Prince N'Jobu Udaku is the second son in line for the throne of Wakanda. While his older
brother T'Chaka is being groomed to take on the mantle of King and lead their nation as the Black Panther, N'Jobu is being groomed to become the Ambassador of Wakanda. While completing his Masters in Political Science in the United States, he meets the woman who becomes the mother of his secret son, Erik N'Jadaka Stevens-Udaku, and inspires his radicalization in helping Black people globally when he becomes a War Dog in Oakland. This leads to tragic results for himself and the future of Wakanda when he must hide his son Erik, and Erik's mother in plain sight. (Part of a Series)

Book series chronicles how Prince N'Jobu Udaku met Erik Killmonger's mother, follows their courtship and the birth of their son Erik and his rise to become Killmonger.

Also, I don't own any Marvel characters and shit.

Notes

I love the Black Panther movie, and many have wondered about Erik Killmonger's mother. So I decided to start my series with how N'Jobu met the mother of his son.

Part 1of the series details how Erik's parents met, fell in love, and eventually conceived our favorite Marvel anti-villain. (I say anti-villain because Erik had some legit reasons to whoop Wakanda's ass and take over, he just went about it the wrong way because...reasons!) N'Jobu finds it difficult to hide his son and his woman in plain sight with the clock ticking on stealing vibranium with Klaue. Part one takes us right up to where the Black Panther movie starts.

Part 2 of the series will follow Erik to MIT where he comes into his own solidified political consciousness after meeting the love of his life (because we all want to see him fucking too, let's be honest). He soon starts training to become the badass we all know and love after going black-ops before heading off to Wakanda to claim his throne. It will detail what happens to him after he was "killed" by T'Challa where we find out that bad guys don't always stay dead.

Part 3 goes into the political turmoil and post-civil war drama in Wakanda that takes place after the end of the Black Panther movie. This final book (spoiler alert, lol!) will reveal how Erik was actually saved by T'Challa, but kept in a cryogenic chamber (like Bucky). It's discovered that Erik has his own secret family that T'Challa is trying to hide, essentially repeating the mistakes of his father. Lots of political drama and the Jabari tribe will be involved, so yes M'Baku witcho thick ass! This final book will reconcile Erik and his parents legacy, and yes bitches, there will be a happy ending because our boy deserves it.

Basically, I'm writing a sweeping saga. Thank you for reading in advance. Please comment or share the story, and please, link me to any other cool Black Panther stories that are written for the grown and sexy. I want to read it all.

My series title comes from a line in the Ursula Rucker spoken word/song "Brown Boy", Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jdux7lbRW30

Thank you for coming to my long ass TED talk!
"Handheld seduction hijacking my point of view

Everybody's watching
Checking for minutiae
And I wish I cared less
But, I wanna be on your mind"

Joi -- “Stare At Me”

N’Jobu Udaku could be stubborn when he wanted to be. For several weeks he refused to attend any Black Student Union meetings on the UC Berkley campus while he was completing his masters in Political Science. His roommate Bakari Dunduza (né, Julius Greene—he changed his name to Bakari to embrace some nebulous unknown African heritage), kept pestering him about being involved in Black campus politics.

“Bakari,” N’Jobu would sigh, rolling his eyes at him, “I am Wakandan, I know who I am and where my people come from. Why do I need to be part of an organization that is so fixated on heritage?”

Bakari often gave N’Jobu an exasperated glare, his round glasses slipping on his nose as he stared at the arrogant exchange student with the regal bearing and penetrating dark brown eyes. This time was no exception.

“We’re all African, and we’re trying to survive America,” Bakari said.

“You are American, and you are trying to survive your first semester exams,” N’Jobu answered sipping on a cup of English Breakfast tea and perusing the New York Stock Exchange and Wall Street Journal simultaneously. His breakfast of lukewarm scrambled eggs and slightly burnt toast sat untouched while they sat inside the University cafeteria after the seven-a.m. morning rush.

Bakari sat across from him, a stack of Black Student Union flyers in his hand and a soggy bowl of cereal pushed to the side on the table.

“What’s wrong with getting in touch with our heritage while we also organize around issues that impact us?”

“What issues impact you, hmm? You are on an elite campus in the UC system. Your parents are both lawyers at private firms. You vacation on Martha’s Vineyard every summer. What exactly is your struggle, brother?” N’Jobu’s voice was teasing, his bright clear eyes shining with mischief.

“Man, fuck you,” Bakari said, picking up a plastic spoon and swirling limp flakes around his cereal bowl.

“You mad?” N’Jobu asked.

“Naw, forget it bruh,” Bakari answered, pushing his bowl away again, still clutching his flyers tight.

“You’re mad. Seriously?”

“Look bruh, just go to one meeting. It’s a good way to meet other Black people on campus, network…and, on my mother man, the finest honeys be there. There’s always good snacks too.”
“Do you ever not think of food?”

Bakari reached over and snatched one of the burnt pieces of buttered toast on N’Jobu’s plate.

“Food is my drug, man, for reals,” Bakari said stuffing the blackened wheat toast in his mouth, munching loudly.

N’Jobu picked up one of the green Black Student Union Flyers from Bakari’s stack and looked it over. The meeting was only for one hour. Food was being provided by a local Ethiopian restaurant. The agenda was simple: talks of Spring Elections for officers, plans to march at an upcoming Mumia Abu Jamal rally, and then an open discussion of continental Africans and the Diaspora.

“My dude, just peep one meeting. If it ain’t your thang, then cool,” Bakari said.

N’Jobu looked at his friend, folded up the flyer and stuck it inside a class folder next to his plate of food.

“One meeting. And the food better be good.”

“Free food is always good, son,” Bakari answered with a big grin on his face.

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The Black Student Union meeting took place inside a large campus meeting hall near the library. Rows of white folding chairs were arranged in a semi-circle in front of a podium decorated with red, black and green colored streamers. A large placard leaned against the podium with the BSU insignia on it, a simple Black Power Fist also colored red, black and green.

N’Jobu was shocked at the number of students who showed up. He counted at least seventy when he took his seat in the back near the exit. If the meeting bored him, he wanted to make a discreet and quiet exit. Soon, the meeting space became standing room only. The vast majority of the members were female, at least sixty percent of the attendees. But N’Jobu had already been made keenly aware that Black American women tended to stay in college and graduate at a higher rate than their male counterparts on campus. They also took on a lot more of the leadership roles on campus too. N’Jobu now also understood why the men who did come to the meetings did so—the women here were gorgeous. There were all sizes and all shades of Black, and these sisters were sharp, organized, and ready to shake up the world. The energy in the room was buzzing. Like there was an expectation of something.

Bakari walked in and eased his way to the back where N’Jobu had saved him a seat.

“This place is packed,” N’Jobu said.

“The BSU from San Francisco State is here, and so are some sisters from Mills College and a few jc’s too. The Mumia Abu Jamal march is a big deal.” Bakari’s head swiveled around looking for something. “I guess the food ain’t here yet,” he said, “I’m hungry as fuck.”

A pretty dark brown skinned woman with long box braids giggled when she heard Bakari. N’Jobu leaned in towards her and whispered, “I apologize for my friend’s language.” The woman gazed into N’Jobu’s eyes and giggled again.

“That’s okay,” she said, warming up to N’Jobu’s deep voice and lilting Wakandan accent, “I’m hungry too and was wondering where the food was myself.”

N’Jobu smiled and the woman’s smile grew wider. Bakari nudged N’Jobu in his side with an elbow.
“Cool it, bruh. Keep that Wakanda-bringing-sexy-back shit under wraps and give other niggas a chance up in here.”

“I’m just talking,” N’Jobu protested.

“Naw man, your voice be having women dropping panties before they even know your name. Don’t talk. Just sit there and listen until I get a chance.”

N’Jobu glanced around the room. He caught a few women sneaking looks his way, and he tried to be subtle scopeing them out too. He hadn’t really interacted with very many Black women on campus in the last few weeks. It wasn’t that he lacked interest, he’d just been busy with his studies, and also keeping on track with his duties at home as the second son of a King. His older brother T’Chaka was being groomed to take on the mantle of King when the time came, and he himself was being groomed to become the Ambassador of Wakanda, thus his graduate studies in America. After his studies, he would have to return to Wakanda for a compulsory eighteen-month enlistment in the Wakanda Elite Fighting Unit, a military wing of his reclusive and isolationist nation. After his mandatory military duties, he would transition into his Ambassador role, and soon he would be paired up with a proper wife…

N’Jobu shook his head and tried to detach himself from all the things he was required to do for his nation in the future. He was enjoying his time in America, even when he witnessed her contradictions while being touted as the leading world power. He chuckled to think how ass-backward the country really was, how much superior his own country was compared to the U.S. in technology, culture, and governance. However, he found Black Americans intriguing and a bit naïve in some things, so he was curious to learn more about them. He chose Berkley and San Francisco to live because it was touted as a bastion of liberal thinking. Also, it was warmer than New York, the place where his father preferred for him to be because of the United Nations. But N’Jobu liked being far away from his family right now. There was a freedom in people not knowing who he really was.

The meeting began right on time with a pleasantly plump light-skinned woman taking the podium. She tapped the microphone to make sure it was on, then pushed her long ponytail over one shoulder and spoke.

“Hi everyone, my name is Tonette. Oh, my, I’m so excited that so many of you made it out here tonight! Hi Sheila!” Tonette waved at a woman seated near the entrance. “We’re going to start the meeting right now, and just to let you know, the food will be arriving halfway through, so we’ll stop for a break to eat, and then finish up with the Diaspora discussion.”

N’Jobu looked at his expensive Rolex to check the time. The woman seated next to him saw him checking, and her eyes looked taken aback by how flashy his watch looked. He was always slow to remember not to wear too many accessories that screamed wealth, especially when he was supposed to be coming from a “poor” country, but N’Jobu was accustomed to nice things and found it hard to transition his wardrobe and appearance. But Bakari was always telling him that it didn’t matter what he wore, N’Jobu carried a sense of entitlement and richness within him. Even if he was wearing Levi’s and a plain white T-shirt with flip flops, the gait in his walk, the smooth rich unblemished melanin of his dark skin, the pearly white of his perfect teeth, his always fresh line ups and the promise of sensual pleasures in his honey-tinged baritone told on him.

So N’Jobu worked on being humble. A lot. People waited on him hand and foot back home, so when he first lived in the States, he had to get accustomed to doing all the things himself. Like shopping, cleaning, paying bills. At least he was a very good cook. In the palace of Wakanda he loved being in the kitchen with all the gourmet chefs that prepared all the family meals. They often let him cook with them, and this love of cooking kept him connected when he felt a little homesick.
Bakari was grateful for this skill with his own non-cooking ass. N’Jobu found that American women loved men who cooked, especially those who cooked well, and he used this to his advantage when he did find time to woo women in their shared graduate student housing.

The women he did date were often other graduate students, a few women of color, but the majority white because that’s what he was often around because of the circles he ran with on the diplomatic track. The Black women he dated and wanted to keep dating just couldn’t deal with his personality and his life plan. It was true that he was arrogant. He was prideful. He was also up front that his goal was to become an Ambassador and that he would have to marry a Wakandan woman as part of tradition. It was the tradition part that drove Black women against him. And also, the fact that he never wanted to introduce them to his family.

One Black woman he came close to dating exclusively turned on him when she claimed that he always thought Continental Africans were better than Black Americans. He couldn’t help it. He felt this was true most of the time. All the advantages Black Americans had in the U.S., and he couldn’t understand why they weren’t doing so much better. Especially when Continental Africans could come to America and often outperform American born Blacks at Universities. But he had a strong sex drive and liked sex a whole lot, and the women he slept with loved sleeping with him a whole lot too, even when they were mad at him half the time. So, he often kept his opinions to himself to keep the peace. Until he grew bored with them.

His current fuck buddy was an art major from Cameroon, and thus far, she had no problems with his diplomacy goals or his dick. He hoped she wouldn’t be here tonight because he felt like flirting a bit. A thick-thighed cutie with a small waist and glorious behind was leaning against a wall to his left, and she was giving him lustful looks. He stood up from his seat and walked over to her.

“You can have my seat, I’ll stand,” he said to her. She looked up at him, his six-foot-two athletic frame towering over her.

“Thank you…”

“N’Jobu,” he said.

The cutie bit down on her lower lip, and N’Jobu took a split second to brush past her so she could move and take his seat. She glanced back at him.

“Andrea,” she said back to him.

He watched her step past Bakari and plant her lush behind in his former seat. The woman that was next to N’Jobu shifted in her seat away from the new girl. It had been a minute since N’Jobu had been with a thick girl. His Cameroon girl was long and lean, so a change would be nice. For a split second, he imagined Andrea’s fat ass bouncing on his lap. He shook away the thoughts and focused his attention back to the meeting.

Califia Stevens thought she would have an easier time finding parking for her motorcycle in the campus parking lot. Apparently Berkley students had a huge number of scooters and other motorcyclists on campus.

By the time she was able to navigate her way out of Oakland, she was already thirty minutes late to the BSU meeting because of all the circling around she had to do before she found a spot. She texted Bakari to save her a plate if there was any food left. She’d need to gobble down some protein before she started her waitress gig at the Blue Rose later that night.

Pulling off her helmet, Califia stuck her phone and keys in her backpack and jogged in the direction
of the BSU meeting.

She could hear the loud voices of the meeting still going on, and when she checked her watch, there was still 10 minutes left until the meeting was over. Perhaps Tonette would still give her a minute to talk about Aarav Naidu, an Indian American conservative who had written a book that was so full of anti-Black sentiment, Califia felt compelled to let as many BSU organizations throughout Oakland and San Francisco know about his book tour through their schools. She carried a heavily highlighted copy of the book in her backpack to show the Berkley students.

Before opening the glass door of the meeting space, Califia quickly pulled off her beanie and fluffed out the twists of her thick auburn hair. She took a deep breath clutching her helmet and walked inside.

The smell of tasty Ethiopian food hit her nose, and she felt her mouth water when she saw people tearing pieces of injera bread to scoop food from their paper plates. Looking around for the Berkley BSU President, she spotted Tonette speaking to Bakari, and a tall dude in a cream-colored turtleneck. She started walking over towards Tonette when the dude in the turtleneck noticed her approach and started staring at her. At first, she thought he recognized her and tried to place where she may have seen him before herself. But then her eyes found Tonette’s and she was apologizing to her for being tardy.

“Girl, go on up to the mic and do your thing. You still have time,” Tonette said.

“You don’t want to introduce me first?”

“Sis, everybody knows who you are around here,” Tonette teased.

Califia handed Tonette her helmet and took off her backpack to retrieve the book she wanted to show the group.

“Aye, yo, Califia, come meet my boy N’Jobu—”

“You save me a plate, Bakari?”

“Yeah, I got you—”

Califia barely glanced at N’Jobu as she strode up to the podium.

“What’s good, Fam?” Califia said into the mic. Her voice drew the attention of everyone. A few in the crowd acknowledged her and said her name with great affection. Califia let herself look around the room first to make sure she had every eye on her. She must’ve been quite a sight to some of the gathered as they eyed her form-fitting biking gear of black pants and matching black jacket. She had new biker boots that she wore on the weekend, but today she was just sporting comfortable Adidas kicks. She would be wearing high heels tonight for her job and needed comfortable shoes to ride home in later that night. She wiped a finger across her silver nose ring and continued addressing the crowd.

“My name is Califia Stevens, I’m the V.P. of SFSU’s Black Student Union. I just wanted to let you all be aware of an author that is doing a campus book tour this week in our area.”

Califia held up the thick hardback book.

“His name is Aarav Naidu. He is a Dawes Fellow at the Ivy Conservative Think Tank in Washington D.C. His book is racist, anti-woman, anti-Black drivel. He is speaking at my campus tomorrow night, and he will be speaking on this campus the day after that.”
The room was quiet as Califia gave more details about the book. She had an attentive audience.

“I feel it’s important that you are aware of what this man represents. I know on social media and on tv this man is getting praise for being the new voice of conservative thinking that looks at ‘both sides’ of the issues. But this man is a piece of shit and his book is trash.”

People began laughing after she called him a piece of shit. She saw Bakari recording her with his phone, and she gave him an annoyed look. He was always recording everything, trying to create a time capsule of his activism. His friend standing next to him had his arms crossed over his chest, listening to her every word.

“Tomorrow night some members of our BSU will be attending his Q & A, and it would be hella cool if many of you here could join us if you have time. I apologize for the short notice, but we weren’t sure if he was still going to appear on our campus. The more bodies we have in the room, the more these fools realize that they can’t just come to our schools and spew garbage. This man is on some oldschool Bell Curve racial hierarchy bullshit. My BSU members are willing to come out on Friday to back you up if you decide to go to his Q & A here.”

Califia felt her stomach rumbling, so she wrapped up her speech quickly by giving out times and locations and telling the students the website address to get more info. She thanked everyone for their time, stuffed the book back into her backpack and zoomed in on Bakari and what she hoped was her saved food plate in his hand.

