

**THE
REVIVAL**

BOOK TWO of the TOTOBOAN TRILOGY

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THE REVIVAL

Book Two of the Totoboan Trilogy

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Dedicated to my mother, Linda Lee Allen, who passed away on May 24, 2011. She was my companion and my guide. She has shown me that love is eternal, and no matter how hard you try, no matter how terrible a disease, unconditional love never decays.

MLA

Prologue

I certainly did not believe in God, but my dreams defied those of any normal human being. They seemed to have some spiritual component, but I knew that was crazy.

Most people say *déjà vu* is merely an anomaly of memory giving the impression that an experience is being recalled.

And before I returned to Africa, I agreed with the majority of the population. I was simply another human being denying all obvious signs of truth.

We all want to believe we're the only ones here, even though mankind has created religion as an escape for millions of years. It's a paradox, really, but it's what keeps this earth revolving.

Even with all my powerful *déjà vus* and dark, frightening dreams the past couple of years, I still ignored the fact that everything was connected, just so I could easily pass my time as a college student in Washington D.C.

I wanted to have that normal life because I knew that normality did not exist for me.

And I knew, deep down inside, that a time would come when I would know this, and that typical life that I wanted to lead would never come true.

And I knew. I knew everything.

We all knew if we would have simply returned.

Or even just sat down and listened.

But in this hectic generation, in which time seems to speed forward and push you faster along with it, there is no time to listen.

We get up in the morning, run to class with a bagel in our hand,

work, blast some music, watch TV, go to movies, and party with more blasting music.

And there's a good chance we won't even remember that day.

But still, I thought that I was happy living with days that were simply wasted and, in the end, meant nothing. And it was because I hadn't stopped and listened in years. Even with the dreams and the *déjà vus* haunting me, I wouldn't listen. I would wake up and then go back to sleep, or I would keep walking and ignore the memories.

That's what we all did, and everyone else that was with me that summer in Totoba would go on just existing, living off of pitiable memories.

We would also ignore all the signs that there is something *else* out there waiting to be discovered and to prove that we are not subjects to be crammed into cubicles and to follow a pattern that ultimately leads to a lonely death.

Most would sit there, numbed by the media and our own minds, convinced that everything is okay. We would sit in front of our computers social networking and watching funny videos so we could never face that silence.

So we could never stop and listen.

So that none of our denials would actually come true.

They all went through life like that. It may have been harder for them than the rest of society to ignore those strange moments in which they suspect something greater is out there somewhere.

Yet, somehow, they all managed to do it. I could have done it too, but one time I listened for just a second, and I heard cries for help, saw violence and pain in an empty pavilion, and saw black smoke covering an open field.

And that was when I became the only one stupid enough to return.

Flash

The whole scene was absolutely beautiful. Nick was dressed in a black tuxedo and was sitting on a stool with a guitar below a star-studded sky.

I was standing in the middle of the lit up patio in a gorgeous black dress that protruded from my hips and reached just above my knees. I had a pearl necklace on, and my hair was wavy and flowing down past my shoulders.

It sounds cliché to say, but I literally could not take my eyes off of Nick, who had bulked up immensely over the years and had a clean-shaven face. With his guitar in his lap, he sang “Crash Into Me,” one of my favorite love songs performed by Dave Matthews.

Nick wasn’t looking at me at first; he was just perfectly strumming on an acoustic guitar with a bunch of African musicians playing other instruments behind him.

His head was bent forward over the guitar as he sang with concentrated zeal. The sky danced and the stars glittered above me, passing a heavenly light over Nick.

As the music picked up, he noticed me and his eyes lit up. He looked as if he was about to cry with relief. No one had ever looked at me like that before. No one had ever seemed so glad to see me.

I walked toward him.

He leaned his head against mine and I could feel his tiny sweat droplets falling on my cheek. He was still playing the guitar beautifully but obviously did not find it necessary to look down at his fingers. He knew exactly what he was doing.

I kept my hands to my side and curled my fingers into my palm so

I wouldn't be tempted to stroke him. I didn't want to stop him from serenading me.

