

WAVES WAVE BACK

Written by: T'yanna Angeline

DEDICATION

Dedicated to: A very good friend. Thank you for teaching me the true importance of time and how it's the one thing we can't buy, but also can never get back.

FOREWORD

"The ocean doesn't ask for permission to change the shore; it just does". In *Waves Wave Back*, T'yanna Angeline delivers a raw, unfiltered journey through the "no pressure" era of her early twenties—a time defined by cheap wine, IKEA furniture, and the beautiful, chaotic collision of two souls in New York City. Spanning from the blurry, day-drinking haze of 2018 to the quiet clarity of 2023, this is more than a romance. It is a story of growth, ego death, and the bittersweet realization that some people are meant to be a season, not a lifetime. Through heartbreak and humor, T'yanna explores the thin line between losing yourself in someone else and finding yourself in their absence. For anyone who has ever loved somebody they couldn't keep, *Waves Wave Back* is a reminder that even when the tide goes out, the person you became remains.

CHAPTER 1

2018, THE SHIT SHOW

2018 is such a blurry year. I don't know if it's from the day-drinking or all the nights spent partying on Fridays after staying up all day Thursday cramming for human anatomy lectures and labs. 2018 was a preview. I was caught up in my own life, which is so crazy to think about considering everything that happened after you. Though you may no longer be a primary thought, you still exist in my world as long as I live and so do you.

Yet, when I think of the time "before you," life seemed simpler in a way. That isn't a dig at you, but more so at myself. They say "quality over quantity," but I never talked about my life before you with you because I was so caught up in our present. I think now is the time to share what life was like before you. I call it my "no pressure" era.

You ready for this?

Spring 2018: All I Wanted Was to Eat Cake

I was sitting in my overpriced apartment, picking at the drywall paint that was starting to peel. I remember Sicily always complaining about how our apartment was going to shit, and she was right. I had managed to turn a three-inch tear in the wall into a seven-inch one. I was lying on my back, picking away, wondering what I could manage to steal from Walmart on our next trip because, unlike now, back then I was broke.

As I picked at the wall, dreaming of steak tacos we were going to make for the price of a bag of apples and some toilet paper, my phone buzzed. It was Quinn. I knew you knew Quinn because his friends talked about you, but I honestly, I never really wanted to know who you were; the way everybody seemed to know you took away my desire to. The text was letting me know he was on his way. I would be lying if I said I liked him; in all honesty, I barely knew him. But when you're picking chipped paint and fantasizing about shoplifting dinner, anyone and everyone becomes enticing. I looked at the message, sighed, and began to prepare.

I put on what I like to call my "show I care a bit" clothes—outfits that suggested effort, though I was really only in it for the sex. I lit one of the many candles Sicily had managed to swipe from Walmart and began to make myself presentable. I did the basics: brushed my teeth, fixed my hair, and put Vaseline on my lips. I had very little NYX lip gloss left, and he wasn't worth the expensive stuff. I had an interview at Pandora that week and was saving the little bit of leftover shiny, glossy pink for that. Quinn was going to get whatever I gave.

I stood in front of the mirror, looking back at myself and wondering how the hell I managed to end up here—somewhere between reality and a state of violent dissociation—when the doorbell rang. I let out a sigh and made my way to the door, dragging my feet and yelling at Sicily not to worry about who it was. My hand went to the deadbolt, and all I could think was how much I wanted him to leave already. I turned the lock and used my last bit of enthusiasm to open the door. As I pulled it open, all I remember thinking was, "I wonder if he brought any snacks from the facility".

"Shit!" I blurt out now, over-pouring my glass of boxed wine. Now, before you go saying I knew better and had no business messing with Quinn, I'll have you know you're absolutely right—I didn't. But I was bored, lonely, broke, and starving. I begin to laugh at my own words because, as always, I'm being unserious. "No, no, no, before you chime in, let me explain my encounter with you, because we seem to always recall it differently," I say, finally getting my laughter under control. I take a sip of my wine and plant my toes in the sand. The first night I spent with you was when I learned the meaning of new beginnings.