“Here,” Bakari said handing her a plate.

Califia planted herself onto an open chair, put the plate on her lap and began scarfing down spicy lentil samosas.

“Whoa girl, don’t give yourself indigestion,” Tonette said, handing Califia a can of soda.

“N’Jobu, this is Califia. Cali, this is N’Jobu,” Bakari said.

Califia stuffed a whole samosa in her mouth and looked up at N’Jobu. She opened the can of orange soda, gulped down half and finally said, “Hi.”

“Starving, I see,” N’Jobu said, blessing her with his megawatt smile.

“I haven’t eaten anything all day,” she answered, dipping the soft torn pieces of injera into a mixture of cabbage and seasoned strips of beef.

“Where you been all day?” Bakari asked.

“Went up to see my Dad,” she said. Bakari nodded.

“Your father couldn’t feed you after a nice visit?” N’Jobu asked, a teasing grin on his face.

“My Dad’s in prison,” she answered matter of fact, licking her fingers and focusing on her plate again.

N’Jobu’s grin froze, and Bakari changed the subject quickly.

“Yo, I’ll be there for the Naidu thing on Thursday,” Bakari said.

“Thanks.”

Bakari looked over at N’Jobu who was still trying to recover from his accidental faux pas. He
seemed genuinely flummoxed. Tonette appeared nonplussed.

“So...uh, N’Jobu, Califia and I are a part of the West African Dance Troupe I drum for. We’ve been performing together for over six years now,” Bakari said.

“That’s very cool,” N’Jobu said, his voice soft as he watched Califia.

“What happened with the Diaspora discussion?” Califia asked Tonette.

“Had to cut it short because the Mumia Abu Jamal march took up more time than we thought. It’s going to be huge. People are really ready to show up and show out next week.”

“Good, they should,” Califia said.

N’Jobu was still looking at her. Now that her belly was full, Califia took a good long look at him. He was really good looking. Like model good looking. And there was something about his eyes that made him even more attractive. What her mother would call soft eyes,... kind eyes, but with the right hint of secret scoundrel. She wondered what his bedroom eyes looked like. And she immediately questioned where that thought came from. She couldn’t place his accent, so she wondered if he purposely tried to downplay it to fit in, or if he had been in the States for a long time. She looked at her watch again and then noticed the bracelet on N’Jobu’s left wrist. It was tucked underneath his sleeve, but the obsidian colored round beads with the strange lavender markings caught her eye. She reached up and touched his hand. N’Jobu jumped a little by the sudden feel of her fingers on his skin.

“It’s beautiful,” Califia said admiring the beads, taking a closer look at the writing. Something clicked in her mind. The memory of a bad blind date set up by Bakari. They were at the Museum of Modern Art, the guy was fine as hell, but handsy, and Califia was looking at an exhibit on textiles. There was a display of Central and East African blankets...

“This is Wakandan, right?” Califia asked, recognizing the markings on N’Jobu’s beads from the similar markings she saw on those blankets a few weeks ago. N’Jobu grinned again.

“Good eye,” he said. He quickly tucked it back under his sleeve.

"Are you...?"

“Yes.”

They were looking at one another, a long silence stretching between them. Until Andrea walked over with another woman.

“N’Jobu,” Andrea said, stepping in front of Califia and tugging on N’Jobu’s arm, “come and meet some friends of mine.”

Andrea pulled N’Jobu towards her, he stopped and looked back down at Califia.

“Here, let me throw that away for you. Are you done with your soda?” he asked.

“Yes, thanks,” Califia said, handing him her trash.

N’Jobu took her trash and followed Andrea to the other side of the room. Tonette took her leave, leaving Bakari and Califia together.

“Is that his girlfriend?” Califia asked.
“Naw. Why? You interested?”

Califia didn’t answer, just watched N’Jobu interact with Andrea and several other women. He appeared to be pouring on the charm because they were all smiles and glossy lips hanging onto his every word.

“Be warned, that nigga slangs dick,” Bakari said.

Califia made a face.

“Whyyyyyy are you like that, Bakari? Did I ask about his dick?”

“Didn’t have to, the way you were staring him down, I know the thirst is real,” he said.

“Negro, please,” she said.

“You my girl, my homie for life, but I know parched when I see it. You and a bunch of other women in here. But that one right there,” Bakari pointed to Andrea,

“I’ma be hearing her get them walls beat up tonight.”

“You are so crude,” Califia said, sizing up Andrea. Babygirl had all the right weaponry, so it shouldn’t be a surprise that N’Jobu would step to her. Califia checked her watch again.

“Shit, I gotta dip,” she said.

“Word? I’ll walk you out,” Bakari said, “but let me make a to go plate right quick.”
We get a peek at N’Jobu’s journal writing and... smut.

Chapter Notes

Hope to have more chapters up later in the week.

Chapter 2

Passion burning, causing rapture of laughter
Pressure building, falling faster and faster
If I told you that you rock my world, I want you around me
Would you let me call you my girl, my girlfriend, my girlfriend?
I can give you the life you deserve, just say the word, baby
And I got you, darling, I got you
1500 or Nothin—“Girl”

October 5th, 20—

It is early morning, and I must write down my thoughts. I confess that I have not been consistent with writing in my journal as I had challenged myself to do while staying in this country. But there are so many distractions, (good ones!) that it is hard to sit still and just transcribe words onto paper. I finally went to one of Bakari’s BSU meetings a few days ago. I admit that it actually turned out to be a productive use of my time. I met some interesting people. However, I embarrassed myself in front of a woman who is a good friend of Bakari. Her name is Califia Stevens. Bakari has known this woman since he was ten. They grew up together. She is a dancer for the group he drums for. He says she’s one of the best in the city.

I meet different women all the time, and I am usually very good at knowing where I stand with them, but Holy Bast, this woman, I feel like I’m wearing roller skates and trying to cross a road filled with marbles when I speak to her. I knew I was in trouble when I made the mistake of questioning why her father did not feed her while she was on a visit with him. She said he was in prison, and I swear to Sekmet, my face turned to stone. She noticed my kimoyo beads and then Andrea, the woman I am seeing now, rescued me from the quicksand of my ignorance.
I don’t know why it bothers me so much, but I feel like I made a horrible first impression and I need to redeem myself to her. She is so different. Very direct with people. Fierce. She came into the meeting towards the end, and the moment she walked in the door, I felt like the energy in the room shifted. She is very striking to look at. Her skin is so brown, like the deep dark red-brown clay near Warrior Falls back home. And she has these dark freckles all over her nose and cheeks. I have never met a Black woman with hair the natural color of cinnamon. She reminds me so much of someone from back home, and I just can’t remember who. She is both familiar and strange to me. Normally I would feel uneasy with people who keep me on edge, but there is something about her that intrigues me. She was fairly dismissive of me. The only time she took an interest was when she saw my beads.

I must make a note that she touched my hand to get a look at my beads, and she gave me a static electricity shock with her touch. I shall take that as a warning sign from Bast that Califia should be given a wide berth from me in the future. If I ever see her again. She and Bakari seem close, but he has never brought her around to the apartment like his other friends. She is very opinionated, and I must take a look at this book she came to the meeting to talk about. I have seen this writer Aarav on television. He seems pretty benign, but Califia was very heated about his message. I hear the term “anti-Black” being thrown around a lot. Aarav comes from immigrants and is Indian American, and I’m sure as a person of color himself, he must be aware of the problems Black Americans encounter at times. Califia called him a piece of shit. I don’t know if this is a fair assessment of someone she doesn’t know personally, but the BSU crowd didn’t challenge her assertion. Andrea has a copy of the book and will loan it to me. I will read it this weekend.

The rest of the time there I spoke with Andrea and her classmates. They are in the Literature Department. Really smart women. And Andrea, well, let’s just say that Renaissance Literature isn’t the only thing she’s good at.

Bakari seemed pleased that I finally attended a meeting. He is a good man. I am glad that we have become roommates and friends. When we moved in together last June, I wasn’t sure if I could take his “All Black Everything All The Time” energy. Now after five months, I can truly say he’s one of my closest friends here. The man is brilliant. He’ll probably end up an influential lobbyist in Washington one day. But he is sincere with the love of his people. He and Califia seem to have a shared sense of purpose. They really want to save Black people from… I don’t know what really, but they are passionate.

I am curious to know why Califia’s father is in prison. I know she has a full dance scholarship to SFSU, and Bakari told me her home life is a little sketchy. It must be difficult to live with a parent you love incarcerated for a long time. Bakari said her father has been in prison since she was thirteen. It’s part of why she and Bakari are so close. He wouldn’t divulge anything more out of respect for Califia’s privacy. Their relationship appears completely platonic. Califia talks to him like a younger sibling. But the other day he was talking about her, something trivial about a drumming rehearsal and how Califia never wants to listen to the drum cues and moves when she wants to, and I have to say, the gleam in his eye tells me he probably wishes they were something more. I could be reading more into it than there really is. He definitely admires her.

More soon.

N.U.
N’Jobu left the pen he was using inside the pages of his journal and placed the leather-bound pages inside the drawer next to his bed and turned off his bedside lamp. His nude body slipped comfortably back under the silk plum-colored sheets and matching duvet. It was 5a.m., the sky just starting to lighten outside his bedroom window. The world was still quiet.

He felt a warm body shift next to his right side, and then Andrea’s arm was draped across him, her soft fingers caressing the hard planes of his chest. She allowed an index finger to circle his left nipple which hardened at her attention.

“You finished writing?” she whispered. Her short curly bob of jet black hair cascaded all around her face, and without her make-up on, she was even more gorgeous in N’Jobu’s eyes. He glanced down at her lips which were plump, but small. They turned him on because when he had his cock down her throat the night before, it just made his dick look even bigger and more powerful sliding in and out.

“Yes,” he answered.

Her fingers left his nipple and descended to his stomach, tracing the indentations of his six-pack abs, and then teased further down until she was gripping his already thickening cock in her hand. She gave two short tugs on the head, then a long and languid stroke.

“Damn, woman. You still hungry for more?” he laughed, pulling the covers back so he could watch her delicate hand work his length.

Andrea leaned in closer. He could see her full breasts and pert nipples just waiting for his tongue and touch. She cupped his balls and gave a slight squeeze and he moaned.

“N’Jobu, baby, you have such a pretty dick,” she said.

“You like this dick?”

“I love this dick,” she said.

“Why do you love this dick?” he asked.

N’Jobu was a verbal man when it came to sex. He liked to talk and be talked to, and it was hard to find women who were good at it without sounding like fake corny ass porn stars. However, Andrea was a woman who knew how to make that verbal shit sing.

She sat up and positioned herself between his legs, holding onto his dick and arching her back so he could see her ass in the air. N’Jobu felt his mouth partially open as he released a deep sigh at the beauty of what she presented to him. She took her velvety tongue and licked him from his balls all the way up to the tip of his length.
“I love this dick because it’s so long and thick, Daddy. The head is so big, I can barely get my mouth around it…”
Andrea opened her lips and took in the large mushroom cap of his dick, her tongue playing with the head using teasing licks, and then sucking out the pre-cum that was already dripping from him.

“And baby, you have such a big fat sack, I love to feel your balls slapping against my ass…” she continued, now engulfing more of his cock into her warm mouth.

“Show me how much you love this dick,” he growled out, now gripping her hair with his left hand. Andrea slid her mouth further down, and began bobbing her head, her left hand holding her balance, her right hand still caressing his heavy balls. N’Jobu’s eyes alternated between watching her hallowed out cheeks bulging with his thickness and the jiggle in her round brown ass cheeks.

Andrea came up for air and stared into N’Jobu’s heavy-lidded eyes. His lush lips were twisted up in a way that tried to hold in deep moans from disturbing Bakari in the bedroom across the small hallway. It wasn’t working.

“You got me so wet,” Andrea said, catching her breath.

“Let me hear it then,” he said, releasing his grip on her hair and leaning back on his elbows. He watched her right hand release his twitching dick and snake between her legs. She took two fingers and plunged them into her slick opening. Wiggling her fingers around, she gazed at him with euphoric, almost dazed eyes, and they both could hear the wet slippery sounds so loud in the quiet room.

“You hear it, Daddy?” Andrea asked, adding a third finger.

“I hear your pussy baby,” N’Jobu said, gripping his own dick and fisting it slowly. Andrea arched her back a little more, just enough to make her cheeks bounce.

“You are a nasty, bitch, you know that? Playing with your pussy so early in the morning. Making all that cake bounce. You must want me to cum in your face. Huh? You want me to paint your face?”

Andrea squeezed her eyes shut as a long groan of “Ohhhhh!!” escaped from her mouth. Her fingers were working faster.

“N’Jobu, you got my pussy dripping!!”

She was panting now, rather loud.

“Shh, keep it down,” he said.

“I can’t!” she whined, her eyes now open and focused on his hand beating his thick meat in front of her face.

The tightening in his balls let him know he couldn’t hold out much longer. He really wanted to slide a condom on and beat her cheeks up hard and fast from behind, break her fucking back if he could… but the sweet sounds of her fingers plunging in and out of her swollen pussy lips just pushed him too far.

“Take this, cum! Take it…Fuck!!” he hollered at her, yanking her hair to pull her face back as thick spurts of creamy white splashed across her face. Andrea opened her mouth to catch a lot of it. He groaned louder than he wanted to, still squeezing out the last drops of his seed on her face. His impressive cumload made Andrea smile, her quick tongue licking up the salty-sweet semen from her lips.
“Come sit on my face,” he said, and Andrea scrambled up his body like she was climbing a tree in a park and ground her sopping clit and juicy vulva onto N’Jobu’s full lips and long tongue. His hands held her ass cheeks as he drove his tongue deep inside of her for a few deep probes, and then he was sucking on her swollen clit with his entire mouth.

It didn’t take long for Andrea to cum, drowning his mouth and face with her juices. N’Jobu knew he would have to apologize to Bakari again. No matter how quiet he tried to have sex in his bedroom, it never worked out. It was what it was.

###
Chapter Summary

Califia goes to spend a self-care day with her bestie, Bakari, and instead plays witness to the complicated romantic entanglements of N'Jobu.

Chapter 3

"Gonna put the windows down
Cuz it's getting hot in here
Yeah, I know you feel it now..."
starRo & Kyle Dion—"Time Off"

Califia parked her motorcycle in the guest spot of Bakari’s apartment building carport. The new graduate housing he lived in was pretty sweet. Walking up the steps to his second-floor spot, she kept an eye out for the specific potted cactus plant that a spare key was supposed to be hidden under. She found it with no problem and let herself into the apartment.

She was pleasantly surprised to see how neat and clean the living room appeared. Bakari had always been a slob, so Califia knew that this pristine abode was the work of N'Jobu for sure. The second thing that caught her eye in the room was the bookshelf near the front entrance. The dark mahogany wood shelves were stuffed with books on International Law, finance, and geography. There were a few bestselling non-fiction books and some popular commercial fare taking up shelf space too. The Donald Goines novels on the bottom shelf had to be Bakari's. She couldn't imagine N'Jobu being into street lit.

Califia walked out onto the balcony to sit on the overstuffed gray leather couch that Bakari had owned since his freshman year of college. She plopped herself on the couch, leaned back and allowed the warm sun to bake her legs. She was wearing her favorite pair of olive-colored "skorts", a polyester short and skirt combo that made her feel like a tennis player. She was rocking a classic "Black Star" Hip-Hop t-shirt that belonged to her father and she was feeling pretty hipster-ish in her black motorcycle boots.

Closing her eyes, she stroked her freshly braided cornrows and waited for Bakari to show up. Today they were going to practice capoeira together, taking turns playing the berimbau while the other worked on their Ginga moves and then they would spar off together play fighting until they were exhausted. Which usually meant they would play for an hour, and then kick back and toke on a spliff and listen to new FDM music online.

She also had intense practices scheduled for the following week with the theater director at her school to prep for their winter dance concert. Today was going to be a gift, a bit of free time to let off stress from school and spend time doing a bit of self-care with a friend. After today, the next five weeks would be spent watching what she ate, lifting weights in the school gym, rehearsals, finishing papers, studying for tests, and trying to keep dick appointments with her sort-of boyfriend Xavier.

Xavier was getting on her nerves lately, so she wasn't sure if they would make it to Christmas. He
wanted her to come to New Orleans with him to stay with his family for the holidays, but she really wanted to visit her mother in New Jersey. It had been a year since she'd seen her mother. Their relationship was under great strain lately, and she really wanted to patch things up. Califia was hoping that at some point later in the day she could talk to Bakari about her mom. The sun felt amazing on her legs, all toasty and warm, but the black t-shirt was roasting her upper body, so she stood up to take it off revealing a cute lime-green tank top underneath. She was folding the t-shirt when she saw N'Jobu running towards the apartment unit through the open parking lot. He was shirtless, a thin blue backpack hugging his shoulders, with wrap-around sunglasses covering his eyes. The blue and black knee-length running shorts he wore hugged his muscular thighs.