He finally looked down at his guitar as he played the chorus and, overtaken with some godly force, I twirled around and danced in the middle of the patio underneath the moonlight.

I gleefully pulled up my skirt as the song suggested, so that it reached just above my upper thigh. He beat harder on his instrument and I giggled and backed up.

He danced around me and I tried to follow him.

He raised his voice and belted out the remainder of the lyrics, prancing on the tile, never taking his huge, blue eyes off of me or his hands away from the guitar.

I began to sing with him, and he skipped toward me, our faces nearly touching as we moved in harmony.

We continued to dance in symphony for the next thirty seconds of the song, lost in the sounds of the acoustic, Nick's perfect voice and each other's eyes. As he finished the song, we kissed passionately and wrapped our arms around each other.

"Virginia," he said softly.

"Yes, Nick?"

"Virginia?" His voice was now high-pitched and bothered.

I opened my eyes and saw my roommate, Samantha, shaking me.

I sat up and rubbed my forehead and looked around. I was still in my boring dorm room at Georgetown; the sound of enthralled students playing Ultimate Frisbee wafted faintly through the window.

"Was I sleeping?" I asked her.

She shook her head. "You were just lying there with your eyes really wide and bulging and everything. And you were singing some love song and you had your arms out and everything and were acting like you were hugging and kissing someone. And you were smiling a lot."

She was folding clothes on her side of the room, completely used

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to the weird trances that I would always fall into. She was probably also used to my dreams, where I'd wake up and scream and be sweating and they would have to calm me down like a little child with night terrors. As much as she annoyed me with her ignorance and obsession with men, she was always there for me, as weird as I probably was.

"I don't know how I do that," I said, "but it felt so real this time... more real than anything else."

"Well, that's nice," she said, "but we're late for a meeting with our advisers, and have you even thought about where you're interning this summer?"

I saw Nick in his black tuxedo, beckoning me gently from the middle of the patio.

I smiled, stood up and put on my jacket. "Yeah, I think I'm gonna go to Totoba."

As I was filling out the sheet in the career office that Saturday in October, I immediately wrote "Totoba" next to the line "Location of Internship," even though it gave me chills just to think about going back.

"So where is that?" Samantha asked, peering over my shoulder as she tried to fill out her sheet.

"It's in Africa," I said.

"Never heard of it."

"It's really small."

"Okay."

Samantha was a pre-med major, so she obviously didn't need to know about every single country in the world like I did.

As an International Politics major, I felt like I had a broad understanding of this world, but out of all the countries we studied, we hardly even touched on Totoba.

Since it had only been a country for a few years, there was not much to say about it in the textbooks, except that it was the only

nation in Africa in which the US was directly involved, which made violence nearly non-existent, and the heavy border patrol there made it seem like an African paradise, the way Kenya used to be.

And even though we barely talked about Totoba, I knew more about that small country than I knew about my own. I could even speak the language, and this was a tool I used to make friends quickly at Georgetown.

“How are you so...fluent?” someone asked me the first night I was here.

“I don’t know.” I shrugged. “I vacationed there, and I guess it’s really easy to pick up.”

“Yeah right!” he shouted, “No one can pick up an entire language in...how long?”

I paused and thought. My initial reaction was to say two weeks, but it had to be much longer than that.

“A little over fifty days,” I said.

“Well...I dunno. You could just be a freakin’ genius.”

I was the only person at Georgetown to speak Totoboan, even as international as the college was.

“I had another awful dream last night,” I told Sam as we sat there.

“God, you and your dreams. That must really suck.”

“It was sort of the same too,” I said, “It was really dark, and this huge guy killed this little man right in front of me, and everyone was screaming, and then he walked over to me, but this black smoke enshrouded us and we were swept away. I really thought I was gonna die there, Sam. I woke up and was sweating and really glad I was alive.”

“Ugh, I hate dreams that are like that.”

“It felt so real.”

“Yeah, I know, they suck.”

“Why do you think I have that dream all the time though?”

“Um, I wouldn’t know. I’m not a psychology major.”

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I played with my pen.