CHAPTER 2

FALL 2019: NO LONGER IN KANSAS (AND HAPPY ABOUT IT)

"Fuck, can you help me find my other shoe?" I yelled from the hallway to my friend Ashley. I was running late as always. I knew about these plans precisely three hours prior, but here I was, rushing out the door at the last minute.

"Isn't it by the door?" Ashley asked. Pop Smoke's "Dior" was blasting in the background. That was something I wasn't accustomed to yet the way people could have a whole productive conversation while drill music blasted in the background.

"You're right," I said, shoving my foot into one boot and leaning on the wall to force on the other. "You good?" Ashley asked, laughing but looking slightly concerned. "Yeah, yeah, I'm good. I just don't want to be late," I said, cheeks flushed, throwing on my jacket. "Girl, he's coming from Jersey. Even if you're late, he's gonna be later than you". She handed me my phone charger. "Be safe and let me know when you make it".

She was right. Despite leaving 15 minutes late and taking a 30-minute train ride into the city, I still beat you. Luckily, it wasn't too cold yet. I sat in a McDonald's to stay warm, debating whether or not I'd sleep with you that night. I know, not very modest of me, but I was fresh off a breakup and, if I recalled college correctly, you were "everything plus some" in bed. Before I

could decide, you texted: "Here". It's embarrassing how fast I got up and made my way to your car.

I thought of so many things in those fifty steps: What if Quinn put him up to this? What if you are a dickhead? What if I'm just in my own head? The biggest fear was: What if I'm so overwhelmed internally that I become off-putting? I grabbed the handle, let out a sigh, and thought: Here goes nothing.

Being in the car with you was everything but nothing. I sat down so fast it was like I was in Squid Game and my head would get blown off if I wasn't seated in five seconds. I buckled my seatbelt and looked straight ahead, too nervous to look at you. I could feel the heat of your stare and the fact that you were smiling. I tried to sneak a glance, but we locked eyes and both burst out laughing. You asked if I was good. Facing you fully now, I assured you I was great—perfect, even. I looked you dead in the eyes, possibly forgetting to blink because I was in genuine shock at how good you smelled and how much I loved your facial structure. I was so overwhelmed that instead of becoming off-putting, I relaxed into the most calm, yet chaotic, feeling I've ever known.

You made jokes the whole 40-minute ride back to Jersey—about how you couldn't believe I was finally with you after "curving" you for years, and how I couldn't look at you without turning red. You made me nervous, and my body did everything in its power to expose me. I was in a trance when we reached your place. It was beautiful. If anyone knew I wasn't used to living like that, it was you; we were practically neighbors our whole lives. I forced us to watch *Surf's Up*, my comfort movie, because if we were playing on your territory, it was going to be by my rules. You looked at me like I was insane when the penguins and chickens popped up on the screen.

"Is this it?" you asked. "Yes, perfect," I replied, clicking "OK" on the remote while it was still in your hand. You stared at me and smiled, telling me I was funny. Usually, I'd agree, but in that moment, I was just overwhelmed in the best way. I was so stuck on how much I enjoyed being with you; my body was wired like it was Christmas morning in 2005. We stayed up all night sharing the "411", As grew up to call sharing other peoples business that absolutely did not concern us. We swapped stories about childhood, parents, siblings, and college. We laughed at how we were always indirectly connected.

"I'm so mad now that I never got to know you like this in college," I managed to say through a yawn. "I'm not. I'm glad you're getting to know me now," you said. Your tone had shifted; you looked serious. I sat up and asked if you were okay. You assured me you were great—it was just late. The clock read 3:54 AM. "Agreed," I sighed. "I have a work at six". As my body fell back into a bed that cost more than my rent, you laughed. "You're funny as hell. I'm glad you finally came to kick it". I couldn't help but smile back. "Yeah, me too," I said, laying on your chest before drifting off.