Califia found herself feeling a little flushed in the face. The first time she saw him at the BSU meeting, she could tell that he had a very nice physique. But what she was witnessing running towards her at this moment was pure lady porn. Before he got to the apartment he stopped near a bench that sat in an open lawn space and stretched his legs. The sweat on his skin glistened, and she admired his calves and that (Lord Jesus) sinfully round derriere of his. She gazed spellbound as he flexed taut glutes.

After he was done stretching, he walked to the apartment. He hadn't noticed her out on his balcony. She sat back down on the couch. She wasn't expecting him to be here. The sound of his feet bounding up the stairs prompted her to put her t-shirt back on. She thought it prudent to wait for him to enter and get himself dressed first before bounding out from the balcony and scaring him. Perhaps it would be even better to be found sitting in the livingroom when he walked in. She didn't want him to know she had been outside practically eye fucking him as he cooled down his run.

She quickly stood up to head into the livingroom when she heard his keys in the door, but then a woman walked into the livingroom wearing only a salmon-colored man's button up shirt and nothing else. Califia dove back down onto the balcony couch unseen and mortified. The woman hadn't heard her come into the apartment. It was the same woman from the BSU meeting. She listened as N'Jobu said "Hey, beautiful," and then there was the sound of kissing. Fuck. How was she going to get away without appearing awkward?

The sound of a door shutting, and a shower running came next, and she could hear Andrea chatting to N'Jobu from the bedroom. Califia stuck her head up above the couch again and could see an open bedroom door and Andrea's legs dangling on the edge of a bed. She was still talking to N'Jobu loudly over the running shower, and Califia could hear N'Jobu responding. The shower didn't last long, and soon N'Jobu was stepping out from a steamy bathroom wearing nothing but a white towel around his waist.

He walked into his bedroom and stood in front of Andrea's legs, and at that point, Califia ducked her head back down. Her cell phone vibrated in her skort pocket and she pulled it out to see a text from Bakari. He was only forty minutes away. Cool. This may turn out fine-

Califia sucked in a breath and covered her eyes with her hands. Now she could hear the unmistakable sounds of a bed squeaking because of vigorous sex taking place. "Shit," she whispered. Not only was the bed rattling like crazy, but N'Jobu must've being put it down real nice because Califia could hear Andrea making a ton of noise. Like whimper crying, not even full-on words, just struggle talking. Straight gibberish.

Taking another chance, Califia popped her head above the couch. N'Jobu's bedroom door was halfway closed, so she scrambled off the couch and skittered her way to the front door. She opened it and closed it behind her quickly and sat on the front steps.

Luckily, she couldn't hear very much from outside and tried to calm the rapid beating of her heart.
She would've died had N'Jobu caught her. She checked her phone again and sat quietly on the steps wishing Bakari would hurry.

Thirty minutes later, Bakari strolled up the steps, surprised to see her sitting outside in the heat.

"You didn't find the key?" he asked.

She jumped up and followed him into the apartment. "Please let them be done," Califia thought to herself as she made herself comfortable on the loveseat facing the balcony. She had left the balcony door open exactly as she had found it with the balcony screen closed. Bakari went into the kitchen and called out,

"You want anything to drink?"

"Water," she responded.

Bakari brought over a small bottled water and handed to her.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked.

"What?"

"Why are you looking all weird?"

"Nothing, I was just thinking. Got a lot going on, so I'm a little frazzled right now."

Bakari drank from his own bottle of water, and at that moment, Andrea walked out. She was wearing what looked to be her own clothes now, a simple white linen dress, sans any shoes.

"Hey, Bakari," Andrea said, obviously at home in their apartment as she walked into the kitchen and opened the fridge.

"Andrea," Bakari said, and Califia heard that strain in his voice when he was annoyed with someone but still trying to be nice. Andrea poured herself a glass of juice and when she took a swallow, finally noticed Califia on the loveseat. "Oh, hey there," Andrea said.

"Hi," Califia said.

"I'm Andrea."

Califia nodded and then looked over at Bakari. Sipping water had never looked so taxing before, and Califia knew without a doubt Bakari couldn't stand Andrea. They all heard N'Jobu's bedroom door open and watched him emerge looking refreshed and comfortable in a t-shirt with gray sweatpants. Califia silently prayed that there wouldn't be a dick print, and God took that moment not to answer prayers.

N'Jobu's eyes landed on hers, and a bright smile played out on his lips when he saw her.

"Califia Stevens," he said.

She waved at him, then felt stupid for waving.

"Hey, N'Jobu," she said, looking away from him lest she drop her gaze down to his sweatpants.

"W'sup Bakari," he said, slapping hands with Bakari and then making his way to where Andrea was
standing in the kitchen with the fridge door open. The furnished graduate apartment wasn't very big, so the room suddenly felt extra full with them all there looking at one another.

Califia gave Bakari another glance. She felt a little confused because she thought they would be alone in the apartment so they could work on their martial art. Now there appeared to be a potential audience. And she didn't want that.

"What are you two up to?" asked Andrea. Califia felt her left eyebrow shoot up. This woman was coming off a little too familiar.

"Yo, I thought you were going to be ghost for the day, bruh," Bakari said, ignoring Andrea.

"My bad, Bakari. Got my days mixed up," N'Jobu said.

Califia gave Bakari a look of "Wtf?" wondering if they were going to leave or if she and Bakari would have to go to the nearby park. She didn't want to change spots because she was looking forward to smoking weed in peace and in private with Bakari.

The doorbell rang, and when Bakari went to answer it, Califia hissed under her breath at him. "Get rid of them."

Bakari peeked through the peephole, and a vindictive smile curled his lips. He whispered to her, "Dis gone be good, Cali."

He opened the door, "Hey, w'sup Serah," he said.

N'Jobu's head whiplashed around when he heard the name, and Califia swore she could see his body tense when the woman, Serah, walked in. With the tall lithe frame of a supermodel, and sporting tiny Nubian knots that looked like a natural crown on her head, Serah entered the apartment like a woman on a mission. Califia sat up higher on the loveseat.

"Serah," N'Jobu said.

His voice betrayed nothing, and whatever surprise he had when he first heard her name at the door, it was now gone, replaced with the cool veneer of a man who had experience dealing with two jump-offs appearing at the same time in the same space.

Califia wished she had a bowl of popcorn for this shit. Bakari took a seat next to her on the loveseat and she felt his hand nudging her. He whispered in Califia's ear, "Harpo, who dis woman?" and Califia just about died trying to keep a bone-deep guffaw from spilling out of her mouth. She kinda felt embarrassed for N'Jobu. But fuck it. Califia loved a good show.

Andrea closed the fridge door and watched Serah approach.

"Andrea, go on home, I'll check out the Miyamoto doc with you later," N'Jobu said.

"But I thought—"

"Now, Andrea. I'll call you," he said with some added bass in his voice.

His tone conveyed an urgency that was both firm and caressing and Califia found it...seductive. He was deciding how this narrative would play out, and instead of protesting, or pitching a bitch fit as Califia would probably do in the same situation, Andrea simply walked out of the kitchen and around Serah and went into N'Jobu's bedroom.

"Can we talk now?" Serah asked, her Cameroonian accent soft like spring rain. Her voice equally as
seductive as N'Jobu's.

N'Jobu pointed to the balcony and said "Yiza nama," and Serah walked out ahead of him. N'Jobu glanced back over at Bakari and Califia, gave them a shrug and a rakish smile, and then closed the sliding balcony door behind him so that they could have some semblance of privacy. Before Califia could say anything to Bakari, Andrea walked out of N'Jobu's bedroom carrying her purse and wearing kitten heels on her feet. She said nothing to the pair on the loveseat as she saw herself out the front door. After a minute seemed to pass, Califia turned to Bakari and said, "Who is this nigga?"

Bakari burst out laughing, and Califia poked him in his leg.

"Dude! What the fuck was that?" Califia said.

Bakari stood up and Califia followed him into his bedroom. She sat down on his bed as he rummaged through a dresser drawer and pulled out a cigar box that hid his weed. He pulled out a joint, lit it and passed it to Califia so she could hit it first. She took two quick puffs and passed it back to Bakari.

"Talk to me, B," Califia said, her hand back out for the joint again.

"I done told you. That man out there is a dick slanger. Serah is like his long-term squeeze. I mean, my dude doesn't really do the whole girlfriend thing. He's mad respectful about his shit though, but occasionally he slips up with his hoetation schedule—"

"Wild overlap. Is Andrea his new shorty?"

"I can't even tell you for sure. That woman has been here every goddamn day since he met her last week. He fucked her the first night he met her. I mean, that's not a judgment, but she got sprung on him so fast, she can't leave him alone. He must like her because he keeps letting her come through."

"She looks real comfy around y'all shit for real, B."

"The good thing is, he hasn't cooked for her yet."

"Watchu mean?" Califia asked, her words loosening up as the weed relaxed her.

"N'Jobu can cook his ass off, and when he's really feeling a woman, he starts making her home-cooked meals and shit. I've only seen him and Andrea go out to eat, or they pick up fast food. When he starts cooking, they usually be around him long term. He's cooked for Serah plenty of times. Serah is cool though. Andrea has those stalker tendencies."

"Is the dick too bomb though, that's the question," Califia said, passing the joint back over to Bakari.

"Must be. You saw Andrea get her shit and get the fuck out when he told her to. When have you ever seen shit like that?"

"Dude when you said that "Color Purple" shit, I almost peed!" Califia said, falling back onto Bakari's bed laughing. Bakari grabbed the joint from her fingers and snuffed it out. He grabbed his berimbau that leaned against the wall.

"C'mon, let's play, then we can grab something to eat later," Bakari said.

Califia pulled off her shirt, boots, and socks.

"I'm going to rinse my feet," she said walking out of the room.
The small bathroom was neat and clean. Califia stuck her feet in the bathtub and turned on some cold water and rinsed her toes and the balls of her feet. She used a paper towel to dry them that hung from a dispenser on the sink.

Bakari was already warming up the five-foot-long berimbau when she met him in the livingroom. He had pushed back the loveseat near the bookcase making room for them to move.

"Do you need to warm up?" he asked.

"Nah, I was warmed up before I got here. Let's go," she said positioning herself in front of Bakari and the stringed musical instrument. There was no coffee table, so Califia had plenty of space.

"Do you," he said.

The berimbau reverberated throughout the room with an intense wah-wah sound that Califia adored. Powerful. Loud. Demanding. With the caxixi rattle, his favorite smooth stone and the small baqueta stick in his hand, Bakari guided Califia through some basic capoeira swaying moves. Califia had a strong lower body. Rocking back in forth she started out slow until Bakari picked up the pace on the instrument. Sweeping her legs on the floor, almost like break dancing moves, Califia moved more aggressively. Bakari began singing in Portuguese the songs they learned as children when they first met learning capoeira together.

His voice led her through more fighting moves, and soon she was doing small cartwheels and back handsprings keeping in time with his playing. They switched positions with Califia taking on the berimbau. Her playing wasn't as good as he had been, but she was adequate, her voice strong and commanding. She found herself moving her hips in time to the beat, her high from the weed enhanced by the swaying of her feet. Damn. She was feeling so good.

After thirty minutes, Bakari turned on his stereo system: a simple laptop connected to massive speakers. He played capoeira music so they could now spar together.

It got intense real fast. High sweeping kicks to the body, arms tangling, the interlocking of their legs to flip one another over, their play fighting only stopped when Califia swung her foot around and kicked the shit out of Bakari, sending him down on his ass.

"Damn, Califia," he protested, holding his lip. Both out of breath, drenched in sweat, the capoeira music continued to play as Califia checked Bakari's lower lip. There was no serious damage.

"Alright, ma. I see you not playing today," Bakari said, smiling.

Califia kissed him on his forehead, then did a cartwheel straight into a sliding leg move where she kicked Bakari in his chest to force him to fight again. Bakari wrapped his legs around hers and pinned her to the floor.

"Wow, you guys are rough," Serah said.

Untangling their legs, Bakari and Califia looked up at Serah, who was watching them from the re-opened balcony door. N'Jobu stood next to Serah, observing them on the floor together.

"Please, continue," N'Jobu said.

Califia didn't want to. But they were both standing there staring at her and Bakari. She was still
feeling high, still feeling a little salty about her and Bakari not being able to be alone. But then the
delicious rich sound of the berimbau simmered down in her bones, and with eyes blazing, she
glanced back up at N'Jobu, felt bold enough to let her eyes drift across his body, thinking about the
sounds he was making with Andrea earlier on his bed…the bed that shook so hard…and then she
was looking at those gray sweatpants he was wearing, and yes, oh yes, she could still see that outline
of his manhood. Califia quirked her lips, looked him dead in his eye and began to sway on her feet
again. She and Bakari went off on each other, bending, stooping, leaping, and dancing with one
another until they exploded into another frenzy of fighting that almost turned real until Califia did a
small backflip that caused her to crash into N'Jobu, knocking him back.

N'Jobu grabbed a hold of her arms to keep his balance.

"Sorry," she said, looking up into his face.

Serah clapped wildly.

"Oh my God, that was amazing! I thought you two were going to leap off the balcony!"

N'Jobu was still holding Califia's arms as she was panting from the exertion. She felt good, loving
the feel of perspiration dripping from her body, her tank top sticky, her nipples hard…

N'Jobu was rubbing her arms. Califia looked up into his face, still gulping for air, her heart
hammering in her chest. His body was so close, all she had to do was take a tiny step forward and
she could press herself into him, see what it felt like to rub her breasts against his chest, that same
amazing chest she saw earlier. She saw something flicker in N'Jobu's eyes, and then he was gazing
down at her chest. Califia gave a little sigh when she saw N'Jobu lick his bottom lip for just a quick
second. And in that second Califia so desperately wanted N'Jobu to make her speak in tongues like
he had made Andrea.

"I gotta go pee," she squeaked out running to the bathroom.
Chapter Summary

N'Jobu and Califia go on an unplanned group outing to a private Karaoke party and lowkey plan their first "date", despite the fact Califia has boyfriend problems. Plus, she also likes N'Jobu's main squeeze, Serah, in a platonic way. ie, Things Get Complicated Just A Little Bit.

Chapter Notes

Hi all. Here is the next installment of N'Jobu and Califia. Now that I have the summer off, I will hopefully be able to get more chapters done quickly now that I have time to focus on this. I'm sort of outlining and pantsing this story as I go along. I do better with outlines, but these two characters tend to tell me what they want, and I just try to type and stay outta the way.

I would like to incorporate more of N'Jobu's journal writing because it will become key to the later parts of the story when we meet Eric as a child and then an adult. I already know how the book series will end, so any slow down in posting updated weekly chapters (I'm aiming for at least 2 a week) will be due to trying to make sure the timelines I'm creating match up with the plot bunnies I'm laying out. Also, "Hotel Artemis" is coming out soon, so I will sneak off to go watch Sterling K. Brown in all his obsidian glory. (Why is that man so fine?!)

Thanks to those of you who are hanging in there with this story. I bounce between writing this and going off to read Star Trek fanfic and other Black Panther stories.

Happy reading.

Chapter 4

“You’re my baby
My lover, my lady
All night you make me
Want you it drives me crazy
I feel like you were made just for me baby
Tell me if you
Feel the same way…”
Musiq Soulchild – “So Beautiful”

N'Jobu had heard the phrase “Poetry in Motion” many times but watching Bakari and Califia go at it in his livingroom gave the saying texture and color. He and Serah had cordial words out on the balcony. Nothing too serious, just a quick chat about him joining her that night to attend a mutual friends party at a private Karaoke bar. He didn’t feel like going, and Serah began to run down all the times she did things he wanted, even when she didn’t feel like it. She ran her fingers up and down
his cheek in that way she did when she pouted, and he needed a break from her before he gave in, and they both stepped back into the livingroom.

He saw what looked like a roundhouse kick from Califia connecting with Bakari’s face. He watched Bakari touch his lip and laugh and Califia kiss him on his forehead. N’Jobu felt his chest tense up as he watched her full lips touch Bakari’s face. Then she kicked him again and Bakari retaliated by pinning her down.

When Califia’s eyes met N’Jobu’s, he encouraged them to continue. She seemed hesitant at first, and then she closed her eyes for a moment and they began fighting in earnest. Until she flipped into him. N’Jobu held onto her arms to keep himself from falling, and then he couldn’t let her go. The whites of her eyes were a bit red, and he could smell marijuana smoke in her hair. She was breathing heavily, and when he stroked her arms, he felt her sweat slicken his fingers.

A soft shuddering sigh left her lips, made his ears tingle with the sound, and his head dropped forward and he stared at her chest. The lime-green top she wore was soaked and he could see through the outline of her round upturned breasts and her stiff nipples. Shit. Danger Will Robinson, danger.

