

It's Not That Simple, Natty Rose

Dr. Tim Rice

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Chapter 1

Natalia Rose Sanders had never seen so many people her own age in the same place at the same time. The auditorium buzzed with the sound of 150 college students, each carrying a new book bag and looking for a seat, while trying to appear cool, comfortable, and mature.

Natalia hoped she did not look as scared as she felt. She wanted to shout, “I made it!” one second and, “I want my momma!” the next. Instead, she took a deep breath, said to herself, *I’ve got this*, and made her way down one of the stairways that divided the auditorium into three sections. She chose the middle seat in the middle row in the middle section of the auditorium. Natalia sat down and, feeling awkward, checked her schedule. It read:

PSYCH 1101
Weber
Mon 8:50am
Boring Auditorium A

The E. G. Boring Auditorium was part of the Psychology and Literature Complex, the newest building at State University. The stadium style seating gave each seat an unobstructed view of the stage and lectern and the jumbo state-of-the-art video monitor. It reminded Natalia of an IMAX theater, but instead of cup holders, each seat had a small folding desktop for writing.

Introductory Psychology was required for Early Childhood Education majors at State University. Natalia had wanted to be a 1st grade teacher for as long as she could remember.

She looked around the auditorium and noticed a few familiar faces from the dorm. She saw her suitemate, Gladys, in the top row, all the way against the auditorium wall – as far from the lectern as possible. Natalia waved, but Gladys didn't seem to notice.

She's different, Natalia thought as she recalled meeting the girl who shared her bathroom.

Natalia's half of the "suite" was about the size of her bedroom back home. It had a bed, desk, and dresser, and was separated from Gladys' half by a door, the bathroom, and another door.

Natalia's dad and little brother had each made four trips carrying boxes and plastic tubs of clothes, books, and other necessities to the second floor of Laurel Dorm. Mrs. Sanders had unpacked her daughter's clothes while Natalia had hung her favorite pictures in just the right places. Mr. Sanders had sat on the edge of the bed, looking uncomfortable, while Natalia's little brother had played a game on their mom's phone.

Natalia knew that most girls requested their suitemates, but Natalia hadn't known anyone to

request. She wasn't hoping for a new best friend, just a nice girl to talk to.

Natalia had first seen Gladys through the open doors of the bathroom that connected their rooms. She had tossed a green duffle bag on the bed, and suddenly looked back at Natalia. Her hair was jet black and hung straight over her forehead. She wore heavy black eyeliner, and had five earrings in the ear that Natalia could see. Her torn jeans had ridden low on her hips, held up by a wide black belt barely doing its job.

Natalia had smiled and said, "Hi. My name is Natalia, but my friends call me Natty Rose."

Gladys had taken off her leather jacket and had tossed it, too, onto the bed. "I'm Gladys," she had said.

Her arms were covered with tattoos. Natalia had tried not to stare.

The door near the stage clicked open, interrupting Natalia's thoughts. The auditorium became quiet as four girls and three guys filed in and sat in folding chairs on the right of the stage. They looked older and seemed uncomfortable being the center of attention.

They must be the teaching assistants.

Right away, Natalia noticed a guy at the end of the row with long blond hair and a navy blue blazer.

He's cute.

She watched as he adjusted his blazer and ran his fingers through his hair. When he looked at his phone, Natalia checked hers one more time.

Ringer off. Check.

The last thing she wanted was for her phone to ring during class. The week after Natalia had gotten her first phone, she had forgotten to turn it off during church. After all, who would call at 12:05 on a Sunday afternoon during Pastor Blackmore's invitation for people to be saved? A wrong number. Natalia had thought she would die from embarrassment at age sixteen over a wrong number.

She noticed there was one missed call – from her mom.

Mom! Really?

Natalia's transition to State U. was hardest on her mom. She had wanted Natalia to go to Temple Bible College. Temple Bible College was known as the place to go to find a husband – a future pastor or missionary or music minister.

Temple Bridal College.

Her mom thought Natalia would make a good pastor's wife. There was an unstated expectation that Natalia would get married and start having children soon after she started dating.

When Natalia had announced that she was considering State U., her mom had made a list of the pros and cons. There were zero pros and one big con – the whole godless, humanistic, anti-Christian, politically correct, pro-gay and abortion rights culture. It was also 300 miles from home.

You've got this, she told herself again as she opened her notebook and waited.

At 8:50am precisely, the heavy metal door to the right of the stage snapped open with a loud click. Every head turned to look at the shaft of light and the man who stepped onto the stage.

Dr. Ernst Weber was a tall man and he moved with long, confident strides. If Natalia had seen him on the street, she would have guessed he was a professor. From twenty rows up, Natalia could see that his hair was perfect. His khaki pants and oxford shirt were crisply pressed. His herringbone tweed jacket even had elbow patches.

He stood at the lectern, tapped his tablet, adjusted his glasses, and began to speak. He did not smile and he did not look up.