I lay on my back now, staring up at the sky. "You know, before you say anything back, that night was one of the best nights of my life. You might not know, but I had gone through that circus with Quinn and then the bad split with Jet. I really was starting to feel cursed until you came along". I shut my eyes to stop the tears. "We weren't perfect, but damn, you brought me back to life. I forgot what it felt like to adore somebody. The warmth I gave myself by being able to share that love with you healed everything that had shattered two years prior".

I swallow the lump in my throat and open my eyes. I stand up and plant my hands in the sand, feeling every grain between my fingers. I inhale and exhale. "Did you think we'd end like this? Because I absolutely didn't," I say, chugging my wine and topping off the glass. "I know you never meant to hurt me, because I never meant to hurt you—even though I did. But before you say your piece, let me explain it from my perspective".

CHAPTER 3

SUMMER 2020: COVID & EGO DEATH

Let's be real: 2020 wasn't our year, together or separately. In January 2020, I discovered your "little big secret". The girl you had convinced my cousin and me was your cousin was actually your girlfriend. My better judgment told me to leave right then, but I'd be lying if I said I didn't try to lie to myself to keep you. My cousin found out and sent me the proof. When we saw who she was, we both concluded: "Absolutely no fucking way". Nothing made sense. Most men will pick Shakira over Rosie O'Donnell, but... tomato, tomato.

I sat on that information, and the longer I sat, the deeper I dug myself into a hole of emotions. We spent all our free time together. I even "supervised" you building a guest room with IKEA furniture. Between me finding YouTube tutorials for you and the nights spent trying random food places—sharing Panera Bread reviews we found funny—the secret became too heavy to carry.

I hatched a plan to set the mood, get your guard down, and then attack. I let you pick the movie and watched as you got comfortable. Once your head was resting and your feet were up, I just blurted it out: "So, is so-and-so your bitch?" I sat there, stiff as a board at the kitchen island, staring into your soul with a blank look on my face. "Now, before you answer, think about how you want this to play out," I said, taking a sip of wine. "Why do you want to be my girlfriend?" you asked, shifting your body toward me with a face even more serious than mine. I put my glass down, said, "Fuck you," and left. I don't know who was more surprised by how fast I got out of there.

I texted you later saying I was mailing your shit back and to never worry about me again. You apologized and asked to explain, but I wasn't hearing it. I was "cool" on the surface but torn up

inside. To make matters worse, we got into another fight that led to us not speaking for four months. I won't say I thought of you the whole time; you actually made me start to hate you. Blocking you did wonders for my mental health. I talked to other people, but nobody matched me like you did.

So, on April 1, 2020, I unblocked you. I told myself, "If he's meant for me, he'll find me". Four days later, I woke up to a text: "Hey, it's me". I damn near clapped my ankles together seeing your name. I texted back a cold "I know," while grinning at the screen. I knew you were thinking, "See, I got her," because of how quickly I forgave you. But I loved you. More importantly, I missed you.

We caught up, you apologized, and we met. The day was perfect. We got to know each other more deeply than I had ever allowed a man to know me. That night, you fell asleep before me—a rarity. I used to wonder what kept you up at night. How could someone so busy never be tired? What was your mental programming? Now, when I have nights of insomnia, I wish I could go back to you then and tell you it's going to be okay.

I looked at you that night and realized I either had to leave you alone fully or prepare for a lifetime of going through hell and back. As much as I loved an underdog story, I loved myself more. I decided that "no reason to stay" was a good enough reason to go. I plant my glass of wine in the sand. "I never wanted to leave you. I just didn't want to lose myself along the way. I knew losing you would hurt, but I thought if I did it on my own terms, I could control the impact".

I close my eyes. It's ironic how, in isolation, everything makes sense. It's black and white. Then, when you're with someone, it gets shaky. Nothing makes sense anymore. It's a world full of color, you somehow manage to become colorblind.

CHAPTER 4

JANUARY 2021: THE START OF OUR DEMISE

From May through July, I spent time with a SoundCloud rapper. July to September, I spent debating whether to stay put or move to LA. October to December was brutal. A wave of emotions swept over me. I had physically gotten away from you, yet I felt tethered, like we had left so much unsaid. Instead of running back, I took a page from my college playbook: I would get close to you through mutual friends.

