

## So I Ain't No Good Girl

PEOPLE SAY THINGS about me. Bad things. Momma says I give 'em reason to. That if I would just be a good girl—like the girls who wait for the bus with me in the mornings—then things wouldn't go so hard for me. But I don't wanna be like them girls: so plain and pitiful, boys don't even look their way or ask their names. I wanna be me. Ain't nothing wrong with that. Is it?

Me and them girls been standing on the same corner waiting for the same bus for a year now, and I don't even know their names. But I hate 'em just the same, mostly 'cause that girl with the red hair and gray eyes looks like the girl Raheem once left me for. She was a good girl too, so they say. She got straight A's. Worked in the principal's office, headed up the cheerleading team, and played flute for the marching band. You'd figure a girl like that wouldn't be no thief. But she was. She stole my man right from under me—for a little while, anyhow.

"What you looking at?" I ask the girl in the green plaid skirt. She keeps her mouth shut and her squinty, brown eyes looking down at the ground. And right when I go to tell her she better not even think about looking my way, I trip over my own two feet. The good girls laugh—all four of 'em. Now, what they do that for?

"I should . . ." I say, going for the one with the red hair and run-over shoes.

She and her friends run to the other side of the street like they being chased by boys with bricks. I'm right behind 'em, with my fist balled up. But then, I see Raheem. Sweet, pretty Raheem. So I forget about them girls, and go back to be with my Boo.

Yellow phlegm flies out Raheem's mouth and onto the curb, right when I walk up to him. "Hey, baby," he says.

I give him a big one on the lips. "Hey." He takes off his shades and eyes a girl passing by. Then out the blue he tells me to go to school without him, 'cause he's got things to do.

I push up against him. Stick my tongue in his ear and roll it around the fat gold stud I gave him for his seventeenth birthday. "Come on, Raheem. I skip English every day so me and you can ride to school together."

He yells at me. "Did I ask you to miss class for me?" I snap out on him then, asking him why he's always wasting my time. He hooks his thumb through my gold hoop earring and pulls down hard. "Ouch! You trying to split my ear?" He turns away from me and starts walking. But he don't get far—I don't let him. I apologize. Then I press kisses to my fingers and touch his warm lips. I try not to sweat Raheem when he gets a little rough with me or says he's coming over my house and don't show up. He's the cutest boy in school: an amateur boxer with a six-pack and honey-brown muscles that girls reach for even when they don't know him. I can't keep him on no short leash; but I forget that sometimes.

Raheem puts his arm over my shoulder and tells me again to go to school without him.

“No,” that’s what I wanna tell him. But Raheem likes girls that do what he says and don’t talk back. So I remind him that he’s got a test third period. If he don’t pass it, he flunks the class. If he flunks, he don’t graduate next month. “So you just need to take your butt to school with me.”

He rubs the back of my ear. “I know you been waiting on me,” he says in a voice so sweet my knees almost give way. “But I ain’t going. I got things to do.”

I can’t help it. I get mad all over again, and it’s me that turns away from him this time. He tickles my neck. “Come on, baby. Don’t be like that.” He kisses my lips. Says it’s me and him forever.

I give in. Tell him what he wants to hear—I’ll take the bus by myself. I’ll do your homework, wash your clothes, lend you money, anything. . . . Just keep being my Boo. But then he takes off them sunglasses to wipe something out his eye, and before I say another word, his eyes crawl over one of them good girls, like worms sliding across wet dirt.

I am loud like my mother. When I holler, you can hear me up and down the street and around the corner. So when I go off on Raheem, people across the street turn and stare. “You my man! What you doing looking at her for?”

Raheem’s hand smashes the words back into my mouth. “Girl! Don’t make me . . .” I apologize just like my momma does when my daddy slaps her. Like Raheem’s momma does too.

Raheem says he’s gonna forgive me this time. But I better check myself, ’cause he needs a cooperative woman. “Not a whole bunch of drama.”

He’s right. A boy like him can get any girl he wants. He ain’t gotta take no stuff off nobody. “Sorry,” I say, thinking ’bout how jealous girls be when they see me with him.

Raheem and me been together two years now. He my third boyfriend. The other ones, they was all right. But him, well, he’s better than I deserve, I figure. I mean, like my mother says, I won’t never win no beauty contest. But my body, well that’s something else. It’s the Mona Lisa. The sun and the moon, Raheem wrote in a poem once. It’s too big in too many places, that’s what I think. But Raheem likes it. That’s all that counts, right?

