Aaliyah snoops through my messages, she sobs uncontrollably, I rebound with a rotation of indistinguishable bodies, I feel empty, self-medicate until I'm an empty pit of drugs and depression and finally, my destiny is carved in stone for all to mourn. Alternatively, and worse, she forgives and never forgets. She loves me passionately, holding me out of fear I might stray again.

Wonder What She Thinks of Me - A Chloe X Halle tribute

They're posting constantly, inundating my feed with their lavish life, romantic getaways and powerful popularity. And where I am I? in the shadows, curled up in an uncomfortably hard bed next to the only source of warmth in my life, shrouded in darkness, knowing before Aaliyah there was me and during their sham there's still me. Not much of an empowered feminist aye? A man's three year off-and-on side-chick? I can advocate for marginalized women by marching and yelling and starting petitions, but I can't stand up for the one woman everyone says I should love the most. My hands crawl down, and I touch myself lovingly, remembering nights when Rodney made this room less dark. Our heavy breathing and insecure panting competed for dominance as his force thrust me against my wall, creating a violent bang that should have been heard nationwide. He rubbed at my chest, squeezing every part of my body lightly and intensely. I wriggle myself out of my shoes, he massages my clothes and the pretence off me. He climbs on top of me, his musk penetrating my nose and the rest of me. I loved the way his nose flares when he's excited. "Zora Neale Hurston, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, bell hooks, Angela Davis." He said. "Yeah." I sighed, trailing kisses along his neck, marking my spot, positioning his dominance closer to me. "You're committed." He praised. "Yep, I am".

My phone chimes. My phone buzzes. My phone rings repeatedly like a knell to my fragile ear. "Why the hell do I have notifications on for them?!"

Aaliyah - Tell me what's up

The sun is generating sweat beads around his face. Brooding clouds begin to form. He inhales slowly, gives me a quick glance and then breathes shakily like oxygen is toxic. His nose twitches. I hate when it does that. I love it when his nose flares. *What's he hiding?* a lingering voice wonders. *I knew this was too good to be true. Your life isn't a movie,* it loudens. Tires screech and plates crash in the café in front of us. Loving couples separate after rows and the sun relinquishes to the triumphant might of the moon dawning on us.

Rodney - A lie

She's staring at me curiously, burning holes through my body. I have genuine feelings for her and appreciate her giving me the opportunity to disprove my playboy reputation. I guess I'm just a self-fulfilling prophecy, commitment-phobe jerk. The innocence on her divine dark skin and keen features seem like a punishment for my indiscretion, philandering, sneaking around and betrayal. I lied. Or did I just not practice disclosure? A lie by omission is a lie. Haunting acoustic music introduces itself as I hesitantly release my mouth from the bondage of remaining sealed.

My name is Kelly

After finishing, I roll over, horrified. I listen to empowering women talk about a range of issues on podcasts and TEDx Talks, I consume all the right literature, participate in all the right clubs and champion worthy causes. I grew up with strong and courageous women like my mom, who has her own law firm, affirm me in my greatness, wholistic beauty and intellect. All this nurturing doesn't make me repellent or impervious to the sweet nothings of a sly sleaze. I remember one night that made me consider drawing a line somewhere in the sand. He was flowing in and out of me like a transient tide, lilting hushing tones into my ear, wrapping my entire soul around his orbit. "Rodneey!" I moaned and gasped out of severe pleasure until I crescendoed. "hmm,

Aaliyah” he groaned raspy, unstoppable, tireless. I should have stopped him, protested, caused a commotion. I sulked timorously after, feigning strength. “My name is Kelly.” “I-I know.” He whispers, leaping into his clothes, placing one finger on my lips. He jumps out the window. Without a second thought. My name is Kelly. That’s who I am. To him, I’m just a body in his identity parade. Hold this. Squeeze it. Suck it. Make the noise I like. Turn left, turn right, you’re free to go. Sex isn’t an expression of love or intimacy to him. Just a transaction. You get me off; I’ll be inside you for three shameless nanoseconds. Keep your mouth shut and I’ll come back for more.

Aaliyah - All’s well

“I’m...” he suddenly heaves out an aggressive yawn “tired” he leans forward and lifts his arms up and taps his phone. We go. I’m galivanting joyfully as I clasp onto his hands and he takes me back to my house. He’s doing deft acrobatics along my love-line, pausing for shallow kisses across my cheek, twisting and resisting my grip. “My hand hurts.” He chuckles casually, now swaggering in front of me, looking behind me. All I see is a cute girl with thick jet- black hair cascading down to her ankles, wandering around town. I always see her, she grins at me weirdly, but she seems friendly, and I love her Instagram. She posts the most aesthetic pictures and quotes feminists of yesteryear and tomorrow all the time. Maybe I should talk to her. *Something’s going on with Rodney*, the voice warns. I’m not going to be slave to the stories and attach him to his past-self. He’s changed and all’s well.

Kelly - Play your position

My footsteps pace and I know he sees me from the shock that flashes on his face and the colour it drains. Keeping secrets can’t be easy. Maintaining one existence from the devastation of little omnishambles that can potentially destroy everything is difficult enough, imagine the workload of two. Why the hell am I sympathising with his faux plight?! Aaliyah is the one I should care for. She’s not remarkable. Her grades are blasé. Her hair tends to be frizzy and veer off to matted territory and she seldom wears a flattering outfit. Crap, I’m falling for the game. Attack him, not her. My footsteps recede as I go back home; it’s not worth it.