In October, I spent time with Scully. He knew I was using him almost immediately. I got too high and said, "I missed you". I cracked up because I knew I'd fucked up. We hung out on Halloween 2020, and I haven't seen him since. In November, I spent time with my high school ex. I even toyed with the idea of having a baby with him. But when I found myself considering giving the child your name as a middle name, I knew I had an issue to address.

In December, I hung out with Scoob. I knew he'd tell you, and he did his part perfectly—except he failed to mention how he forced me to watch his post-game interviews the whole time. Just like I had done with you and Surf's Up. Somewhere between him talking about my "off days" and showing me more interviews, I got emotional. I missed you so much. I went home and wrote about you in my Notes app for the entire hour-long ride. I needed to know you were okay. As always, the universe answered.

"I hate this part of the story! I hate it so much!" I scream, sitting up. "The story always just ends. What if we don't have a story? What if we have a movie or an 'experience'? Why does it have to be a fucking story?" I yell at the sand. "I hate this part, and I know you hate to see me cry," I say, wiping my eyes. "I'm almost done. Five more minutes, then you can talk".

CHAPTER 5

2021 THE CHAPTER CLOSES FOR GOOD

When you texted me that Thursday night for an iMessage game, I was swimming laps. As a healthy distraction, I had joined an overpriced country club gym. Every day after work, I'd go there and cosplay as a stay-at-home Westchester daughter. I saw your text after my third lap, responded with my move, and kept swimming. We FaceTimed that night, and I saw you the next day.

The day felt different. Everything was great, but I could feel it: our time was ending. It wasn't because we wanted it to, but because it needed to. We were meant to grow together, then apart. You didn't do anything wrong. In fact, you were so aware and well-spoken about how you had hurt me and yourself. I finally understood what you meant back in 2019 when you said, "I'm glad you didn't know me then". You were an amazing person, but you had only changed the scenery, not the situation. I loved who I was with you, but I couldn't be who I needed to become while staying with you.

The night I told you I loved you, I made sure you were actually listening. I thanked you for being my first real friend in New York, for teaching me how to build IKEA furniture, and for that favorite hack of yours—how to get on the good side of Panera employees. The next day, I hugged you goodbye and said, "I'll see you later". I haven't seen you since.

I moved home for a bit in 2021. I met someone sweet who made me lose focus on the past. You and I kept in touch briefly. In moments where I wondered if you were okay, we would speak, and it was nothing short of our usual vibe. We laughed at how I was a "true adult" now with a serious job. By 2022 and 2023, we talked less and less. You reached out on Halloween 2023, but by then, I was in love with someone else. I still smiled at your name on my phone—just without the teeth. You invited me to dinner and drinks. I declined and said, "Another time". Another time never came.

I sit up, tears flowing. "It never came," I say, my voice trembling. "That's it. The end of Tabitha and Preston. Finished. Water under the bridge". I'm crying and laughing at the same time. I sit staring at the water. "Wherever you are, I hope you're okay and you know how much I adore you. God, I never stopped adoring you".

I stand up and walk into the surf, feeling the waves wash over my feet. I inhale, feeling the air leave my body and life coming back into it. "I will always love you in this life and all the ones that follow. Always the one I—". Before I can finish, a wave wipes me off my feet, landing me right on my butt. I burst out laughing. "You never were good with emotions," I say to the ocean. "But I love you,. Forever and always".

AUTHOR BIO

T'yanna Angeline is a writer who finds the extraordinary in the "unserious" moments of life. Originally from a background that taught her the value of time and the weight of a dollar, she moved to New York to find her own voice amidst the noise of the city. Her writing is characterized by its emotional honesty, sharp wit, and a deep appreciation for the friends and "fools" who help us grow. When she isn't writing, she is likely swimming laps, avoiding overpriced furniture assembly, or looking for the perfect beach to watch the waves.