Raheem don’t never stay mad long. So a few minutes after our bus-stop fight, me and him are talking and laughing again. But when he bends down to wipe his sneakers, the good girl with the red hair and the dirty brown skirt comes back to our side of the street. She looks his way and smiles—just a little. He stands, she bends way over and pulls up her long white socks. He smiles. She winks. I go to tell him what I seen, but his eyes let me know I’d better hold my tongue. I do.

Raheem rubs my butt. “You know you my Boo. Can’t nobody take me off you.” Then he asks me to spot him five. Before I get inside my purse, he unsnaps it. Takes out my wallet and puts ten bucks in his back pocket, right when the other girls return.

“Don’t be going in my . . .” “What’s yours is mine, ain’t it?” The good girls watch him kiss my neck and whisper in my ear. “Yeah, he mine,” I say loud enough for them to hear.

The redhead presses her books to her flat chest and rolls her eyes at me. I point to her. Say for her to step into the street if she got a problem with me.

Raheem tells me not to be like that. “You the only one I want,” he says, crossing the street, heading for the doughnut shop.

I look over at the good girls. The redhead looks back my way, shakes her head, and just like that, I feel dirty—like somebody rolled me in chicken fat and left me outside for the birds to snack on.

I wanna give them girls something they won’t forget, but the bus is coming. The good girls step into the street, just when Raheem makes it back over to me. He wipes white powder off his mouth with the back of his hand and tells me he’ll come to my place later.

“Promise?” He takes off his shades. Crosses his heart. “Sure.” When the bus finally pulls up, there’s all this commotion, people pushing to get on. I head for the back, following right behind the good girls. A blind man steps on my foot. I tell him about it, too. Some fat woman blocks my way, so it’s a few minutes ’fore I get back to where them girls are. When the bus jerks and takes off, I hold on to the rail and peek out between all the bodies to get one last look at my man.

“Oh no you didn’t!” I say, digging my elbow into some girl’s stomach. Slapping my hand up against another girl’s back, trying to get to the front of this thing. But it’s too late. The driver won’t stop, even though I’m yelling at the top of my lungs for him to please, please let me off.

I lean over and stare out the window and see the redhead standing on the corner with Raheem. She must have sneaked out the back of the bus as soon as she got on. Raheem’s all up in her face. Sunglasses off. Arms wrapped around her neck. His sweet, brown lips pressed tight to hers.

I wanna kill ’em both. But then my mother’s words come back to me. You ain’t no beauty prize.

The bus keeps rolling, just like my tears, down my cheeks and dripping off my chin. “Who I’m gonna be without him?” I whisper. I wipe my face clean on the bottom of my skirt, stand up, and head for the back of the bus. Then, well, I start thinking. Raheem don’t never stay gone too long. Besides, he is cute. Really, really cute. And when you got a man like that, you can’t be expecting to keep him all to yourself, not all the time anyhow.

The driver stops two blocks away. He eyes me. “Getting off?” If I go after her, I think, Raheem’s gonna be mad at me. “Hey, you. Off or not?” But if I act like I ain’t seen nothing, he’ll be by my place tonight—like usual.

“Next stop, Seventeenth Street,” the driver says, closing the door and pulling into traffic.

I sit down, cross my legs, and stare out the window. I’ll go to his class, I think, and tell his teacher he was sick this morning. That he’ll take the test tomorrow.

When the bus stops again, the good girls fly out the back door and head for their school.

I bang on the closed window. “You better run! Better not let me see you tomorrow, neither!”

The driver tells me to settle down. I let him know I paid my money and I can talk as loud as I like. He says something else, but I don’t know or care what it is. My head’s back to thinking on Raheem. Tonight, when I see him, I’m gonna . . . I’m gonna . . . make him something nice to eat, I think. And act like I ain’t seen nothing at all.

## Questions

1. Who are the characters in this story? List the characters and give a brief description of three major ones.
2. The main characters has a lot of negative feelings in this story. What would you say is her main problem? Does she recognize what her real problem is?
3. An **antagonist** is a character that is preventing the main character from achieving their goals. Which character, in your opinion, is the antagonist? Why do you think so?
4. If you were going to give advice to the main character, what would you say? What lesson do you think she needs to learn?
5. Write a continuation to this story (1 paragraph or more). What will the main character do next? It can be written in the **first person** (I, me, my) or the **third person** (he, she, they).

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