

Miracle

A short story by Karen Lawrence

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“What is your real true name?”

Matthew is looking right at me with his tiny eyes all crinkly round the edges. He squinting so serious it make me giggle.

“Why you wanna know?”

He taps the side of his nose with one finger, cheeky like. I got no idea what his big secret.

“Well I got a lot of names. You want real, ‘ficcial name?”

He nods so hard I think he gonna fall off the wall and land down splat on the beach. He grinning and panting like a happy puppy. Why he so excited?

“Ok then.” I take a big breath. This gonna be a mouthful. “My real birth stiff-cat name is Miracle Buhle Praise Jesus Otieno.”

He open his eyes big now. They blue as holiday sky, with short seethrough lashes make him look like a cute baby piggy. He think for a minute. Then he say,

“So why everyone call you Bella?”

I sigh. “It a long story. So long we gonna be sat here till they close the pier and the moon come up.”

He shrugs. “I no hurry. It’s ‘portant. Your true name, is you. Tell me the story.”

I think a minute. Matthew my best boyfriend ever. He funny and kind, and he got hair the colour of butterscotch milkshake. Which is my favourite. But if I tell him ‘bout all my names, maybe he not like me no more.

He squeezing my hand. “Tell me. I want to know who is you.”

So I begin.

“All that long name - my birth mummy give me. She call me Miracle and all that. But I don’t think she got it right. I know what means miracle. Miracle is something so good it not ever going to happen. So I not like that name.

“When I just a little girl, my birth mummy couldn’t look after me no more. I dunno why. That all they ever tell me. But I think maybe coz I got learning dis’bility. She think I too hard work. I sick a lot and naughty baby sometimes.”

Matthew is nodding. He heard stories like this before. One day he tell me his mummy die when he was a little boy. He got learning dis’bility too, like me. He squeeze my hand super tight now. So I keep on going.

“So then I go live with my foster mummy. She nice lady. Kind and buy me new clothes. But she not like my name neither. Too much mouthful for white lady like her. So she decide call me Bella. She say that much easier for everyone.

“Bella mean beautiful. So I like that. My foster mummy - I call her Mum - she look after me good, but I know I is different. She never know what to do with my hair. She cut it dead short all the time coz she say it get too frizzy and can’t control it. All the other kids got shiny yellow hair, and I want hair like that too.

“I go to school with all the yellow hair kids, and some of them mean. In the toilets, some of the girls say, ‘Bella, Bella you can smell her’. Mum always give me shower every day and I not smell bad, not ever. But those girls make me cry. They pick on me because I short, or I fat, or I black, or I not always understand stuff. Because I is different from them.

“And then I not so sure I like name Bella neither.”

Matthew sitting right close to me now. He wriggles his nose right into my neck and takes a long deep breath. His breathing feels warm.

“You smell like candyfloss”, he say. And I smile.

“Anyway,” I go on. “Like I tell you, this is long story. I grow up big, and I want a boyfriend. Someone who love me just for me. Not coz it their job nor nothing. But I only fifteen, and I not understand much ‘bout boys back then. I get nice clothes, all

pink. Coz pink my favourite colour, right? And Mum tell me I pretty girl, so I think yeah, I pretty. Beautiful Bella get a boyfriend.

“But boys I know back then. They not ‘spectful. You know what I mean? Some boys, they just want to get into a girl’s knickers.”

Matthew start to giggle. His face all crease up and big grin coming. Sometimes he like a big kid. But then he see I dead serious, so he stop. Matthew bit slow sometimes, but he good man. His Auntie teach him respect women.

“So I get a boyfriend. Nathan his name. He kiss and snog me and all that. First I think I special and he gonna marry me. But I silly teenager back then, and I not know nothing. Turn out he just knicker boyfriend. And then one or two more boyfriends the same. Oh Bella you so pretty. Oh Bella I love you, they say. Then they get in my knickers and all finished.

“And then one day Mum look at me funny, and she say, ‘Bella, when you last have your period?’ And it turn out I gotta little baby in my belly. From all the knicker business. So then I happy, coz I love babies. They dead cute. And I think I gonna get my own baby to love me and I gonna be best mummy ever.”

Matthew all big eyes. He open his hands like he lost something.

“So where your baby now?”, he say.

I take a big deep breath in. I remember the hospital.

“No baby”, I say. “Mum tell me people like me not have babies. Not suitable, she say. She take me big hospital, and nurses and doctors there all call me Miracle. And Miss Otieno sometimes. Hospital smell like clean toilet. Too clean. ‘Miracle’, they say, ‘We make you go sleep, and when you wake up baby all gone.’ They ask me if I ok with that, and I say yes coz Mum said not suitable. But in my belly I cold. Cold like the sea in winter.

“And it just like they said. Miracle sleep and baby gone. And doctor tell me he cut and tie knot inside and no more babies never. ‘Best for you’, he say. So that is that.”

Matthew scratch his head with his little finger in that funny way he does.

“But why not suitable?”, he ask. “You very lovely sweet lady. You would be best Mummy ever.”

“No one never tell me. Maybe is because learning dis’bility. Maybe because I is black skin. Or too short maybe. No one never tell me that.”

I quiet for a minute. All was long time ago, but still sometimes a little tear sneaks out my eye when I remember. Matthew gives me one of his very best hugs. Slow and soft and kind. No hurry. Just kind. Warm as sunshine.

After a while I blow all the wet snot outta my nose and give Matthew a smile. Then I kiss him right on his turn-up little nose.

“Thanks gorgeous,” I tell him. “You are proper boyfriend. Love me for all of me, not just for knickers.”

He giggle for real now, and I laughing too. Soon we both laugh-crying and tummies shaking up and down. He hold both my hands and we laugh till I nearly wet myself.

When I can breathe proper again I say,

“So after that everyone call me Bella. ‘Cept sometimes social workers n doctors n people with forms. They read ‘Miracle’. Maybe they don’t know that magic good stuff never happen. Anyway I grow up, live in group home, work charity shop sometimes. Still I wear nice clothes and hair very fancy now. But no more boyfriends. Until you come along.” Matthew make his chest all big.

“So I special?”, he say.

“You super special.”

His face nearly break in half, his smile so big. Then suddenly he all serious.

“That is a sad story,” he say. “But happy ending now, coz I think you super special too and best girlfriend ever.”

He stop a minute, look at the sea. It blue and pretty today. Then he say,

“But one thing I think you got wrong. Miracle don’t mean not never gonna happen. Miracle mean so good it change the whole world. Like magic. Forever. You are my Miracle Bella. You make my world magic.”

And then, all of a sudden, he stand up. I not sure what he doing. Then he kneeling down next to me, a bit wobbly, like. He is holding something, and it is a ring. I think it maybe the one he won when we was playing the penny falls on the pier last week. He put in a whole ton of 2ps to win it. He wouldn’t stop, not even when I tell him silly waste of money.

Matthew get down on one knee and he hold my hand and his soft face all quiet.

“Miracle Bella”, he say. “You are most beautiful lady in the whole world, and you also magic forever. All your name is perfect. You perfect. Will you marry me, Bella Miracle?”

So he put the shiny ring on my finger. And it too small and only go halfway down, and we giggle again. And I kissing him all over. “Yes”, I say. “Yes, yes, yes, you funny lovely man.”

And then I whisper in his ear, “And you welcome in my knickers.” And we both jump down on the beach, laughing and kissing and holding hands. So he is right.

Some things are so good they just have to happen. I gotta a new name now.
Miracle.