He was grateful when Califia broke away from him and ran into the bathroom. It gave him time to go into his bedroom. He closed his door, opened drawers pulling out boxers and a pair of jeans. While sliding off his sweats, he saw that his dick was semi-hard. Seeing breasts was no big deal, but here his body was acting like it was thirteen again simply because he saw some nipples. Nipples he started imagining his tongue swirling around. Up close, Califia’s body was what Bakari referred to as “slim thick”. She had a dancer’s body and moved with the poise of a trained lean athlete, but Califia also had an Oakland booty, thighs, and what Bakari would call “tig ol biddies”. He didn’t realize how large her breasts were until he was looking down at them through a top that had gone transparent from sweat.

Now he was standing in his bedroom with no pants on, and his cock at full mast thinking about her. He laughed at himself, pulled on his boxers, adjusted his junk and finished dressing.

###

Serah was sitting on the couch talking to Bakari. The music had been turned off, the tv replacing the background noise. N’Jobu saw Califia out on the balcony, rummaging through her backpack. He opted to stay away from her, not wanting to find himself staring at her chest or any other part of her body. Witnessing her moving around gave him a great appreciation for the physicality of her. He was curious to see her skills on stage as a dancer. He had so many questions to ask her about herself, but things just felt a bit off. It didn’t help that she saw the little interaction between him and Andrea, and the slight awkwardness of Serah coming over unexpectedly. He played that shit off outwardly even though internally he was cursing himself for letting Andrea spend the night with him. It just wasn’t a good look for Califia to see, especially when he genuinely wanted to get to know her.

Grabbing a soda from the fridge he joined Bakari and Serah in the livingroom.

“I’ve invited Bakari to come to Ren’s get together. It will be fun,” Serah said.

Califia came back into the livingroom clutching her backpack and helmet.

“We were just going to get some food and chill tonight,” Bakari said, giving Califia a “Help me” look.

“Oh come on, Bakari. There will be free food and liquor, all the things you like. And plenty of music. I promise, it’s a great crowd, and plus I’m leaving in two weeks, and this will be the last time
I see you guys for awhile.”

“Wait, you took the internship?” Bakari asked.

Serah smiled, crossed her legs and grabbed onto Bakari’s arm.

“Yes! So you must see me off. You’ll be too busy soon, so you must bid me farewell properly now.”

“It’s cool, Bakari. I can go chill with Soliel,” Califia said.

“No! You must come too!” Serah said, jumping up and grabbing Califia’s arm.

“I don’t have anything to wear,” Califia protested.

“What’s all that?” Serah asked, pointing to the bundle of clean clothes Califia had in her hand.

“Just a t-shirt and some leggings—”

“Perfect! Go take a shower and change. You’re coming with us. N’Jobu is driving.”

“I am?” N’Jobu asked from the couch.

“Yes. We all want to ride in your new car while it still has that new car smell.”
Serah pushed Califia towards the bathroom. Califia looked over her shoulder at Bakari who shrugged at her.
“When she’s done, you go in next Bakari,” Serah said, taking the can of soda N’Jobu held and drinking from it.
“I guess we’re all going to Karaoke,” N’Jobu said, rolling his eyes at Bakari.

###

N’Jobu watched Bakari in hog heaven as he fixed himself a plate of overindulgent snacks. The private Korean Karaoke room was filled with high-end liquor and wine, a spread of expensive h’ordeuvres and an eclectic group of men and women, all friends of Serah.
Once the four of them arrived, the private room was at its maximum occupancy of thirty. People took turns singing songs that were surprisingly contemporary, and N’Jobu was grateful that most of the singers had decent voices. Being designated driver, N’Jobu nursed one glass of white wine and filled up on Korean dumplings.

Serah and Califia hit it off and spent most of their time sitting next to each other tossing back Tequila shots and experimenting with new cocktails they had never tried and rating them. N’Jobu found himself conversing with Ren, a woman he first met over a year ago when he also met Serah. Through a twist of fate, N’Jobu had ended up with Serah first instead of Ren, even though he had pursued Ren first.

N’Jobu was complimenting Ren on her glittery earrings, trying his best to ignore the ratchet sounds of a guy murdering the lyrics to a classic, Mary J. Blige’s “Happy”.

Ren’s eyes were shiny, an expensive glass of red wine relaxing her. N’Jobu glanced over her shoulder, taking a peek at Serah and Califia laughing together. When he looked back at Ren, she was giving him a coy smile.

“What?” N’Jobu asked.

“You keep checking on her,” Ren said.
“I’m not going to see her for awhile, so—”

“Not Serah, the other one. What’s her name again?”

“Califa?”

“What’s the story?”

“She’s Bakari’s friend.”

“Hmmm.”

“What?”

“You’ve been peeking at her all night since you’ve been here.”

“No, I haven’t.”

Ren took a sip of wine and tossed back her long dark hair.

“When Trent went over to introduce himself to her, you acted like he was trying to steal your shiny new toy.”

“I did no such thing—”

Ren giggled.

“I watched you stop mid-sentence in one conversation, walk over to them and insert yourself into their conversation. You were cockblocking.”

N’Jobu shook his head in denial. His eyes drifted past Ren…

“There you go again,” she laughed, slapping her right hand onto his chest, “You like her.”

“I find her interesting.”

“Okay…”

“Okay what?” he asked.

“This isn’t like you. Usually, you are a heat-seeking missile, and here you are hanging out on the fringes of the room like you’re scared of her or something.”

“I’m not scared. I just don’t know her that well…”

“When has that ever stopped you?”

“I don’t think she likes me that much. Plus, she’s close with Bakari—”

“So?”

N’Jobu tried to think of a response.

“Wow. Never thought I’d see the day that the smooth-talking and debonair N’Jobu has found a woman he can’t conquer.”

“Stop.”
“It’s kind of cute actually.”

The music grew louder as one of the men in the room chose a hardcore industrial rap song to perform. Ren moved closer to N’Jobu so he could hear her.

“I like seeing this side of you, N’Jobu. You’ve always been sexy, but this…”

She waved her hand in front of him.

“…this is a different side of you. Vulnerable. Shy.”

“Now you’re being silly.”

“Do you think she might like you?”

“What is this? Twenty questions?”

“I may want to shoot my own shot.”

“At her?”

“No…you.”

N’Jobu leaned back against the wall, his eyes focused on Ren. She leaned against him and finished off her glass of wine.

“Serah is leaving, and I know you two haven’t been that hot and heavy for a minute.”

N’Jobu took another look at Serah and Califia, they were still drinking and talking together.

“I don’t think this is an appropriate time to be talking about us, Ren.”

“We can fuck, but not talk?”

“Let’s just have a good time and keep shit friendly, okay?” he asked.

“Right. That’s how you always want things. Friendly. Sometimes I wish you were a dog just like regular guys.”

“Regular is something I will never be, Ren,” he said, reaching out and touching her left earring. The Japanese Canadian beauty stroked his hand as he played with her dangling earring.

“Don’t you ever want to settle down? Be a one on one man?”

N’Jobu chuckled hard, finished off his glass of white wine. How many times had he been asked this question, just in the last two months alone? The reality was, he had a limited amount of time to be in the United States before he had to return home and take on his diplomatic duties. Once his family (no, once his mother) found a suitable woman from home, he would be married off and stuck with a wife who would produce royal children and continue the family bloodline. So yes, he was doing the absolute most to fuck his way through America. Drown himself in good pussy before he was permanently cut off.

“Let me get you another drink, Ren,” N’Jobu said, moving away from her.

###
Califia found herself having a great time at the Karaoke party. She was not a big fan of singing herself. Her voice was okay, and she had to sing a lot while doing capoeira, but it wasn’t something she found pleasurable. However, Serah was a bundle of fun and made Califia feel comfortable with the room full of complete strangers. The only person who rubbed her the wrong way was a dude named Trent who kept finding excuses to talk to her when she just wanted to chill and ease into the scene.

Bakari jumped right into the food and joined in to sing background vocals on a Michael Jackson song. Bakari had a voice, but at the moment, he was more interested in eating and chatting up a cute woman from Brooklyn who found him entertaining.

Califia had entered a relaxed zone of the right balance between weed and liquor. She wasn’t exactly couch locked, but damn near close. Bakari had slipped her some marijuana-laced edibles before they got into San Francisco and found the party. Serah could hang with the heavy drinking along with her, and Califia wished she could invite her bestie Soliel to join them. Serah was bright, witty, and just as direct as Califia was. She was impressed with N’Jobu’s woman, and she found herself glancing at him from time to time throughout the night. If Serah was this cool, was Andrea just as likable?

Her father always told her when she was younger that whomever a man chose as his mate said a lot about him. N’Jobu seemed to have a harem. Did he just collect amazing women? Listening to Serah talk about her art and her new internship at a Florida Museum, Califia wondered if she could handle juggling different guys at one time. And what about the other side of that equation? What was it like being a woman in a relationship with a man who saw other women at the same time openly and not just casual dating? The weed took over and she had to ask, “Is it hard being with a dude who isn’t monogamous?”

“Well, damn, Califia, cut to the chase!” Serah laughed.

The gold label Tequila jumped in too.

“I just have to know. You didn’t blink an eye when you walked into the spot and Andrea was there. I heard them fucking earlier by accident, and I was feeling hella awkward when you showed up.”

Serah started cackling.

“That bird? Honey, N’Jobu likes to play around. No harm in it. And he fucks like a God, so who am I to deny Grade A dick to another woman?”

Califia leaned back and squinted at Serah.

“Dang. You just straight up like that?”

“How else should I be?”

“But your man is out here dipping and doing other chicks—”

“He’s not my man.”

Califia leaned her head to the side.

“We are good friends with amazing benefits. Don’t get it twisted,” Serah said.

“I couldn’t do it. If my man was that fine, and smart, and put it down in the bedroom like you claim, I would try to hem him up—”
“I’m not interested in marrying him. Our educational goals and future career paths are going in opposite directions. I plan on running a museum in Paris one day. He will become a boring diplomat for his country. We’re having fun and that’s great for me. Women who can’t handle that don’t last long in his world. That Andrea chick? Pfftt, I give it another week and he’ll move on. It’s his way.”

Califia stared at Serah. She sounded sincere and had a confidence in her words that made Califia believe her.

“You think he’s fine?” Serah asked in a conspiratorial tone.

Califia was watching N’Jobu in the corner with an Asian woman. He was playing with her earring and she was pressed into him intimately.

“Huh?” Califia murmured, eyes still on N’Jobu and Ren.

“You think N’Jobu’s fine?”

Fuck it. It didn’t hurt to admit it.

“Yeah.”

“You have a man?” Serah asked.

Like ice water thrown on a weak fire, Califia felt the cool chill of a reality check. She did indeed have a boyfriend. An exclusive relationship. A rocky one, but one nonetheless.

“Yeah. Xavier,” Califia responded.

“You make it sound like you’re dating the grim reaper!”

Califia took a long swig of the Long Island Ice Tea she was halfway sipping.

“We’re not doing too well.”

“Dump him,” Serah said.

“We’ve been together for a minute, and we’re going through a rough patch.”

“How long has your rough patch been?”

Califia scrunched up her face.

“That long?”

They both burst out laughing.

“Oh shit,” Califia said sitting up and looking towards the Karaoke machine. Bakari was waving the mic around and scrolling through the song catalog. He found something that made his face light up.

“Oh, I wanna dedicate this song to all the lovely ladies in the house tonight!”

“Please don’t sing another Whitney Houston tribute, I can’t take it,” Califia called out and everyone laughed.

N’Jobu took a seat in a lounge chair facing Bakari near the screen that displayed song lyrics. Ren sat down next to him. Serah handed Califia a plate of kimchi quesadillas and they nibbled the finger
food together.

Bakari adjusted his glasses and popped the collar on his button-down shirt. He pressed play on the machine and the first wavy chords of “So Beautiful” came on. Califia’s mouth fell open. It was her parent’s favorite song, the tune they danced to at their wedding.

Bakari’s falsetto voice filled the room and the heavy bass line from the tune vibrated from the walls. Despite the fact that she knew Bakari was high as fuck, his voice was strong and did the song justice. She looked down at her own hands remembering family barbecues and her parents dancing together before her Daddy went to jail on trumped up murder charges. She willed herself not to cry. It was like he knew her parents were on her mind and he wanted to let her know that he knew.

She drank from her glass of Long Island and caught herself looking over at N’Jobu. He was watching her, openly, and she decided to linger inside his gaze. His life just seemed so effortless. He had money (The super high-end BMW he drove with all the bells and whistles was an indication that although his country was considered poor, the upper classes were doing quite well), women, and comfort. A clear and direct career path. No struggles or fears or great concerns. A charmed life.

She should feel a certain way about people who never suffered lack perhaps, but all she could do was look back into his eyes. He had a beautiful woman sitting next to him, a few more waiting for him to call perhaps, but here he was looking at her in her old ass t-shirt, some ratty black leggings, and riding boots.

She remembered the way he had looked at her breasts. She remembered running into his bathroom and splashing cool water on her face. She had felt her pussy throb and slipped her hand down inside her panties, felt the slippery coating of her own desire oozing out so fast, just from that man staring at her tits. Her clit was so engorged in that bathroom that she was afraid to touch it, convinced she would masturbate right then and there and they would hear her. And she wanted to so bad. Her own man hadn’t made her feel desire like that for weeks.

She could admit that she was feeling N’Jobu. Part of it was the fact that other women wanted him, some willing to endure embarrassment to get next to him. Part of it was the newness of N’Jobu, him not being the typical around the way brotha she was accustomed to. Then there was the way he spoke, a mixture of learned hood-speak, and the gentle, sexy allure of his native tongue. Clearly, he knew how to code-switch and there was an ethereal quality to him that made him a human magnet. He gave off a vibe where people, men, and women, wanted to get near him. Who was she kidding, the subtext to it all was his fucking Andrea earlier that day, how utterly scandalous and turned on she felt listening to that bed’s box springs groan from their smashing so hard. How N’Jobu stood there with that towel around his waist, and his thick as fuck dick print bulging out of his sweats…

Her breathing was getting a little heavy. She drained the last of her drink as Bakari finished singing. And Lordt, N’Jobu was still eyeing her. Ren was stroking his arm and sipping a margarita, but that nigga was looking at her and only her. And she liked that shit. Liked it a lot.

The crowd clapped for Bakari and he wandered off to sit with his new babe. Califia decided to get another drink and walked over to the bartender at the open bar. She asked for a Lemon Drop, and while she waited for her drink to be created, she heard Ren jump on the mic.

“N’Jobu, give us a song. You’ve been hiding from us all night,” Ren purred into the mic. N’Jobu put up his hands to beg off from participating. Serah walked over to him, taking the mic from Ren’s hand.

“Please?” Serah said, her sultry voice whispery on the mic.

“My dude, don’t be scurrred!” Bakari teased, pressed up next to his Brooklyn hottie.
Serah whispered in N’Jobu’s ear, and whatever she said…or promised…gave him pause to then take the mic from her hand.

“Do Midnight Mischief for me,” Serah said aloud. She pushed a few buttons on the Karaoke machine. Scrolled a few screens until she found what she was looking for.

Calafia gave Bakari a look, wondering if this was going to become a cringe-worthy moment, and Bakari just winked and went back to talking to his new friend.

The bartender slid Califia’s Lemon Drop to her, and she took a big gulp and sat back down near Bakari and his girl.

The music was soulful and mid-tempo, and the crowd immediately began bobbing their heads. Califia wasn’t familiar with the song, but she found herself wanting to stand up and do a Chicago two-step. N’Jobu waited for the words to appear onscreen, took a deep breath like he was slightly nervous and began to sang. Like super Black neo-soul meets funky electronica meets cornbread and neckbones simmering on the stove singing. She felt her scalp tingle and her hips rotated in her seat. Soon she was standing up joining Bakari and another woman in an impromptu East Bay line dance that only Yay Area residents knew about. The man was adlibbing riffs and hitting raw high notes just as precise as Bakari.

Some in the crowd sang parts of the chorus with him when N’Jobu stopped looking at the lyrics on the screen and sang out to his enraptured audience. A few other people caught onto the line dance steps, and Califia found herself sipping on her drink and stepping simultaneously, adding extra moves the rest of the dancers couldn’t keep up with.

She held her martini glass above her head as she bent her legs to throw her ass back in time to the beat. Feeling really extra, she took her drink glass and rubbed it between her breasts then let it fall lower and linger near her crotch like she was at a Jamaican dancehall, snaking her body in exaggerated body rolls.

A breakbeat came on and N’Jobu had a moment to stop singing and sway with the crowd. Serah started dancing next to Califia, and they both stared at N’Jobu whose eyes became bewitching as he smiled at the two of them dancing before him. He sang the final verse of the song to the two of them, and when he was done, Serah jumped on him, peppering his face with kisses and exclaiming “Thank you! Thank you!” after each smooch.

N’Jobu passed the mic back to Ren, who had a radiant smile on her face. Califia could tell she wanted to kiss N’Jobu too, but Serah was clutching onto him, staking her claim for the night.

A comely white woman with an upswept hairdo and glittery eyeshadow gathered most of the women to sing a Broadway show tune, and Califia took that moment to sit down. The Lemon Drop was really strong, and despite holding her liquor well for most of the night, she felt her body give warning signs to slow down. It was after midnight and the sugars in the liquor would have her fucked up in a few hours if she kept going.