“I am Dr. Ernst Weber. This is Psychology 1101– Introduction to the Brain and Behavior.” His accent made it sound like he had said, “I am Dr. Veeber. Introduction to zee brain and behavior.”

Dr. Weber continued, “If you are supposed to be in English 1101, you should be in auditorium B, the King English Auditorium, on the other side of the complex.”

There were giggles as two students put their pens, notebooks, laptops, and cell phones back into their new backpacks, and made their way to the top of the auditorium, looking as though they wished they were invisible. As if on cue, the metal door at the back of the auditorium opened and three misplaced students arrived from English class. There was more laughter as the new arrivals, looking equally embarrassed, quickly found seats near the top of the auditorium.

Almost as embarrassing as your phone ringing while the choir softly sings Jesus is Calling, thought Natalia.

She turned back to see Dr. Weber looking up and smiling as the late arrivals found seats. His grey beard and broad smile made him look wise and warm, not at all like his reputation.

He doesn't seem so bad.

“As I was saying, this is Psychology 1101, Introduction to the Brain and Behavior. For most of you, this is your first class at State University. On behalf of the University, welcome. Today you begin a journey – a journey through the discoveries and ideas that shaped civilization and guided human history. It is my goal, like every professor here, to tell you the truth and to teach you how to think.”

Natalia took notes. *Truth. How to think.*

“You are all smart and promising undergrads. Every one of you graduated in the top 10% of your high school class. About 1/3 of you graduated in the top 2% of your class.”

Natalia graduated at the absolute top of her class.

First in a class of one.

“The registrar tells me there are 6 valedictorians, 18 salutatorians, and 2 National Merit Scholars in the room this morning. The registrar also tells me that a few of you, two to be exact, graduated from ‘homeschool or other.’”

Natalia thought, *Don’t blush! Don’t squirm!*

She joined the other students and looked around, as if to get a glimpse of a real live homeschooler.

Denim jumper and long braided hair anyone?

Natalia had mixed feelings about all the times she and her mother had worn matching handmade jumpers and braided their hair and wrapped it tightly in buns. When she was young, she had wanted to dress just like her mom. She did not want that any more.

Dr. Weber continued, “For many of you, the journey can only begin in earnest when you let go of old ideas and old ways of thinking. Some of you may still cling to some type of religious fundamentalism forced on you by your parents. The Quran, the Torah, and the Bible say God did it all – simple. Well, it’s just not that simple.”

I’ve heard that before.

Natalia felt uncomfortable but tried not to let it show.

Dr. Weber paused and looked around the auditorium.

“It is my job, as a scientist, to strip away religious superstitions, to expose them, and to make them seem silly – which they are – rather than discussable – which they are not. Psychology class, more than any other you will take at State University, proves that all religions, Christianity in particular, are delusional. They are exploitative, controlling, inhibitive, and oppressive systems of control. It’s my hope that very soon you will grow up and grow out of those old ideas.”

Oh my goodness.

“In this class, and at this university, we pursue truth without superstitious baggage. Faith is belief despite the lack of evidence. Here, we require evidence.”

Natalia knew that it was important to take good notes, but she didn't know what else to write.

“Science has made it unnecessary to believe in a creator. We've been liberated.”

Natalia understood that State U. was a secular liberal arts college, but she didn't expect this attack in the first five minutes of her first class.

Maybe Mom was right.

“Mr. Nathan Sutton, my lead teaching assistant, will come and review the syllabus and the course requirements. Next class I will introduce two giant ideas from the history of psychology – two foundational ideas that have been called a *Dangerous Idea* and an *Astonishing Hypothesis*. Until then, Mr. Sutton.”

Dr. Weber closed his tablet, nodded toward the blond boy in the blue blazer, and left the auditorium. The metal door snapped shut behind him.

He did not speak long, but Dr. Weber had made quite an impression.

Chapter 2

When the door snapped shut behind Dr. Weber, the buzz started again with renewed vigor. Nathan Sutton had to say “good morning” three times before he could begin.

I’ve worked hard for this, he thought as he stood at the lectern that the great Dr. Ernst Weber had just vacated. Not only was Nathan lead teaching assistant, he was also Dr. Weber’s lead research associate, and was soon to be Dr. Nathan Sutton. He smiled at the thought.

While Dr. Weber had been speaking, Nathan had studied the faces of the students – especially the redhead in the middle seat.

I hope she’s in my study group.

Nathan pulled himself back to reality, took a deep breath, and greeted the class. “Good morning. My name is Nathan Sutton and my team of teaching assistants this semester is seated to my left – Amy Martinez, Jill Cook, Doug Morris, Billy Ray Sweatman, and Ande Phinney.”

He remembered to button his blazer now that he was standing. His mother had sent extra cash so he could buy it. He preferred jeans and a t-shirt. He thought that the jacket and khaki pants, oxford button down, and loafers made him look like his father.