

I chose, then God chose

Following a bumpy ride in the church van we finally got to the park for our Memorial Day picnic. Once settled in I patiently waited for my boyfriend Jeff to arrive so we could finally talk. Jeff and I had an argument the previous week and I was hoping that he missed me and that we could make up. I was in my early 20's in my second semester of college and I was going through finals. It felt like a bit of a relief because this "break" allowed me to focus on school. As I was looking over my shoulder I finally caught a glimpse of him approaching over the horizon. I quickly looked towards my friends and let out some unnecessary loud laughs to show him that I was having fun and didn't miss him at all, even though I did. I was sure that Jeff was the one for me because he had all the attributes I wanted in a man. He was tall, good looking, he was funny, a "bad boy" turned "good" when he started going to church the previous year. Our families knew each other very well and we had been together for six months. He was only a few more feet away from me at this point, but for some reason he was taking long to make it towards me so I decided to turn my head to look.

Jeff didn't see me looking at him because he was too busy locking eyes with another girl, it was Rayna, his ex-girlfriend. For a second I wanted to believe that they had just ran into each other but then, as I watched closely, I observed them smiling and exchanging flirtatious glances and gestures, and then suddenly it was more than locking eyes ... they were locking hands! At that moment, I thought I heard the sound of a thundering crack across the universe. The world came to an abrupt earth shattering halt. I stood there, frozen, unable to move. Humiliated, angry, hurt, not knowing what to feel. I see that people around me are whispering into each others ears and giving me puzzled looks. As they were coming closer, my thoughts were racing, sweat seemed to drip off my palms, I was trying to think of my next move. Pretend to pass out? Run away? Throw rocks at them? Light them up on fire with the charcoal lighter? I see a perfect spot to bury some bodies. No, bad idea, too many eye witnesses. THINK LADY, THINK! Everyone knew we were together. Everyone except Jeff, who apparently decided to break up with me, without even talking to me first. I am dark skinned but I'm sure I turned as pale as a ghost. He did not say a word to me. The nerve of him, how dare he completely ignore me! Yet all I could do was ... absolutely nothing! It was official: I was invisible. Like a popular hispanic saying: "un cero a la izquierda", "a zero to the left". Not sure if that translation makes sense but basically, a nothing! I just froze, consumed by anger and grief, I avoided everyone for the remainder of the day. How did a devoted, dedicated believer like me end up in such a ridiculous soap opera?

I continued to go to church having to run into him every single Sunday. I never confronted Jeff about the whole thing. But I still I wondered how could God allow his

beloved child to be hurt like this? I blamed God at first but eventually I admitted my part in all of it. I had not only seen the red flags in Jeff, but other people who knew him for much longer than I did, warned me that he was indeed, a two-timer. I knew deep down in my gut that those warning signs were correct, I knew he still had feelings for his ex-girlfriend but it was easier to pretend he didn't. I convinced myself that our relationship would work. That was the Jeff that I had chosen. That was the Jeff that I wanted. I wanted the looks but God sees the heart. I will not say that he was the most horrible person, he just wasn't the one God wanted for me.

Pain had an interesting effect on me. I thought of things I could do to make myself numb: drinking, smoking, drugs, self harming, etc. I came to the conclusion that I knew what end all those things would bring and I knew that God wanted so much more for me. Instead I decided to throw myself in full into the arms of Christ. I went with The One who would bandage my wounds the right way. Slowly, carefully and lovingly. I spent long nights reading the Bible and rose up early in the morning to spend hours in prayer before going to school. Little by little I began to heal and I lost that feeling of needing to retaliate. I even talked to Rayna after she came to me about it and we became good friends. A few months later I started to smile again, being single felt good and I didn't feel like I needed to be in a relationship to feel whole. Life was good again, until another guy named Jeff came into my life.

He had been visiting our church for weeks I just didn't notice him because I was no longer using my carnal eyes. He gave me a piece of paper with his phone number on it and I immediately put it in my purse. When I got home that night I fought the urge to pick up the phone and got on my knees instead. This time I was going to make the right choice because this time I was not going to choose alone.

My prayer was that a man after God's own heart was the right kind of man for me. Everything else was secondary. Just like in the Bible Gideon asked for signs and confirmation, the two weeks that followed so did I and everything I asked got confirmed. After the third confirmation I was totally convinced and the next day I called Jeff. It usually takes me some time to warm up to someone I just met but our very first phone conversation lasted over 2 hours. We laughed and talked with such ease, it was like we had known each other for years. We even discussed our virginity and how we felt it was important to us, that we saved sex until the wedding night. We dated for 2 years, then got engaged and we were married a year after. This is the Jeff that God chose for me. The one I have shared all my "firsts" with. Our first trip overseas, our first cell phones (before flip phones, yes we are that old), our first apartment, our first full time jobs, our first child. A few months ago, by God's grace, we celebrated 13th years of marriage and counting.

I don't know what ever happened to that other guy named Jeff. Sometimes I can't help but wonder what could've happened if I continued in that relationship. Or what could've happened if I stayed angry and bitter after that awkward "break up". What would've

happened if I ran away from God instead of towards Him. People say that God works in mysterious ways but I say God is more than mysterious. He is The beginning and The end. His plans are carefully made and intricately woven. He is intentional. He has a plan for everything that happens in our lives, even for our pain. Now I know that my heart break was God setting me up for a bigger and better blessing. He was setting me up with the right Jeff. We have gone through struggles and challenges and have gotten through them together. After all this time I can honestly say that this Jeff was tailor made especially for me. He has been my partner in life, in ministry and my three girls could not have a better father.