“Here.”

A bottled water was thrust in front of her face, and when she reached for it, N’Jobu plopped down next to her. She gulped down the water first, thankful that she didn’t have to move right away.

When she finished draining the bottle, she turned to face N’Jobu, but felt his warm thigh next to her own thigh and lost her train of thought for a second.

“Your singing was….damn, you were badass up there,” she finally ushered out. He handed her
another water bottle, and she drank that one slowly.

“Thank you.”

“You seriously sounded like a pro. You also sounded very…” She tried to figure out a way to say it without sounding rude.

He tilted his head toward her waiting for her to finish her thought.

“He sounds Black American when he sings, right?” Serah said, sitting on the other side of N’Jobu.

“Yeah. I don’t hear an accent when you sing,” Califia said.

N’Jobu nodded, a slight smirk on his face. He leaned back and threw his arms across the back of the couch, creating a more intimate space for the three of them. Califia’s left thigh was still rubbed up against N’Jobu’s and she kept wanting to pull it away from him with Serah so close, but she also craved the contact. If Serah was to be believed, this wasn’t going to be an issue, so Califia crossed her right leg over her left and shifted her body towards him.

“You sounded like an Oakland native,” she said.

“Hanging around Bakari kinda makes that easy to do. He drips with that Northern Cali swag, ma,” N’Jobu said, and Califia squealed in delight as his voice became pure East Bay. He sounded sooo good.

“Stunt your Brixton,” Serah said, her face upturned to N’Jobu so close that she could kiss him if she wanted to. Califia sensed the tiniest twinges of envy within herself. Feeling a bit covetous, Califia let her right hand fall innocently onto her lap so that her fingers brushed up on his hip.

N’Jobu let his head fall back as he thought about it, then spoke in full on Black British patois voice. Califia was impressed.

“You can fit in anywhere with that skill,” she said, glancing over at Serah who looked like a proud mother beaming at his talent.

“That’s what happens when you travel a lot with diplomats. You try to fit in, find common ground,” he said.

“Imagine what it’s like in bed,” Serah said, pinching his cheek, “you can have a different lover every night if you want.”

Califia saw N’Jobu’s countenance switch up in the negative. His left eyebrow shot up in an arch. He didn’t like what Serah said. Serah caught his displeasure.

“I’m going to mingle a bit, anyone want another drink or anything?” Serah asked. Califia shook her head no, and N’Jobu ignored Serah’s question. Serah patted N’Jobu’s thigh and distanced herself from them.

They sat together in silence, Califia self-conscious about being so close to him on the couch. He dropped his left arm from the back of the couch but kept his right arm dangling above Califia’s shoulders.

“Are you enjoying yourself?” he finally asked, lightness returning to their space.

“I have never been to a Karaoke joint before. I always thought they would be boring, but this was
actually a lot of fun.”

“You looked like you were really enjoying yourself. I appreciated your dancing while I was performing.”

“A good bop will move asses,” she said. That beautiful smile of his returned.

“Indeed.”

“You guys do this a lot? I mean you and your friends?”

“Once every few months or so. We’re kind of an international clique. Most of us are exchange students so we have dinners together, attend plays, that sort of thing. I haven’t hung out much this year. Too busy.”

“School?”

“School and travel. Family stuff. I didn’t want to come here tonight, but I’m glad I did.”

“Me too,” she said.

He turned his head to look at the crowd singing another Broadway number.

“Elizabeth loves her show tunes. She lives for this,” N’Jobu said.

“She’s really theatrical,” Califia said.

“Do you need any more water?”

“No, I’m good now, thanks. I went a little overboard tonight with the open bar,” Califia said.

“It’s all good,” he said.

Califia was feeling butterflies in her stomach. This was their first time being alone (somewhat), and she was feeling floaty. She was normally mouthy and bold when she drank hard, but she was worried about saying something ridiculous in front of him. His eyes were back on her.

“I’m curious, how did you know my bracelet was Wakandan? Not many people know our language.”

Thank God. He was asking about something that she could focus on besides his face and how good he smelled. Whatever aftershave or tonic, or cologne he had on was heady and made her think of beaches and romantic getaways.

“There’s a textile exhibit at the San Francisco MOMA. I was there a few weeks ago and the writing and designs on some of the blankets were magnificent. Something like that just stands out. It made me want to visit Wakanda one day.”

N’Jobu nodded. “Unfortunately, my country doesn’t really have the infrastructure for tourism,” he said.

“Oh,” she responded.

“We have a few cultural exchanges like museums and universities, but for the most part we’re trying to catch up with the rest of the world,” he said.

She nodded.
“I’d like to see this exhibit,” he said.

“Bakari and I are going back soon. It moves to San Diego next month. You should come with us before it leaves.”

“Let me know when you plan to go and I’m there. Here, take my number,” he said pulling out his cell phone.

Smooth, Califia thought. She pulled out her cell from her handbag and typed in his number. Once it was in her phone she called it. His cell lit up.

“Smile for me,” he said, aiming his phone at her. She closed her eyes and stuck out her tongue. He snapped her photo.

“I was joking, ugh, don’t use that!”

She grabbed his hands and he held his phone away.

“Lemme see it!” She squeaked.

He held his phone out to her. Her face filled his phone screen, eyes squeezed shut, her dark brown freckles vivid against her copper skin, lips moist, tongue…damn. Her tongue. Instead of looking silly as she intended, it looked pornographic.

“That’s a keeper,” he said, staring at it. She snapped a picture of him.

“Not fair, I wasn’t ready,” he said. She slipped her phone back into her purse.

“Oh well,” she snapped.

“It’s like that?”

“It’s like that,” she answered smug and folding her arms across her chest.

“You’re cute when you’re feisty,” he said, throwing her off.

She didn’t have a snappy comeback so she leaned back into her seat, her shoulder touching N’Jobu’s, the shrill voices of a horrid rendition of "Oklahoma" going on in front of them. For the rest of their time there, they sat in silence watching the scene.
As of Late

Chapter Summary

N'Jobu and Califia return home from the party and release tension in their own separate ways. N'Jobu also gets a bit of bad news from home.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 5

"I'm fallin' for you
I'm fallin' for you
I'm fallin' for you
I'm fallin' for you…
Lay down your legions of reasons to
Say no, say so"

Insightful and Naji—"As of Late"

The party finally petered out around 2 a.m. Ubers and Lyfts carted some folks away, the rest had their designated drivers rounding them up into personal cars. Califia was a little surprised to find Bakari hugged up and riding off with the woman from Brooklyn in a shared Uber. Which left her riding with N'Jobu and Serah by herself.

Hopping into the back seat of his silver BMW, Califia buckled her seatbelt and eased her neck back onto the plush butter leather seat,…correction, plush heated butter leather seat. Serah was still turnt full tilt, her French acrylics lightly scratching the back of N'Jobu's neck when he settled himself into the driver's seat.

"You can drop me off at Marchella's. We have a spa day tomorrow," Serah said.

N'Jobu nodded, and Califia felt a little wary. She would be left riding with N'Jobu alone.

"Where do you need us to take you?" Serah asked, looking back at Califia.

"My bike is at Bakari's. I can get home from there," Califia said.

"Bike?" Serah asked.


"Ooh, motorcycle Mama, I hear that!" Serah said.

Califia caught N'Jobu's eye in the rearview mirror, and she quickly peered out the window as he drove through the city. They only rode together for about fifteen minutes when N'Jobu pulled in front of a new high-rise apartment.

"This is my stop. I'm so glad we got to hang out, Califia. Let's do lunch soon, love," Serah said,
reaching back and hugging Califia over the seat. N'Jobu put on his hazard lights and stepped out of the car. Califia watched him open Serah's door and escort her inside the foyer of the building. She watched them hug and saw Serah give him a peck on his cheek. When he turned around to walk back outside the building, Califia turned her head pretending to stare at the street.

N'Jobu stopped in front of the back-passenger door and tapped on the window. Califia pressed a button to let the window down.

"Would you like for me to pretend to be your chauffeur, or would you rather sit up front with me? I promise I don't bite," he said.

He opened the door and Califia hopped out, opening the front passenger door herself and climbing in. N'Jobu closed the door and walked around to the driver's side. Once he was inside, he changed the radio station to softer music. The house music Serah had selected was a little too bouncy for the hour.

"I can drop you off to your final destination if you're tired," he said.

"Nah, I'm good. I can ride."

They listened to the soft sounds of electronica music instrumentals as his sleek car drove nearly noiseless. Once they were crossing over the Bay bridge to head back to his Berkley apartment, Califia had already dozed off. The ambient music, the heated seat, and the subtle pleasing aroma of N'Jobu's cologne lulled her off to lullaby land.

"Califia…hey…Califia…"

Her eyes fluttered open. Looking around, Califia saw that they were parked in his apartment complex lot. Jeez, that was fast. Califia bolted up and was instantly yanked back by the seatbelt strapping her in. N'Jobu chuckled, unfastening the seatbelt for her.

"You were knocked out," he said gently, his voice a near whisper inside the car.

She stepped out of his car clutching her purse.

"I need to get my backpack and my helmet," she said.

She followed him up the stairs and into the dark apartment. He turned on track lights and took off his jacket, hanging it on a coat rack on the back of the front door. Califia wasted no time picking up her backpack and helmet off the couch.

N'Jobu watched her stuff her purse into the backpack.

"It's really late, Califia. You're welcome to crash on the couch. It pulls out into a bed," he said turning on lights in the kitchen.

Califia watched him start up a Keurig machine on the counter. Her Spidey senses started tingling. Alone in an apartment with a gorgeous man who just suggested staying over on a pullout bed? Definite set up. Although it sounded like the magical tropes of romantic fantasy, Califia lived in the real world. She didn't know N'Jobu at all. He was just a friend of Bakari's. Not her friend. Shit happened to women. Cautious Califia kicked in even harder.

"Thanks for the offer, but I have to be somewhere tomorrow, so I'ma bounce," she said pulling on her riding jacket.
"Cappuccino?" he asked, holding out a freshly made cup.

Her kryptonite. Damn him. She took the cup.

"There's sugar in that container right there," he said making a fresh cappuccino for himself. She dumped two Sugar in the Raw packs into her cup and used a clean spoon from the counter. The first taste on her tongue made her moan. N'Jobu laughed.

"That good, huh?"

"Those things are dangerous," she said.

"Saves time waiting in line before classes. Cheaper too," he said, fixing his cup. He took one packet of sugar.

She finished up her drink and placed the cup in the sink.

"Thanks."

"No problem. Are you sure you're okay to ride?"

There was genuine concern in his voice.

"Trust. I'm good. Oh, snap—"

Califia walked out of the kitchen and made her way to the balcony. She had left Bakari's spare key on the couch. It was dark out on the balcony. She felt around on the couch blindly until N'Jobu turned on an outside light. The key had fallen on the floor. She palmed it.

"I left Bakari's key out here by accident. I need to put it back…” N'Jobu had a curious look on his face. Jesus. Hopefully, he wasn't putting two and two together.

"Thanks for the ride out to the party. And back. I better go," she said. She walked past him.

"I'll walk you out," he said.

"I'm good."

"I have to open the gate to let you out. It closes up after six."

"Oh."

The moon was still out and very full and made it easy for Califia to put the spare key back. Strapping on her backpack fast, she popped her helmet on the moment she got to her bike. The carport had bright lights and N'Jobu admired her ride. Her Kawasaki was silver and black with green detailing. It was a standout. Her street bike helmet had silver and green racing lines to match.

"Very nice," he said.

"My baby," she said, hopping on.

"It's a sexy piece of machinery. How long have you been riding?"

"Since I was twelve. My Dad was part of a club. I still ride with his people sometimes."

She had her hands on the handlebars, ready to start up her bike. His eyes were on her ride, still
admiring the curves and sleek design of the chassis.

"Be careful," he said.

His eyes met hers again.

"I always am," she answered, a smile on her lips. She thought he wanted to say something else. He stepped forward and for a heartbeat, she thought, Is he going to kiss me? Really? But then his right hand reached out and patted her arm. A friendly goodbye.

She pushed down the visor on her helmet and started her bike, the powerful rumble throbbing between her legs. She eased her bike back with her legs.

"Want to be my back warmer for a minute?" she asked suddenly. She hadn't intended to say anything more, but he was staring at her bike like he was curious. His face gave a quizzical look to the term back warmer. She giggled.

"Hop on, I'll give you a ride. Just to the gate."

He looked unsure.

"Don't worry, I won't go fast. You'll be ok without a helmet."

He still hesitated.

"Don't be scurred," she teased, imitating Bakari. N'Jobu laughed, showing her those beautiful white teeth of his.

"Next time," he said.

"Might not be a next time."

She wiggled her backside as she scooted forward on her seat.

"Okay, okay," he said.

He swung his leg over, his hands uncertain while gripping her waist.

"You have to hold me tighter than that, or you'll fall off," she said, reaching back and pulling his arms around her waist.

"Put your feet on the passenger pedals."

"Here?"

"Yeah."

He leaned into her and she took off.

"Oh shit," he said, and she started laughing.

She drove a little faster on purpose and he held her tighter. When she pulled up to the gate, he hopped off quick.

"Night, N'Jobu," she said.

"Goodnight, Califia."
He punched in a code for the gate to open, and she zoomed out.

###

Califia didn't have a secure housing situation at the moment. Bouncing between Xavier's apartment, her bestie Soliel's dorm room, and her paternal grandmother's spare bedroom, she tended to live out of her backpack. Tonight (or rather, this morning), she was going to crash with Xavier. Most of her belongings were at her grandmother's house in the Outer Mission district because of proximity to her university, but she only went there on days she had classes. Her grandmother was pretty strict on what went on in her house (much like the dorm housing she turned down her sophomore year 2 years ago), so all her weed/drinking/partying/sex shenanigans took place elsewhere.

Xavier had graduated the year before and was completing an internship at a tech firm. Communication was shaky between them, but he was still cool with her crashing with him. Mainly for sex. To his credit, he did try to work on their relationship, but lately, he was so stuck on respectability politics and judging her life choices that she found it difficult to be around him without them arguing over petty shit. It was tolerable when sex was good between them, but now it was just boring to her.

Xavier was a pretty boy used to getting his way, and it became an unspoken thing between them that sex would gain her access to his place when she needed it. She viewed it as part of the hustle of living. Mediocre dick was better than no dick sometimes. During those sessions, she just treated him like a human dildo. She was quite sure he looked at her like a blow-up doll based on his poor-quality stroke game. She wished they weren't so chickenshit with each other and would just call it permanent quits. Stop dragging out the miasma of their affair.

The truth was she could easily pack it in, transfer to a school back east and stay with her mother and step-father, even have her own place if she wanted, but she needed to be close to her father. And her grandmother needed her too.

Her scholarship covered all her necessities, but the work she did that was extra, like her gig at the Blue Rose, the beginning West African dance classes she taught at a hipster studio in Richmond supplemented the activities she helped procure for the community center she volunteered for in Oakland. Most people wrote those children off, but her father came from there, and she came from there, and if no one was going to make a difference from city hall, then she was going to do it. Budget cuts had eliminated much-needed resources and staff, and the center director was grateful for any assistance Califia could round up. And that meant she had to be on the move all the time collecting her coins and maintaining her GPA.

When she pulled up to Xavier's apartment, she carefully parked her bike near his Honda Accord. He lived in a small building of eight units. She had a key, so there was no need to wake him to open the door. She felt her cell vibrating in her pack.

U make it home ok?

N'Jobu. She chose a thumb up emoji to send him. Within ten seconds of sending it to him, he responded with a happy face emoji. She stared at his avatar on her phone. Califia tapped the screen to make it larger. It was a simple snapshot. N'Jobu looking at his own phone, staring at her face and her tongue. Even his profile was delicious to look at. The look he was giving her picture on his phone was sinful.

Walking into Xavier's apartment, she put down her things and went straight to the bathroom to take a shower. For ten minutes she let water just shy of scalding run all over her, avoiding her hair as much as possible. Soon she was brushing her teeth and tying up her cornrows with a silk scarf. Wearing
nothing but a towel, she slipped into Xavier's bedroom and shimmied into clean underwear and a yoga tank top. Xavier was out cold, snoring and in the fetal position near the bedroom door side of the bed.

Califia eased into the bed wrapping the covers up to her chin, wishing Xavier had curtains for the window. Bright moonlight bathed her face. She closed her eyes thinking about the day. How it started off one way and ended completely different from which she had planned. She met a cool woman who happened to have an unconventional relationship with a guy she may or may not be seriously attracted to. Guilt began to gel around her, making her feel icky for thinking of some other dude while lying in her boyfriend's bed. Wasn't life like that though? What was the old saying? The grass always looked greener. She was in a relationship funk, so of course, another man who was good-looking, polite, attentive, (and sang a song to her in front of her face) would most certainly make her feel open and tingly all over. Make her feel like jumping ship. She sat with that feeling, wondering how she would take it if Xavier was thinking about someone else in that way. In all honesty, she would probably feel some relief; it would be a clean break, a great excuse for her to say "Deuces!" and let go.

