

Telling Stories

Inspired by John 6:24-35



When the crowd saw that neither Shanice nor her entourage were there, they themselves got into their cars and came to Chicago looking for her. It's a big and busy city. One where Shanice thought she could get lost in the crowd for a bit, blending in with the sounds and the sights and the distractions. But, too many people recognized her and when they found her across the parking lot they said to her, "When did you get here? This wasn't a stop on your tour schedule!" Shanice answered them and said, "Hello! Hello! I say to you, you aren't looking for me because you want to hear me sing but because you sell your pictures of me and feed the people's curiosity with stories. But that kind of ravenous hunger for gossip can never truly be filled.

Do you see that you work for the story that is shallow sensationalism? Wouldn't you rather work for the stories of truth that last a lifetime? I am happy to give those to you — stories about the real person of me and what inspires me. That is the kind of story which endures. Would you like a meaningful story for your byline, one for your editor to proudly set his seal upon?

Shanice looked at the sea of faces holding their cameras at the ready. Only the shutters were stilled and the lenses were slightly askew. Perhaps they had actually heard and understood what she was trying to convey. Perhaps they were considering her proposal. Perhaps they were merely stunned. An unusual moment of silence filled the space. Shanice's personal assistant, Annie, nudged her and whispered, "These people make you famous. It is good for us that they follow you and report on what you're doing. Give them something to spark attention. Give them what they want. I'm afraid you're losing them!"

Shanice saw the faces of the reporters seemingly for the first time. She had never really looked at them closely. She was usually preoccupied in what she looked like. Now she could see weariness and worry in the lines on darkened foreheads from hours outdoors on the chase for celebrities. She saw eager beginners in it for the thrill. She saw aged veterans working to put food on the

table. She saw that they were in it for themselves. Funny how she had naively believed they were here for their love of her.

Normally, she would put on a grand smile and make sure they catch her “good side.” She knew how to work these moments. Just last month, she was featured all over social media when they caught her at a farmer’s market. She removed her “disguise” sunhat and sunglasses, and held up her basket of fresh fruits and vegetables. She had that ‘you caught me’ look of surprise on her face and announced, “I’m turning over a new leaf — literally!” Shanice played the game well. “I have decided to be kinder to my body,” she declared as she set free her long locks that had been pinned up. Of course, the whole thing had been set up as a strategy to market her new line of diet supplements. The publicity would naturally lead the world to associate her line of products with fresh, whole foods. The whole event worked just as Annie had planned and projected it would. All to the good of their brand success.

Shanice had been thinking lately, was the purpose to make money or to make a difference? She entered the business because she loves music. God had gifted her with this special talent. She was first discovered at the age of 12 filling the Cathedral beautiful songs of praise. Her voice was unique and filled with the Spirit. It reached your heart before your ears. Her singing invited you to His presence.

But the quick rise to fame had shifted the focus from music that means something to music that reaches the top of the charts and brings in big revenue. She wasn’t exactly sure how her music career turned into clothing lines, home decor, and now food products. Where was the meaning? Where were the songs that take your breath away and make you forget where you are for a few minutes? She no longer felt the Spirit moving her music.

Shanice looked down at Annie whose big, brown eyes were pleading for a catchy quote. Silence was deadly in this business. So one of the reporters said to Shanice, “What can we do to publish the great works of your life?” Shanice answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe I am a person who has a true story.” So they said to her, “What story can you tell us, that we may see and believe you? What can you say? Most of our stories quote you selling and pushing your products. It seems nothing has been written about anything lasting in your life.”

So Shanice said to them, “Right, right. That is what I am saying to you. It’s not the story for parking lot paparazzi; my story gives the truth about me and my quest for Heaven, not stardom.” Many turned and walked away, irritated at this waste of time and already on the trail of the next celebrity sighting. Annie’s face was a mangled mix of confusion and rising fury. “This is going to hurt you,” she murmured sternly.

One reporter packed away his camera and said to Shanice, “I want to buy your story.” She replied, “I am a person, not a commodity; whoever wants to come to me and listen to me will not be hungry for gossip, and whoever believes me will never thirst for profits.” The man stepped closer and said, “Then, I’m your guy. I’m truly interested.”

Annie extended her arm to block his approach. “He is NOT the one to tell your story,” she expertly stated. “His byline will benefit us.” A wave of truth washed over Shanice. Annie wasn’t here to assist, she was here to drive. She had taken the lead a long time ago, and was steering them in a direction different than the path to which Shanice felt called. They had gotten so swept up in the process of reaching for the stars they were blind to what grounded them.

The truth is that Annie speaks of love and friendship, so many people in Shanice’s life do. But, those are mostly empty words — bubbles of strategy disguised as endearments. The core of the business was about them advancing under the spotlight of Shanice, resulting in leaving the even brighter soul of Shanice in the shadows.

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