Jessie, Leona and Victoria - What Other People Say

The girls assemble in the hallways, raving and smiling in Aaliyah's face, commiserating and ranting behind her back. They warned her first. "Look, Aaliyah we trust you." Jessie started off sweetly. "Umm... no we don't!" Leona completed abrasively, her brash delivery practically suffocating the group of pals. "It's too good to be true. He won't care for you the way you deserve." Leona. Aaliyah dismissed those concerns with a sassy eyeroll, storming off to her next class early as Victoria sprinted to her urgently. "You guys don't know him like I do." Aaliyah's eyes burrowed furiously as she advocated fearlessly. "When people thought I was angry on my first day here because I was frowning all the time from depression, what did you say." "I-I... umm" "What. Did. You. Say?" "I said you shouldn't judge her before you get to know her." Aaliyah nodded to herself slowly with a striking expression on her face, an unholy blend between the egoistical incubator of smugness and the almost played out emotion of sadness. "That's obviously different." "How?" "Because those jerks weren't basing their assumptions on any behaviour you'd shown; they based it on unfair stereotypes of an entire group of people. Rodney's reputation comes from him and him alone." "He's different now." She contested impulsively, the way those words bounced out of her felt strange because she didn't own them. They were his talking points he'd embedded in her. "Is that way he told you? We like to think we're special and we all are. Not to him. To him, you're another vessel, a bucket to shoot his load into and move on once he needs something else new and shiny. Past behaviour is always indication of future behaviour. Be careful, Aaliyah."

Rodney - I can't help the feeling

I blocked out the sounds of wheezing coughs, obnoxious attention-seekers flapping their gums about symbolism, juxtapositions and allusions in English Lit, squealing tires, fights and almost fights. I couldn't think. I just ambled through school, racked with guilt. "Hey babe." Aaliyah bounced cheerfully behind me. Her scent of joy infectious. I think of Kelly's jet-black hair wrapping around my orbit. I think of Aaliyah's running my

fingers through Aaliyah's bushy and wild spirals. I love them both. I have the capacity to love both of them.

Aaliyah - Something's missing

He returns my kisses blithely, eyes travelling across the room, eventually landing on an ambiguous emotion. His nose twitched to an untameable rhythm. "What's wrong?" "Nothing! Nothing!" he rushes me to the end of the unwinding hallway, using my body to knock down several gaggles of students. "I'll see you later." I shout. He doesn't hear me. I feel like I am screaming into a void. Why have I been wrenched from my dream and launched into this nightmare? What's missing?

Rodney - Behind me

"Nothing! Nothing!" I assert, sweat beads forming around my face. All my mechanisms to sound and look normal fail. But I must push Aaliyah away before she gets hurt because *she* is marching behind me.

Kelly - Settle for you

I march to him, determined to break this inextricable link. "I can't take this anymore." I whisper under my breath in a disconnected tone. "I can't take this anymore. We must end this. It's not fair." I practice in a louder tone. He comes up to me. So irresistible. Arms glistening, bulging and masterfully muscular. "We need," he sighs heavily. I look at him with sadness shredding the love intrinsic to my tearful eyes. "to talk." "We do. I can't do this anymore. It's not fair. I was supposed to be your girl, not her." I wailed desperately. "shh" he soothed. We embrace all the way to his room. Enraptured by the sensation of his sensitive touch, our bodies colliding, connecting, our souls tying together, he feels like he was all mine. Mine. He's not though. I realise when he jumps out of my window, mortified, hastening a kiss on my face, responding to a string of messages from Aaliyah.

Jessie, Leona and Victoria - This Mother

The girls formed their own little clique separate from Aaliyah. They love Aaliyah but Aaliyah insists on loving Rodney. They are strolling back from Leona's house, revelling

in the complacent sense of accomplishment after a revision/slack off session, chuckling, swishing their hips and locking their arms like they were a magnetic force to be reckoned with. Leona's mouth scraped the pavement viciously, her breaths terse and tense. A shadowy figure practically levitates out of a window. But Leona must have a detective alter ego because she knows exactly who it is. "This mother- ""Leona, language." Jessie cautioned with an overdone motherly tone, playfully flicking her wrist. "Girls, that's Rodney!!" Leona whisper-screeches in a tone scratched by righteous anger. He's sprinting away. "What should we do?!" Jessie wonders out loud. After seconds of silence that felt like torture, Victoria, with a disappointed but resolved tone arrived at the verdict "We need to tell her."

Love me - Kelly

I lie naked and alone, just the way I was introduced to the earth. I have to give a speech tomorrow on female empowerment and solidarity. I have to lie through my teeth with a crooked smile. Each gap representing deep deception, every stutter reminding me of how worthless my fight is because I can barely fight for myself, every breath highlighting and widening the incongruence between my staunch feminist ideal self and my hopelessly devoted real self. The cover of shame wraps around me like a scanty blanket. Sweet nothings can't be worth this much turmoil? I am at a crossroad, but the decision is simple. I wonder when Rodney's grip will wane, weaken. When will this parasite feast on another innocent host? I have to do the right thing.

12:30AM: Hey Aaliyah...