She felt her body finally winding down, actually relaxing from a long ass day. She thought how sweet it was of N'Jobu to text her just to make sure she made it home safe. He didn't come right out and say it, but he was worried about how much she drank. Lucky for her, liquor ran through her, and she spent a lot of time using the restroom at the party. Would she have let him drive her to Xavier's if he pushed it? Maybe.

A sly smirk settled on her lips when she thought of how nervous he was riding on the back of her bike. His arms had squeezed her waist tight, and he had pressed his chest into her back…Califia's hands fluttered down to her panties. She glanced over towards Xavier, but he was still curled up and snoring. She slipped the fingers of her right hand into her underwear. Her mind wandered to quick images of N'Jobu. His eyes looking her over at the party. The timbre of his voice when he sang. She stroked herself, eyes closed, focused on the sound of his bed when she was hiding out on the balcony. Andrea's voice going incoherent. N'Jobu's voice when he told Andrea to leave. Him touching Ren's earring. The way he strolled out of his bedroom in those damn sweatpants—

"Hmm," she found herself moaning, her fingers covered in slick, legs gone loose. She peered over at Xavier again, but he was still in the same position. She wiggled her panties off, raised her knees up and spread her legs, playing with herself fully under the covers. She had difficulty achieving orgasms, even while masturbating for the last few months, so the outpouring of extreme wetness between her thighs was a welcome surprise. The wetness brought forth the memory of N'Jobu rubbing her sweaty arms and staring at her breasts, her nipples pebbling at all his attention. She reached up with her left hand and pulled on her nipples. No surprise they were stiff and aching for touch.

Now she was thinking of his lips, how their fleshly softness would feel sucking on her tits or tasting her own lips. She imagined her tongue licking his full lips back. The vision of him staring at her picture on his phone made her rub her clit faster and harder. She envisioned him telling her "Open your mouth," with that no-nonsense bass in his voice and she would gift him with her clever tongue, hoping he would take his dick and tap it on the soft pink of her mouth.

Now she had two fingers inside of herself, imagining his thickness filling her up and him taking his time long stroking her deep and ever so slow…

The long harsh moan that tumbled out from her mouth scared her because she hadn't expected it along with the clenching of her walls around her own fingers. The fierce orgasm that raised her up like Lazarus from the dead and left her legs trembling shocked the shit out of her. It also woke
"Hey, babe, when you get in?" he asked, rubbing his eyes.

"Not too long ago," she said a little out of breath. She bit her lip to stifle desperate pants from escaping her mouth.

Xavier scooted over and nudged his cheek against hers in an affectionate greeting.

"You sweating?" he asked.

He was so handsome in the moonlight. His cool russet skin looked magical to her in the afterglow of her self-pleasure. His lips appeared plump and inviting. She reached out with her hand and stroked the springy short twists of his hair. Pulled his face closer to hers. He noticed her heavy breathing, stared deep into her eyes, saw a new fire there and kissed her, hard, his tongue probing the fresh minty toothpaste taste in her mouth and the sudden flow of heat from her tongue into his own mouth.

He released her lips first and buried his face in her neck. The extended deep wet kissing had electrified them both.

"Ooh, shit, Cali," he whispered into the shell of her ear before sucking on her neck in that spot he knew so well. The one that made her toes curl. He threw back the covers to reveal his body to her. He was fully naked, his dick reacting to her naked pussy, all juicy and inviting before him, her yoga top pulled up and her hard nipples ready for action. He pushed her knees back, holding her ankles so that her lower half looked like the letter "M". When he sank into her, they both gasped.

"Fuck me hard, baby, please" she whispered. The way she said it inflamed him, and he thrust into her like his life depended on pushing her through the mattress.

"You're so wet. This pussy is just creaming on my dick," he drawled out raggedly. She tapped her fingers on her clit, and his eyes watched her hand movement. She needed this nigga to keep talking.

"Damn, girl," he panted. Califia reached up and pushed her tits together, tugged on her nipples, eyes closed, riding Xavier's thrusts, feeling herself climbing a new peak. She reached up again and wrapped her arms around his neck, matching him thrust for thrust. She wanted him to say more things to her, tell her to do things, but Xavier was too far gone, lost in his own pounding of her body.

She ground herself into him, circling her hips, still clutching him tight, and then her mind drifted back to N'Jobu's face when he saw her in his apartment, the way he said her name as if it were a gift.

She reached down between their bodies and stroked herself. Her body tensed and she was cumming once more, Xavier's cock deep inside her.

"Ah! I feel you cummin', baby, I feel you!" he yelled, and then he was spilling inside of her, slamming her body back down on the bed through his release. The heaviness of his body smothered her as they both tried to catch their breath, both gasping like fish out of water.

Xavier rolled off of her, throwing his arm over his face, still gulping for air.

"Goddamn, girl," Xavier said, and started laughing, causing Califia to laugh with him. He playfully slapped her thigh with his hand staring at her with disbelief.

"What got into you?" he asked.

They were both sweaty, the sheets were drenched and cooling, and Califia was still laughing.
"A lot of pent up frustration that had to be let out I'm guessing," she said readjusting her head scarf that had become disheveled.

"Well shit, I hope you'll still be frustrated in a few more minutes because I need a round two. That shit was good."

Califia turned on her side to look at him. It actually was good. But the lead weight of guilt was pooling back into her stomach. N'Jobu had made the sex happen between them. She had to admit that. She had used Xavier as a surrogate for her fantasies about another man. She felt like shit.

###

N'Jobu was on his second cappuccino when he took out the primitive cell phone and pulled up Califia's number. It was still too soon to call her, she had only been gone for about ten minutes, but he was compelled to reach out to her. She said she was okay to ride, and she did look okay, but he was going to feel like trash if something happened to her and he could've driven her home.

He carried the cell into his bedroom and tossed it on his bed. He stripped out of everything, tossed his clothes into a hamper and slipped under his sheets. Today was…different. He did have a good time at the party, and he felt like Califia had warmed up to him, but there was still a weird barrier going on with them. When he offered her the pull-out bed and her face took on a bit of panic, he understood then that she was not that comfortable with him. It never occurred to him that she was concerned about being alone with him until after she left.

He checked the time on his cell and then leaned back on one arm reminiscing over the evening. He was going to miss Serah when she left. She was a dear friend and one of the few people whom he really liked having around a lot. He would have to have a serious talk with Ren, set some parameters with their public interactions. He knew he enabled a lot of Ren's behavior at the party with her constant touching and rubbing up against him. Serah didn't care, but N'Jobu worried that Califia would think less of him. But why should he care what she thought? He wasn't cheating on anyone. It wasn't like he and Califia were there together and then he hooked up with some other woman and ignored her. It was a group of friends hanging out at the last minute. At one point, Ren did sit on his lap sharing a drink with him and talking to their mutual friends. Hell, even Serah was sprawled on him soon after, whispering in his ear, feeding him food from her snack plate. Califia being there just made things feel different. She made him feel very self-aware.

He checked the time again, then searched for her number. There was her picture. When she stuck out her tongue instead of smiling he was glad he was sitting down because if he hadn't, he would've needed to adjust himself. He tapped the screen and made her face bigger. Already he felt his dick swelling, and he helped it along by stroking himself. He took the screen and made her face bigger. Already he felt his dick swelling, and he helped it along by stroking himself. Pushing back his bed covers, he held the cell closer and worked his cock, twisting his thumb and index finger right under the dark bulbous head. Her tongue was out there like she was just waiting for his dick, ready to lick him clean. "Nasty bitch," he muttered, his cock swollen and beads of pre-cum already dripping down making his fingers sticky.

He put down the cell and tapped one of his kimoyo beads, the lavender glow illuminating the dimly lit room. He lowered his left wrist above the picture on his cell phone and a second later a holographic 3D image of Califia sticking out her tongue was floating above his wrist. He swiped the 3D image so that it was floating in front of him. He let out a hiss of pleasure once he saw the larger realistic image of her face. He sat up against the headboard of his bed, one hand tugging on his balls, the other resuming long hard strokes on his length.

"Let this big dick hit the back of your throat," he told the floating image. The length of his dick was slick, shiny and so hard in his hand. The dark rich color of his cock looked incredible when it was
shiny with his own pre-cum, or shiny when good pussy was sliding up and down on it…

He pulled down on his balls, squeezing them a bit to prolong his pleasure. They felt full and heavy in his own hands. He had sex with Andrea twice the day before, and three times the night before that, and he should've felt drained. But no. Here he was with a fistful of hungry dick, and a sack that was ready to nut. He tugged on his balls a little harder.

"Where do you want me to cum?" he asked the image.

The freckles scattered on her face looked like little stars to N'Jobu. Those challenging eyes of hers were squeezed tight, and her big juicy lips couldn't control that wet tongue of hers. Heat in his veins made his whole body feel hot and restless. He needed to cum, and he needed to cum soon.

"Look how hard you got my dick," he gasped, his hand gripping his cock so tight he could barely breathe. The thick veins on his dick were throbbing. He was swollen so big it was beginning to hurt. It wouldn't be long now.

"Tell me to cum," his ragged voice commanded the image, "tell me to cum."

In his mind's eye, he saw Califia licking her lips and opening her mouth. He saw her wiggling that juicy bubble of an ass on her bike when he climbed on behind her. He knew she was thinking he was scared of riding with her, but in reality, he was thinking about how much he missed his hoverbike back home and riding above the ground. But that all went out the window once he was gripping her waist and staring down at her round ass encased in her thin leggings. When she sped up on her bike his weight shifted and his front rubbed up against her back, and he had called out "Oh shit," when he felt how soft and round her backside was against his dick.

"Can I cum, baby?" he gritted out through his teeth.

Perspiration rolled off of him in slow lazy drizzles as he stopped squeezing his balls and sat forward stroking his cock with a firm and fast rhythm. He couldn't even close his eyes he was so focused on Califia's face, pretending her image was really moving, wanting to stretch her mouth with his dick.

A deluge of sweat now covered him, his legs and toes had locked up on him, his body wrung so tight he thought he would snap like an overstretched bow string.

"Let me cum…let me cum…stick out your tongue, just like that—"

He knew it wasn't real, but as a bead of sweat dripped into his eye, N'Jobu imagined that Califia's face, the one that was in front of him in full color and almost flesh, he imagined that her face moved and that her eyes opened and she gave him a throaty whisper of, "Cum all over my face Prince N'Jobu."

N'Jobu threw back his head, looked up at the ceiling as he called out, "Oh my fucking, Bast!" and his dick erupted all over his hand, parts of his chest and down over his thighs.

"FUCKKKK!" he let out even louder when his cock still spasmed and let out more cum. He had always shot huge cumloads but looking at the mess he made all over himself this time was a new level. Once his breathing was under control, he stared at Califia's static image. All this from a picture of a tongue?

He started laughing, then slowly made the journey to clean himself up and change the sheets on his bed. When he had finished, (after taking a quick shower when tissues and body wipes failed him), he texted Califia. She responded back right away. He felt relief that she was safe. Laying back on his bed he thought of new avatars he could use for her phone picture. No way he could keep using the
one with her tongue. That mofo was going in his spank bank pronto.

He felt his kimoyo beads warm up on his wrist. A discreet way of alerting him of contact from home. He sat up staring down at his wrist. T’Chaka. He tapped a bead.

"Brother," he said leaning over and touching his bedside lamp, raising the light levels in his bedroom. He swiped the video image of his brother in front of him. T’Chaka was dressed in his blue royal robes, his short afro sporting nice textured waves. In Oakland, they would say his brother looked clean. Booted and suited. Glancing behind T’Chaka, N’Jobu could see he was inside the great domed room of the private family library. It was three in the afternoon back home, and N’Jobu could see the brilliant sun in Wakanda shining on his older brother’s face.

"Baby brother, how are you?"

"Ndiphilile, ndiyaphila," N’Jobu answered.

"Did I disturb your rest?"

"No, it was a late night, I'm actually just getting in from a party. Is everything alright? Baba? Umama?"

"Everyone is fine. Do not worry. I am calling to tell you some news before Baba calls you in a few hours. I was going to leave you a message. I did not expect you to be up."

"Now you have me worried if you have to call me before Baba does. Are you sure everything is fine? Just tell me."

"Farabale," T’Chaka said, the smile on his face extending up to his eyes, making him look more and more like their father as he got older. N’Jobu took after their mother. Something T’Chaka used to lament about when they were teens. Their father was very handsome; however, their mother had a haunting beauty, something that was transmitted into N’Jobu’s DNA that made him what their maternal grandmother called "The golden jaguar", that desirable quality that made girls run after N’Jobu more so than his older brother who was destined to become King. Most folks just called it natural magnetism. It made their father chase after their mother even when he was supposed to be betrothed to someone else. Scandal.

"Don't tell me to calm down, brother. I can see you're in the library hiding out. Just tell me or I will call Umama right now."

T’Chaka looked over his shoulder, then back at N’Jobu.

"Shh, don't be so loud. The Dora Milaje are near and very nosey."

N’Jobu held up his hands in agitation.

"Well?"

"Baba is about to announce that he will relinquish the crown to me. He thinks it is time. I will be crowned King, Brother."

"Father is abdicating his throne? Why? Is he ill? Is something wrong with him?"

N’Jobu felt his stomach drop. He jumped out of bed grabbing a pair of cotton lounging pants from his dresser drawer. He turned on his bedroom lights to full. Their father had married and fathered children late in life (forty), but he was still an agile and highly competent ruler. Something had to be
"He wants to retire and spend his time with Umama. Fish. Swim. Paint. He feels it is my time now. He wants succession to happen now while he can still be here as my personal counsel to help guide me. And also, to play with his grandchild."

T'Chaka had an impish grin on his face. He waited for N'Jobu to catch on.

"Grandchild? What grand…"

T'Chaka's face beamed from the other side of the world.

"Bathandwa is with child? Eku ori ire!" N'Jobu shouted.

"Thank you so much! We are about four months along now. So yes, you will be an uncle next spring."

N'Jobu reached out and tried to touch the image of his brother, but just held his hand up instead. His brother did the same, tears forming in the corners of T'Chaka's eyes.

"I know you've been trying for some time," N'Jobu said, his brother nodding and wiping his eyes, the smile on his face trembling a little. Bathandwa, dear sweet Bathandwa who loved the ground T'Chaka walked on and wanted more than anything to give him an heir. For two years they had been trying, and the royal family had been tense, yet supportive. N'Jobu felt the weight also, because if Bathandwa couldn't produce children, then it would fall on N'Jobu. And the last thing N'Jobu wanted was to be King.

It was bad enough that he would be tied down as an Ambassador, but in that capacity, he could come and go from Wakanda. Kingship meant stuck. There was wiggle room for N'Jobu. Thank Bast that T'Chaka wanted to be King. And thank Bast now that the order of monarchy could be preserved.

"Stop crying. Kings don't cry," N'Jobu teased.

"Okay. Now for the real news." T'Chaka said.

"What?" N'Jobu sat on his bed.

T'Chaka looked around the library again.

"Baba wants to do the coronation ceremony in early January to bring in the new year with me in position."

"Okay, that's fast, but so?"

"He wants you here for your winter break…"

"I can spend a few days there—"

"No, your entire break. He is starting you on your betrothal march."

"Ah, shit!"

"Ukubukela umlomo wakho!"

"Sorry, sorry. I'll try not to curse. Damn." N'Jobu said.
T'Chaka glared at him.

"That's a lot happening so fast. Why the betrothal march now? Can we just ease into your coronation first and worry about me later? Like two years into the future?"

T'Chaka let out a gut buster of a laugh. He laughed so hard he had to go and sit on N'Jobu's favorite chair in the family library. The one by the large picture window that overlooked the Ibukun River.

"N'Jobu. Listen well. If Father wants to see me in my future role now, then, of course, he wants to see you married and in position soon too. Did you think you could play in America forever?"

N'Jobu sucked on his teeth. The sun was rising in his window and his body was showing signs of fatigue. He needed sleep. T'Chaka could read it in his face, even far away.

"The good thing is that coming home will be great. We have missed you dearly. Umama won't admit it, but she misses her baby boy every day. The betrothal march isn't so bad. I lived through it, and my wife is wonderful."

"Yeah, well, it helped that you knew and liked each other before you were paired off," N'Jobu said, throwing his whole body back on his bed. T'Chaka's image floated above N'Jobu, the kimoyo sensors automatically following his line of sight.

"I already know for a fact that the mining tribe is sending Zinzi for consideration," T'Chaka said smoothing down the front of his robes.

"Zinzi with the big—"

"Yima!" T'Chaka said, eyes going wide with embarrassment.

"I'm playing, Brother. I'm playing! But they are big!" N'Jobu was cackling on his bed.

"I can't even talk to you seriously right now. Baba will call you later today. Don't let him know I told you about your upcoming nuptials."

"Shut up!" N'Jobu said, throwing his pillow up at his brother's image, only having it fall back down on his chest.