“It just seems weird. And I was in Africa too. I don’t know how I knew that, but, like, I was.”

“Oooh, maybe you shouldn’t go to Africa then. You’ll obviously die,” Samantha joked.

I chuckled as I grew lightheaded and shivered.

I seemed to feel faint all the time, and when I went to the doctor’s for it a year ago, they said it was just stress.

But every time I thought about death or people attacking each other, or even Africa, it was almost like I would enter this strange, alternate universe. My fingers would grow tingly, and it felt as if I was drunk.

When my professor was lecturing about Totoba one day last year, I fell into such a horrid trance that I forgot where I was until the professor came over to me and told me that the class had ended two minutes ago. My shirt was sopping wet with sweat, and my hands were red from gripping onto my binder so forcefully.

It was all really annoying.

I was finally called in to see my adviser, Linda Ross; a small woman with a mole on her cheek and tight, pulled-back hair.

“So you decided where you want to go?” she asked me as I handed her the sheet.

“Yeah, Totoba.”

Linda peered over her glasses.

“Why?”

“Well, I went there with my family the summer before I came here, and I know a lot about it. And there’s also a guy there that, I... think still lives there, and I’ll meet up with him and he can help me with my project.”

“So what do you plan on studying?”

“Um, Totoba’s...an odd place. America is directly involved with it;

they watch over the country and nearly control it and own it, but it's still a province of Kenya. There's a lot of tourism there since it's so safe and still has all the wildlife and everything that Kenya and Tanzania has. And there's like no urban area at all except for a small town. And their culture and everything is really secretive and private and preserved. And when I went there, it had only existed as a country for a year. But, now, I want to go back and report on how much their culture, daily lives, and natural resources have been affected by the tourism and American intervention."

"So you're going to be set up with a program there?"

"Yeah, I'm going to work that out. I'm going to talk to some of the tribes that are directly involved with the tourism industry, some of the wealthy Americans that own houses there...and Nick."

"Who's Nick?"

There was a bad taste in my mouth, and I was slipping out of my chair. I rubbed my hands through my hair and tried to focus on some American Beauty roses on her desk.

"Um...Nick was...is this conservationist guy who has lived there for years with the tribes and everything. And he leads tours and improves the water quality, so...I think I can find him there."

Linda studied me, chewing on a pencil.

"You okay there, Virginia?" she asked suspiciously.

I was slipping down in my chair again and my eyes must have been wildly fixated on those flowers.

I stared back at Linda, who only seemed like a figment of my imagination.

"Oh, yeah, no, I'm fine."

"Okay," she said slowly, "so sounds good. Let me know when you have your actual itinerary for this summer, but it sounds just like what you want to do with your career."

I nodded and stood up, trying to balance myself.

"Oh, oh, okay. Great, great. Thank you."

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I shook her hand and smiled and stumbled out of the door.

Samantha was leaning against the wall when I came out into the lobby and I hurried past her so I could breathe some fresh fall air outside.

“Strange girl,” I heard Linda say softly to Samantha.

“That’s Ginny for you, though,” Samantha said, “Always in her own little world. God love her.”

Samantha met up with me explaining how I needed to get a boyfriend so I would stop acting so strange in public, always out of it and day dreaming.

But even though college was supposed to be your crazy years, and I had had my crazy times, I had never been that interested in dating. It seemed as if I was holding out for someone and no one else was worth it.

And, as most of my friends had lost their virginity and been in serious relationships, I was content being independent and single.

Besides, most of the guys here weren’t my type.

“There’s this guy I know coming over this Christmas. So don’t worry, Sam,” I said.

“Ooh who?” Samantha seemed totally uninterested as we walked back to our dorms along the cobblestone.

“This guy named Benji. We knew each other...in Totoba, actually. Yeah, his family’s visiting DC, so we’re gonna meet up.”

“Is he hot?”

“I guess...it’s been awhile.”

“Well, what about until then?” Samantha whined since her potential project was coming to a close.

“It’s only two months. I’ll be okay.”

Samantha sighed and said good-bye to me as she headed back over to the main campus to grab some coffee.