T'Chaka smiled. His hooded wide eyes regarded N'Jobu.

"What now?" N'Jobu said.

T'Chaka shook his head, his eyes filled with admiration.

"I love you and I miss you," said T'Chaka. N'Jobu smiled.

"Ndiyakuthanda," N'Jobu said, returning the sentiment.

"I mean it. I am proud of you. It cannot be easy being alone over there, so far away from your people."

"I have some people here," N'Jobu joked, "they are a little odd and can be quite difficult to fathom at times, but I am doing well."

"I await your return, little Brother," T'Chaka said.

"Give Bathandwa a great big hug from me, and smother Umama in kisses," N'Jobu said.
"I shall."

T'Chaka's image disappeared. N'Jobu stayed on his bed for a few minutes, and just when he was starting to drift off into blissful sleep, his mind wrapped around the news of him being formally put out on the open market as husband material.

"Damn, damn, damn!" N'Jobu raged on his bed, shaking his body around like a child having a serious tantrum.

###

Chapter End Notes

A.N.: Thanks to all of you who are hanging in there for this ride! I'm going to aim for posting 2 chapters a week. Right now I'm looking at Wed & Fri. I was going to split this chapter in half, but I got busy reading Star Trek Fanfics and goofing off! Quick question for anyone who is open to answering: Do people prefer shorter chapters or longer chapters? (By chapters, I'm thinking 10-12 pages). Just curious. Again, thanks for reading. Until next week!

A.N. #2 In the story I'm using both Xhosa and Yoruba since the movie mixed several amazing African cultures to create the Wakandan language and look. Also, Zinzi who is mentioned in my story is the name I gave to the counsel Elder from the movie who was from the mining tribe (the sister with the ochre-covered locs who when Erik showed up to claim his rights, looked all shocked when she said "N'Jobu?") I'm trying to plant character seeds so that a lot of shit can pop off later in my series. And if anyone is interested in hearing the song quotes I use before each story, this fic is on Wattpadd and Tumblr with links of the songs. Ciao!
Distraction

Chapter Summary

N'Jobu tries to buy time with his parents for his formal betrothal march, while a video of Califia goes viral in a negative way that has N'Jobu changing his perception of her.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 6

“Do me a favor, pick me up, take me out later
Don't worry about no paper
'Cause I got much stacked up for nights like this
My life can get crazy, I deal with shit on the daily
But baby I'm thinking maybe, we could agree to work it out like this
I need you to give me your time
I need you to not wanna be mine
Are you down to be a distraction baby?
But don't distract me…”
Kehlani – “Distraction”

The conversation N’Jobu had with his father went as well as could be expected with a son who was reluctant to get hitched so quickly. The only thing working in his favor was that his mother was very picky and sided with N’Jobu on his plans to take his time choosing a bride-to-be.

“The wife of a future Ambassador must be thoroughly vetted, Azzuri,” his mother Niyilolawa said seated next to his father inside the cavernous throne room.

The space had been vacated for King Azzuri’s and the Queen Mother’s privacy, although the Dora Milaje were right outside the closed double doors. It was only in private that N’Jobu’s mother addressed his father by his first name only.

“This is true Umama,” N’jobu interjected, trying his best to keep his voice from sounding desperate to get out of the arrangement. He made sure to wear the comfortable saffron yellow lounging robe from home that his mother had sent via FedEx as he sat in his livingroom sipping on an espresso, a notebook in hand pretending to scribble down important notes from their conversation.

He purposely recited several names of women he was acquainted with from royal bloodlines as well as those from distinguished high-ranking families throughout Wakanda to give the impression that he was serious about the search for a wife.

He casually mentioned Zinzi Chiume from the mining region to try and stack the deck in his favor. She was well regarded by his parents even though rumor had it she wanted to train for a position as a Dora Milaje. N’Jobu had to admit that there were some strong contenders in the current ranks of the Dora Milaje, and in the past, Kings and Princes had chosen wives from that elite military faction, just as past Queens and Princess’ chose husbands from the regular military. What better partner to have
by your side than one woman who was deadlier than five men put together?

Zinzi was badass, intelligent and a fair-minded woman. She was also very attractive with a laugh that made people relax with good humor. People trusted her. The more he thought about it, the more he made up his mind to seek her out once he left for Wakanda in mid-December.

Focusing on his parents, N’Jobu kept up the pretense of being quite serious on the matter.

“Would it be possible to have dossiers of your personal choices sent to me as soon as possible, Umama?”

His mother smiled and patted N’Jobu’s father on his leg. She touched one of her royal purple kimoyo beads and a few seconds later the files he requested were already in place, stored in one of his now glowing beads. Damn. They had already been plotting this in advance. Fast-tracked his life probably months ago. Time was now his enemy.

He spoke with his parents about the upcoming birth of the new royal baby and also caught them up with his studies. His mother asked about his poetry writing and he confessed he had very little time to indulge, but he did sketch in his sketch pad to relax and also exercised regularly.

“My son, you look so thin. Shall I send you a care package of your favorite foods? Your future wife does not want a scrawny man.”

“Eh, eh, Niyilorawa, your baby looks very good, in fact, you look like you’ve put on good weight son,” his father said. The robe N’Jobu wore was form-fitting and he flexed an arm to show them he was far from scrawny. The reality was that he would need to gain more weight once he started his military stint.

The call ended when N’Jobu heard Bakari returning home and opening the front door.

“Man, you the only nigga I know who dresses up to be at home,” Bakari said, eyeing N’Jobu’s casual royal garb.

Of course, Bakari didn’t know that what he had on was simple royal clothing. The equivalent of a tracksuit on the Wakandan level of fashion. If he saw the full wardrobe that N’Jobu had at home, all custom-made one of a kind pieces, he would probably pass out.

“What’s your schedule looking like on the fifteenth?”

“What is that, a weekend date?” asked N’Jobu.

“A Saturday. Cali texted me and said that’s when we should go peep the exhibit.”

N’jobu looked over at an end table where his phone sat. He had it on mute. He missed the text that came an hour beforehand. It was a group text with several other people added whose numbers he didn’t know. N’Jobu didn’t even bother to check his schedule, he just typed, “I’m in.”

“So,” N’Jobu said.

“So?”

“You’re just now getting back here. Things go well with Shavonne?”

Bakari grinned from ear to ear, “Well you know, a player’s gonna do what a player’s gonna do. I secured the bag as it were.”
N’Jobu nodded and went to the kitchen to clean his coffee cup.

“Just so you know, I won’t be having overnight visitors for a minute.”

“What happened with Andrea?”

“Nothing. I need to focus on getting my thesis ready, and I have some tests coming up. I have to hit the books.”

“Oh, so you’re adulting now. Coo, coo,” Bakari said.

“About Andrea the other night—”

Bakari held up a hand. “I will stop you right there, sir. We are good. I may be bringing Shavonne through, so payback, Bitch!”

N’Jobu nodded and put away his clean cup. Bakari’s phone buzzed. He checked it then quickly walked into the kitchen and sat at their small dinette table where his laptop sat. Flipping it open he typed on it.

“What’s up?” N’jobu said noting the frown lines on Bakari’s face.

“Something got posted and it’s blowing up. It’s Califia and that book dude. Someone taped his Q & A, and…here it is. The comments are brutal.”

Bakari pivoted his laptop so N’Jobu could see it too.

N’Jobu was transfixed watching Califia standing up in an audience with a mic in her hand going back and forth with Aarav Naidu, the book author. Aarav was seated on a stage next to a moderator, a tow-headed woman in a floral print dress who looked flustered at what was transpiring between the writer and Califia.

Califia was wearing a dark beanie that covered her hair and ears and a scarf that wrapped around her neck. She looked quite comfortable in a jean jacket and blue leggings as she stared down Aarav in his conservative brown suit and tie. She had Aarav’s book in her hand with a page open. Bakari could be seen in the video seated next to her with his phone recorder held up towards her face.

“The main argument of your book, Aarav, is that you believe Black people in this country should act like white people in order to succeed. You parrot the same stereotypes that white Americans have used historically to malign Black Americans—”

“That’s not true, that’s not true. You are misconstruing my words—”

“Sir, I quoted your words from your own book where you said that!”

Some students in the audience, mainly the Black ones, clapped in agreement with Califia.

“What we are not going to do right now is attack our guest,” the moderator interjected.

“No one here is being attacked,” Califia shot back at her, “I’m simply raising the issue that this writer has co-opted the language of oppressive settler policies to tear down the humanity of Black people once again. There are no fresh takes in this book, just another regurgitated racist polemic. But this time coming from a brown person who has fully embraced white racist patriarchal supremacy. I find it fascinating that just before I began speaking, a gentleman before me, a white man, was verbally assertive with Aarav on a similar issue. I would dare say verbally abusive even, and yet you said nothing. But here I stand, verbally neutral in my tone, and you state that I am attacking the guest
speaker. The old “angry Black woman” gaslighting technique. I don’t appreciate that, Emily.”

The moderator would’ve clutched her pearls if she had some, but simply became more upset with Califia as some in the audience laughed, and others agreed with Califia’s point on the matter.

“We’re going to move on to another question,” Emily the moderator said, glancing around the room for another person to change the flow of the conversation.

“Hold on a minute, Emily. I’d like to continue with this, please,” Aarav said.

Emily’s face blanched a bit as she glared at Aarav. The man stood up and faced Califia.

“We have freedom of speech here! You only came here to start trouble!” A male voice from the back of the room yelled out at Califia. Other members of the audience concurred. Califia whipped her head around to address the voice.

“Free speech is not the issue. This is a public forum. He has the right to say what he wants, and I damn sure have the right to clapback,” Califia’s voice went a little confrontational in tonality at that moment.

Bakari had his left index finger up by his lip as he watched the video.

“And this is where ole boy goes bonkers,” said Bakari.

N’Jobu sat down at that point, riveted by the way Califia held her position so coolly in front of a packed house. Her small squad of dissidents, mainly students of color, sat in the middle of an angry sea of conservative right-leaning students who agreed with and supported Aarav.

Instead of addressing Califia directly, Aarav appealed to his audience, spouting talking points used by racist media outlets. He accused Califia of being an affirmative action student who probably took the spot of a more deserving student. He rattled off unsubstantiated statistics about Black Americans, and Califia stood politely, staring daggers into him until he mentioned that Black people didn’t value education like Asian students.

“The fuck you mean Black people don’t value education? My people had to build their own damn colleges because they knew what education meant. These same people who were at one point forbidden by law and threatened with death if they learned to read or write. So here you go hitting us with the tired model minority myth, the most anti-Black propaganda ever used in higher education.”

A cacophony of voices went up after Califia dropped the “F” bomb. Even N’jobu recoiled from her choice of words.

“Here comes Lola,” Bakari said.

The woman sitting next to Califia in an SFSU sweatshirt, Lola, stood up and took the mic from a fuming Califia.

“You don’t speak for the Asian community when it comes to that model minority myth, Aarav,” Lola said. She swiped her hand on her forehead to push back her short bangs.

“I’m Laotian, third generation, and my community struggles in much the same way that some in the Black community do. Asians are not a monolith. In most studies done on Asian educational success, aggregates that are used are only focused on Korean, Japanese, and Chinese students. Cambodians, Filipinos, my people, Pacific Islanders and many others are not even considered, so data is often incomplete and inaccurate.”
Lola handed the mic back to Califia.

“My parents were immigrants. They worked hard when they came to this country and achieved the American Dream. The point of my book was to show that hard work, valuing education—” Aarav chimed in.

“Aarav, my dude, both your parents came here with engineering PhDs. They were already part of the upper class when they came to this country, already ahead of the average American citizen. Don’t sit here and front like they started from the bottom and now they here, son,” Califia said, passing the mic to a student handler and sitting back down.

Whatever the moderator had planned for the rest of the Q &A went out the window as the talk was abruptly ended.

“What happened after that?” N’Jobu asked.

“There was a book signing and the moderator tried to come at Cali. She told Cali that she ruined the event and started crying. Cali told her, and I quote ‘Stop weaponizing white woman tears.’ After that, we left to go have tacos.”

N’Jobu shook his head. “Why would Califia still interact afterward? You don’t like something, you don’t have to participate or stay there.”

“Whoa, look at this shit,” Bakari said scrutinizing the comments section, “The trolls are really eating this up.”

N’Jobu read a few comments and then his radar went through the roof when there were bodily threats made towards Califia’s person.

“We should call her,” N’Jobu said. He reached for his kimoyo beads in his haste, then realized what he was doing. Bakari took out his phone and dialed. When Califia picked up he put her on speaker.

“What up, B?”

“N’Jobu is worried about you,” Bakari said, grinning at N’Jobu whose face had gone serious.

“You got me on speaker?”

“Yeah.”

“Is he there?”

“I’m here, Califia,” N’Jobu said. She went quiet.

“We saw the video of you and Aarav. It’s blowing up in the virtual streets,” Bakari said.

“That thing? I don’t know why it went viral now. Shit was all last week.”

“It was uploaded on RipTalk.”

“Ah, no wonder. Nazi troll mob central.”

“Califia, the comments on here are disturbing,” N’Jobu said.

“Yeah Cali, some ferocious shit is being posted. Where are you?”
“Xavier’s.”

“Is he home with you?”

“Take me off speaker.”

Bakari picked up his phone and switched off the speaker function. N’Jobu listened to the back half of their conversation. Bakari hung up and scanned the comments section under the video again.

“Is she okay?”

“Um, yeah. I don’t know why she was tripping about the speaker. Her boyfriend is there, so she’s fine.”

“She has a boyfriend?” There was a hint of irritation in N’Jobu’s voice. Bakari glanced at him.

“I thought I told you that. She lives with him sometimes.”

“I don’t remember hearing that.”

“I think they still together. He cool. Bougie sometimes.”

N’Jobu took in the information. It clarified some things. She was off limits. Sitting there in the kitchen, N’Jobu felt like the wind had been let out of his sails. Then thoughts of looking through what amounted to marriage resumes made his head hurt.

N’Jobu went into his bedroom and closed the door. He held his cell in his hand thinking of what to do. He wanted to text her, but one couldn’t really interpret tone from characters on a phone. He didn’t feel bold enough to video chat with her, but he had serious concerns about the trolls.

He dialed her number.

She picked up after the fifth ring.

“Califia…” he said.

“Yeah.”

“I just wanted to make sure you were alright. Those comments are really threatening online.”

“They always are when it comes to women voicing their opinion. Especially a Black one who gives no fucks.”

The sharp tone of her voice was harsh in his ears.

“I gotta go. Is that all you called me for?”

Her agitated and dismissive words got to him. She knew how to fight to protect herself. She was also with her man. She’d probably gone through some stuff like this before with her activism in the past. It was time for him to step away.

“That was all. Have a good rest of the day.” He hung up on her.

He felt a tightness in his chest, a sign of anger on his part. She acted like he was bothering her. Bet. Won’t happen again, he thought. He changed into some running gear and stuck ear buds on to listen to his music playlist. Some Wakanda punk bands and London grime. He needed to work some stress out. He texted Andrea to let him come through to her place later. She would make him feel better, get
his mind off of marriage and a certain university student with a stank attitude.

##

N’Jobu dreamed that he was standing near the Ibukun river. The roar of the water as clear as Jabari crystal soothed him. Ibukun led to the opening of Warrior Falls, and the elders often called it the river of grace and wisdom. The Blessed Place.

He wore silk pants and closed toe sandals. No shirt. His dream felt lucid. Looking behind himself, he could just catch sight of the edge of central Wakanda, the great city protected and shielded from prying eyes lurking outside its borders. Everything growing always looked vivid emerald green or the most azure blues in all the waters when he dreamed of home. Technicolor subconscious homesickness is what it was, even though deep in his heart he wasn’t ready to return to the permanence of his homeland. Only in his dreams could he even feign a slight yearning to see his land and his people.

He walked closer to the river’s edge and meandered a path that was lackadaisical, feeling the ebb and flow of his restless heart. In his dreams like these, he was always alone, but this time, as he eased along his way, he saw Zinzi sitting under a young Marula tree. She was sitting on a small orange blanket draped in an off the shoulder ceremonial dress the color of a magenta sunset before the rainy season. Intricate braids crowned her head, and the top half of her face was painted in vivid blood-red ochre. Her smile beckoned him.

“Zinzi,” he said, dropping to his knees to sit next to her. She handed him a silver goblet filled with honey wine. He drank deeply. She reached out and touched his face. He set down the goblet and cradled her hand, kissing the soft pale skin inside her palm.

“Shall I become your wife?”

N’Jobu held onto her hand and rubbed tiny slow circles on the knuckle of her ring finger.

“I do not know. Do you think we could fall in love, Zinzi? Do you think you could love me?”

“Are you ready to fall in love, Prince N’Jobu?”