I was left alone in the middle of the quad with orange leaves sweeping past my feet. I pulled my green jacket closer to my body and walked to my dorm, not wanting to see anyone or do anything.

I just wanted to go back to Totoba.

Everyone that hurried past me was either talking on a cell phone or texting with their blackberries. No one was taking in the fall breeze or the smell of freshly cut grass. It was like they were barely human.

It seemed to all happen at once—this surge of signs that should have prompted me to withdraw from my internship in Totoba.

But my junior year was so hectic that I brushed each chilling feeling and memory aside and continued to look forward to my internship, where I could finally do what I wanted in the place where I wanted to live.

The strongest *déjà vu* and dreams began when Benji was in town. And as we met in the middle of the city one snowy December day, my mind flashed back to him pushing me forward as we headed out to the darkness.

He was the first person who had traveled with me to Totoba that I'd seen since, although a few of us kept in contact through some of the social networking websites.

Though it was hard to really remember him distinctly, he looked about the same as he stood there underneath a tree with his hands in his pockets. His hair was still shaggy and blonde and he still had a strong build, obvious even under his soft, black trench coat.

We hugged briefly and awkwardly, and I felt like I really wasn't that close to him at all.

"Hey, how are you doing?" he asked me.

"Fine, you?"

"I'm starving."

"Me too. I was thinking we could eat at this place where JFK proposed to his wife. It's really famous."

"Great, sounds good! Let's eat!"

At dinner, we mostly discussed our lives since Africa; he was a marine biology major at the University of Miami, wasn't dating

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anyone, and was on the sailing team. It almost felt like I was talking to a stranger as he bragged about his accomplishments and scuba diving expeditions. At times, I just wanted to grab a bread roll and jolt out of there. He was hardly even talking to *me*.

Finally I mentioned that I was going back to Totoba, and he slurped up the rest of his spaghetti and wiped his face.

“Why would you do that?” he asked, like I was crazy even to think of such a thing.

I told him of the good internship opportunity, but suddenly realized there were so many other places I could have traveled.

“I don’t think I’d ever go back,” he said, “I mean, as much as I know about it and love it there, I just get weird feelings, ya know, when I think about it. Like, it’s really weird.”

I looked out the window at the passing cars and anxiously folded my napkin.

“Yeah, me too,” I said softly.

Benji’s eyes widened.

“Really? Like what?”

I shrugged. “Dreams, well usually nightmares, and then sometimes I just zone out and totally get into it, ya know, like I’m there again except it’s stuff I didn’t do there. But I’m *there*.”

“That’s crazy. I’m pretty much the same way.”

Our eyes locked, and we smiled.

Finally, a connection.

“Let’s get out of here,” I spoke, “once we’re done eating. Some of my friends are at this club right now, and I said I wasn’t gonna join ‘em, but...”

Benji grinned. “I love dancing though. We so totally have to go. I can’t wait.”

After dinner, we took a cab over to The Avenue, and I spotted my friends sitting in a corner. Samantha energetically waved over to me, obnoxiously yelling at the others to scoot down.

Not ever being one for loud social situations, I sat halfway off the bench and stared at the people in the crowd. Benji politely greeted everyone sitting around the table. The bartenders seemed like they were having a lot more fun than I was.

After Benji had a few drinks, he shoved me off the booth lightly and commanded me to dance with him.

“Benji, I haven’t been drinking, so now I know I can’t dance,” I laughed as he led me to the center of the mosh pit.

We danced awkwardly to “Low” by Flo Rida and then “Stronger” by Kanye West began.

Benji looked up at the ceiling and frowned.

“Ugh, I hate this song,” he spat.

“Didn’t we dance to this one night in Africa?” I asked, “I remember you saying you loved this song.”

“But it’s *so* overplayed, and it makes me depressed. Maybe because I remember that *you* wouldn’t dance with me that night.”

I could barely remember what he was talking about.

“Well,” I said, “I’ll dance with you now then.”

I took his hands and swung him around, and he started laughing and spun me.

When I turned back around, I could have sworn Nick was standing there, but I blinked and it was still Benji in his flannel shirt and tight jeans.

He pulled me close to him, and I swerved around so I could look at his face, afraid that I would forget who I was with again.

I draped my hands around his neck, and he delicately ran his soft hands up my back.

Sweat beads began to roll down my face, and every time I looked away from him and looked back again, Nick was there for a split second.

I couldn’t handle this anymore.

“I need a drink,” I said and stormed back to our booth.

I ordered a martini and gulped it down. I had recently discovered

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the magic of alcohol during those days when throbbing headaches or strange in-your-face daydreams would overpower me. I was nowhere near an alcoholic, but being such a lightweight, only a few shots of anything would make all those weird visions disappear.

The rest of the night was extremely blurry. There was laughter, drinking games, and someone tickling my neck. Then I invited Benji back to my dorm.

His hands were stuffed in his small pockets when we entered my dark room and I threw my coat on my bed, danced in a circle, and stumbled over to Benji. He caught me and laughed and helped me back up.

He turned on my lava lamp and gazed around the room. He eyed my map of the world on the wall, a Queen poster, a guitar, and my roommate's purple vibrator sitting straight up on the desk side table.

He looked absolutely wonderful in the dim pink light, illuminating his broad muscles and stony features. His large, pink lips seemed to be calling my name.

I fell forward and touched his lower lip and his chin with my lips.

He chuckled again and slowly stood me back up.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"You're drunk."

"Just a little."

"More than you think."

"Look, don't worry. I want this."

I caressed his hard chest muscles, but he pushed me away again.

"I'm not a virgin or anything," I said, but I was never entirely sure about this.

When anyone asked me if I was, I would say I was, but then I would get the feeling that I had gotten really close once, and my crotch would tingle and sometimes I would think of Nick.

But that didn't make any sense. Nick was just our tour guide, and despite the crush I had on him back then, it was obviously nothing more.

I assumed I had probably gotten really drunk one night during freshman year and not remembered, or maybe that Seattle guy and I went farther than I thought.

“That’s not it, Virginia,” Benji said and sat me down on my bed.

“Well, then what?” I pouted, resting my head on his shoulder.

Benji sighed and ran his fingers through his wavy hair.

“This just doesn’t feel right.”

“Oh.” I sat up.

“It just feels really weird, being with you. Like, I dunno, like we barely even know each other. And when we were dancing, I started thinking about this place with a lot of people from the tour and I was singing on a bed and weird shit was happening everywhere. It was crazy. That never happened!”

I leaned over. A headache was coming on, and I really didn’t want to start thinking about all that *now* with the way I was feeling.

“Yeah, me too,” I groaned, “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it, let’s hang out tomorrow. I would love for you to show me around DC.”

I nodded as he rubbed my back.

“I’m really sorry,” I cried.

“Really, it’s no big deal.” He stood up and put on his coat. “Just no talking about Totoba tomorrow.”

He said goodbye and left me in the dark room with the pink glow and I couldn’t bring myself to move, as my thoughts raced from whatever the hell happened tonight: “Stronger”, Benji, Totoba...and Nick.

It was really impossible not to mention Totoba to Benji the next day, since it was really all we had in common, and every time I looked at him, some strange vision would flash through my mind.

Yet as we walked through the museums and skipped beside the reflecting pool, he managed to ramble about South Beach, more scuba diving, more sailing, and his recent trip to Greece.

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When Benji left that night after dinner, it was one of the easiest good-byes I ever had to go through. For we were both extremely relieved to be rid of the excessive amount of déjà vus we had when we were together.

When he walked away romantically into the setting sun and hopped into a cab, it was like a twenty-pound weight had been lifted from my shoulders and I could suddenly walk straight again.

It was no surprise, really, that this happened since about two years ago Madison let all of us know that she and Erik split for about the same reason.

She told Stephanie and me about it one night on a three-way call. “You know those movies where the husband and wife divorce ‘cause their son died and they can’t look at each other anymore ‘cause, like, the husband reminds the wife of the son or whatever?” Well, it was like that. Except we weren’t married, we didn’t have a son, and he didn’t die.”