He shrugged and turned his face to watch the river water. Love was confusing. When had he ever been in love? Lust? Hell yes, many times, too many to count in all honesty. But love? Like the kind his parents had? Like the love found in the old stories of Sekmet and Entabeni? How Entabeni, traveling through the heavens, looked down upon the stars and saw Sekmet braiding and perfuming her hair near the Woods of Solitude and came crashing down to be with her for all eternity? A God who leaves his home in the sky to be with a Goddess from another time and place? Yobudenge! Such foolishness.

N’Jobu wanted to travel, marvel at art, savor new wines from the glasses of the world and between the legs of the world’s women. Was love big enough to encompass a dream like that? But that wasn’t his future. His future was Wakanda. Duty. Honor. Responsibility and upholding the pride of the Nation.

Zinzi squeezed the tips of his fingers bringing his attention back to her.

“Can you answer me, Prince N’Jobu?” Zinzi’s eyes sparkled like dark citrine stones. N’Jobu gazed at her mouth. The voice he heard asking him the question was not Zinzi’s. He was confused.

“Prince N’Jobu,” she said again, her lips stained with a shade of bronze coloring that complimented the orange undertones of her skin. Yet the voice was still not hers.
His eyes popped open. Disoriented he stayed still long enough for his mind and body to ease back into wakefulness. He was in bed. Not his bed. He raised his head from the much too soft pillow cradling his neck and saw Andrea peering down at his face. Fingerwaves caressed her temples, and she was smiling at him.

He groaned a little as he sat up.

“What time is it?” he asked.

“Eleven thirty. The late news is on. That girl Califia is on tv,” she said, aiming the remote in her hand towards the flat screen TV hanging on the wall opposite her bed. She turned the volume up.

Nothing annoyed N’Jobu more than electronics being on while in the bedroom. Americans could never expect proper sleep if their circadian rhythms were screwed up by all the blue lights emanating from all their gadgets being on all the time. N’Jobu heard an edited version of the video he saw earlier. Turning to look at the TV, there was Califia having her “F” bomb bleeped out.

“Wow, she really has it in for this guy,” Andrea said.

An on the scene reporter stood next to the moderator from the video. Emily looked more put together this time, more business-like in a two-piece navy blue suit, her dishwater blonde hair cascading in delicate framed curls. She looked like a no-nonsense Goldilocks.

“This thing is getting pretty big. CNN was interviewing Aarav earlier. He said Califia bullied the moderator after the event. Is that true?”

N’Jobu stopped listening to Emily and anything else being said on the TV.

“Bakari said the woman came up to Califia.”

“I aspire to her level of petty,” Andrea said, eyes still on the TV, “You know that’s going to be the new meme, right? ‘I don’t appreciate that, Emily’. That is hilarious,” Andrea said.

“It is so unnecessary. All this will do is make more people buy his book,” N’Jobu said, grabbing the remote from Andrea’s hand and switching off the TV.

“Well, she is one of those types.”

“Types?” N’Jobu said looking over at Andrea. She was rubbing lemon verbena body lotion onto her arms and legs, being careful not to drip any on her black camisole sleep top and matching bikini panties.

“Fake woke. Back in my father’s day they called it being ‘conscious’. Like being so on top of all the Black issues everywhere. People like her get off on finding everyone and everything problematic. They don’t actually do anything, but they like going around being all righteous to make themselves feel good. I mean, I get it, it’s what got the Civil Rights movement going, the Black Lives Matter stuff years ago, and the old Anti-War movement during 9-11. But people have to be about their business nowadays. Find the right circles of people to be with, build your personal brand, make your paper and keep it moving.”

“Keep it moving, eh?”

Andrea stopped smoothing the lotion into her skin. Mica flakes sparkled on parts of her skin from her
lotion.

“Pretty,” he said, reaching out and stroking her arm.

Andrea’s words filtered into his brain. Fake woke. The right circles of people. Keep it moving. Sentiments he agreed with. Califia’s behavior was so much like Bakari when he first met him. He learned to accept that as part of Bakari’s personality. If that was Califia’s nature too, then so be it. He didn’t have to deal with it. It looked so exhausting to be angry all the time. Injustice happened all over the globe. His country was blessed to stay out of the world’s madness. Yes, there were good things in the world too, and perhaps Califia needed to find a circle that was differing from the squad she rolled with now. She and Bakari would always hang tough, but maybe if she hung out with women more like Serah, or even Andrea, her horizon would become vaster, less narrow, and less stressful.

Andrea snuggled up into N’Jobu’s arms. He kissed her with a tender energy. Then made her turn off all the lights and gadgets in her bedroom. She was not going to offset his circadian groove tonight. He needed to get all the rest he could. He had a lot still on his mind. Andrea was a great diversion. All she wanted was time with him to help her get through her heavy course load too.

As he nuzzled Andrea’s face, he felt his kimoyo beads warming up. What now?

Chapter End Notes

Okay, it can’t be sexy times all the time! Thanks for reading!
N'Jobu's sister-in-law requests his help with T'Chaka and later, N'Jobu goes to the Wakanda textile exhibit with Califia and friends at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and almost gets outed as royalty.

Chapter Notes

This was a rough week for writing. The news has been terrible, but I will work to do better keeping updates at least twice a week. Thanks for reading.

Chapter 7

"I can stare, I can memorize
Your face, your hands, your hair, every part of you
I can cut off any loose ends and not even wanna keep a few
I can speak to you so honestly, I can't even run any game
I can hear a million angels singing in my ears
When I say your name"

Amel Larrieux – "For Real"

N'Jobu waited until Andrea was in a deep sleep before he removed himself from her bed and made his way into her bathroom to check his kimoyo beads. His messenger bead was glowing and he touched it to reveal private video mail from his sister-in-law, Bathandwa. She had never contacted him in private before.

N'Jobu cracked open the bathroom door partially to listen out for Andrea. She was snoring a bit. He closed the bathroom door, pushed down the lid on the toilet seat and sat down. He played back the message.

Bathandwa was sitting on a stump inside the royal gardens all alone. Her hair, normally wrapped up in fancy silk headwraps, was artfully layered in three large braids that twisted into a bun on the nape her neck. Her face looked fuller, the baby weight already transforming her body from the slender woman she had been when he last saw her.

"Prince N'Jobu. How are you, Brother? I know you are surprised to hear from me in this way. But I must speak with you in private when you have the time. I know that you have heard the news about our little one who is on the way…"

She touched her belly with her left hand and her face lit up in an excited smile.

"We are so happy." Her smile waned, and then her face took on a solemn expression as she shifted on the stump. N'Jobu paused the message and listened out for Andrea again. When he felt
comfortable that she was still asleep, he continued watching Bathandwa.

"I need to speak with someone…I need…I need to talk to you about T'Chaka. I cannot talk to anyone here because they will worry or even judge me, and you have always been kind and understanding. I feel like I can speak with you and you will not run straight to T'Chaka or the Queen Mother. I just…I am worried about T'Chaka. No, not worried…um…he just…he just needs some guidance, and I don't know if Baba Azzuri can reassure him the way I believe you can. Believe it or not, your brother looks up to you." Bathandwa cast her eyes downward as she fiddled with her own hands. Nervous. She looked nervous.

"I know this is out of line for me to request this from you, but is there any way you can return home sooner? I will be with the Queen Mother today, so please leave me a discreet message as to when the best time would be for us to speak. Please do not fret. We are all fine, I just need your brotherly wisdom. We miss you. Bast be with you, Prince N'Jobu."

The message ended and N'Jobu sat still in the bathroom. She was worried about his brother. Why? T'Chaka looked well, appeared very pleased to finally have a child, and their parents were ecstatic about it. What was sowing the seeds of disharmony in Bathandwa's heart? Had T'Chaka done something wrong and couldn't fix it?

N'Jobu returned to Andrea's bed. He regretted checking the message because now he would be thinking about T'Chaka the rest of the night. He had an Intro to Quantitative Analysis class at noon, so he didn't have to be up that early in the morning, but he did have a test later in the day for his International Relations class. He knew the material well enough to skip studying for it, but he did have a paper due by the end of the week for the same class. The outline for his paper was complete, he just needed to bang out ten pages.

Stepping out of the bed once again, N'Jobu pulled on his clothes and grabbed his keys. Andrea was still slumbering. The voluptuous curves of her body draped in the thin sheet on her bed almost enticed him to hop back in the sack with her and forget papers and his brother. This woman made forgetting so easy when he was pressed up next to her warmth. They were digging each other and things were chill the way he liked it.

He typed out a quick text message to her on his cell so she wouldn't trip when she woke up and found that he was gone. Exiting her bedroom and trying to be a church mouse with his departure through the livingroom, N'Jobu came face to face with Andrea's roommate Tammy.

"Hey," he said, startled that she was sitting in the dark livingroom, watching a laptop that was the only light source revealing her presence.

"Hi, N'Jobu, right?" Tammy asked, not even bothering to whisper.

"Yes."

He couldn't see her computer screen, but he could hear she was watching a clip from the news of Califia and Aarav. 

"I didn't wake you, did I?" she asked, turning down her computer. "My headphones are broken."

"No."

"Oh, good. Goodnight," she said. 

He walked out of their apartment and padded down the hallway to the elevator. As he waited for the elevator to arrive, Andrea's apartment door opened, and Andrea came sweeping down the hall in a
pink terry cloth robe. She linked her arm into N'Jobu's.

"Why are you leaving?"

"I have some things to take care of earlier before class tomorrow."

She hugged him from the front and buried her face into his chest.

"Stay…please?"

"If I stay, you know what will happen."

"I do, that's why I need you to come back to bed with me. I won't be able to see you until next Sunday." She made a pouty face and curled her fingers in his shirt.

"So, let's save our energy for next Sunday," he said.

"But I want you now."

"Sunday."

"Are you sure?"

Andrea stood back and opened her robe. She was naked underneath.

"You don't play fair, girl," he said, wrapping his arms around her inside the robe.

He lowered his face and kissed her, his tongue running along the seam of her lips. She opened her mouth and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"I have to go," he said.

"Come back to my bed. I need you," she reached for his fingers on his left hand and placed them between her legs, running them up and down and between her damp folds.

"Andrea," he whispered, his eyes closed. She shifted up on tiptoes and whispered in his ear.

"I need you to beat this pussy up so bad, N'Jobu."

He was tempted. So damn tempted. But he had to have some discipline, or else he would burn out on her, and he wasn't ready to give Andrea up yet. And he liked it when she begged.

"Sunday."

He kissed her forehead and the elevator door opened. Andrea wrapped her robe around her and tied it shut. Her pout turned into a frown.

"Don't act up," he said and swatted her butt. She thrust her ass out towards him.

"I know you love that," she said, waiting for him to spank her again. If she pushed it, she would have him hauling her back to her bed and laying a stern hand to her backside for a nice session. She consented right away to his favorite kink straight from the beginning and he felt lucky. But… discipline in regular life was calling him. A family matter was pressing him too.

"I'm going to wear that ass out soon," he said, stepping into the elevator and leaving her in the hallway.
When he settled into his car and drove home, he re-played Bathandwa's message. He still had the same impression about her. She was nervous. Not scared or fearful really, just unsure of something. Something she couldn't even discuss with T'Chaka.

His older brother could be a handful at times. If N'Jobu was known to be stubborn, T'Chaka was known to be hard-headed and a grudge holder. Not the best qualities for a King maybe. Cruising through the street, N'Jobu thought more about his upcoming life back home. Even being on the opposite side of the globe, his home life always found a way to encroach upon his time. He really hoped there would be no sudden transitions until many years down the line. He wanted to push off marriage for as long as possible, do as his father had done and wait until he was much older.

Turning on the car radio, N'Jobu chose Jamaican dub to listen to as he pondered the sudden change in life plans. T'Chaka had taken their father's place as Black Panther three years previous. That was a seamless transition. It was early in T'Chaka's marriage, and N'Jobu had finished his first stint as an undergrad exchange student in London for a year of University before he graduated in Wakanda. Instead of going directly into the military, N'Jobu was able to convince his parents to allow him to obtain a Masters before fulfilling his mandatory enlistment.

Things were going according to plan and N'Jobu calculated he could probably push off talk of marriage for another five years. He struck his steering wheel with a sharp smack of the hand. Masters degree, two-year military enlistment, and then one year of travel before any betrothal march. That was the plan. He figured he could push off another good three to four years as Ambassador by pretending to be picky for a mate. So much for that. He struck the steering wheel again to offset his irritation.

The one chance he had was the new baby. Perhaps the family would be so wrapped up in the grandchild that they would lessen their hold on him.

All was quiet when he returned to his apartment. There were half empty Chinese take-out cartons on the kitchen counter, and N'Jobu tripped over some women's heels near the stove. He moved the shoes into the livingroom and walked over to his desk near the balcony.

Once his laptop was warmed up, N'Jobu got down to the business of writing the introduction for his paper. The moment he got into a groove, he heard the murmuring of voices from the back of the apartment, and then the sharp sound of a headboard striking a wall. Bakari getting it in with Shavonne. Payback was a bitch.

###

Califia maintained a tight schedule for two weeks. From five in the morning until six thirty in the morning she was in the gym lifting weights, alternating arm and leg days. Morning academic classes, and then afternoon dance classes, dance rehearsals for the winter dance concert, and then work at the Rose until one in the morning. A little sleep, and then do it all over again. Saturday mornings were spent in Richmond teaching dance, and then the afternoons at the community center teaching beginner capoeira with Bakari. On top of that, she was eating six meals a day to keep her caloric intake on point.

She knew she was looking good. Admiring herself in the standing oval mirror in Xavier's bedroom, she ran her hands over her nude body. Her calves and quadriceps were on another level this year, and as she turned to the side to admire her traps she whistled her own approval.

"Bitch, do the damn thang," she told herself.

Cupping her breasts, she noticed that once she stuck with her tight exercise regiments, the fat in her
breasts had shrunk a bit faster, the muscles lifting. Her tits looked like they were kissing the sky. She tweaked her own nipples, then did isolations with her butt. She could still make her ass cheeks clap. No matter how much training she did, that Oakland ass was not going to leave her. Praise God.

She kept herself in shape on the regular, but this winter concert had her performing in all but two of the planned routines. She needed to be extra fit. Next year she would perform part of her choreographed final for the Spring concert, and she had a serious piece planned. But the winter gig had her doing a solo, and she had to make sure her body was banging. By the looks of it in the mirror, she was on target to being as good as it was going to get. She did wish she were just a few inches taller so she could have a longer torso, but she often let her hair make up for that when she danced, creating an illusion of added height.

She ran her fingers through the shaggy mane of burnt sienna staring back at her. Her hair had grown a few inches, and the new length added weight and changed the gravity of her once luxuriant afro into a falling cascade. She regretted not letting Serah put it into Senegalese twists when she offered before she left for Florida. They had lunch together in an East African cafe and spent more time laughing instead of eating. N'Jobu never came into the conversation at all. They spoke of hair, make-up for darker skin tones, the talk of enhanced humans that was gathering more chatter in the news, and Xavier.

After stepping into red lace t-back underwear, Califia pulled on a pair of black straight-legged jeans, and a soft blood-orange colored shoulder split top. She wasn’t riding her bike today so she could wear her cute red Mary Jane platforms. Once she was dressed, she stuck extra large silver-hooped earrings in her ears and a cowrie shell choker around her neck. Their little group was going to have lunch at the adjoining museum bistro, so she wanted to look a little classy for her friends since she normally wore whatever was clean and not too wrinkled.

After a little brown eyeliner and a hint of tinted red lip gloss was painted on, she felt she was ready.

Standing outside Xavier's apartment, Califia watched the overcast sky darken a bit and noted the petrichor smell of rain that had already fallen on the ground earlier. The air was a little cool. But not cold enough where she needed a jacket. She checked her phone and saw all the group text responses. She was glad she opted to wear her heels. Some of the crew wanted to go clubbing later.

Bakari arrived on time with her best friend Soliel in the passenger seat of his silver Corolla.

"Hey, gatinha!" Soliel called out in Portuguese after stepping out of Bakari's car.

"I know I look hot!" Califia said, spinning around in her heels.

"How you stuff all that in them jeans, Cali?" Bakari wolf-called. She rolled her eyes at him.

Soliel's curly black hair hung in long shiny ringlets right to her shoulder-blades. Her dark mocha skin required no make-up, and Califia would always consider her bestie of four years her ultimate girl crush. If Califia wasn't straight, they probably would've been a couple. But probably over Soliel's current girlfriend's dead body.

"Where's Aunjanue?"

"She'll meet us later," Soliel said pulling out a compact mirror from her purse to check her eyeliner.

"This semester is kicking her ass. She won't even be able to go home with me for winter break."

"That sucks boo, I'm sorry to hear that," Califia said.
"She'll get to Brazil one day, just like you."

"Summer can't get here fast enough," Califia said. The three of them started walking to the BART station four blocks away.

Califia was at the level of a Professor in capoeira. That summer, she would have to go to Soliel's hometown and fight before her bestie's father a Grand Master of the art, and also in front of a whole host of masters who would decide if she were fit for the highest rank in her art form. She booked her ticket back in June.

"Mestre," Soliel cooed out to Califia in her sexiest Portuguese accent.

"She'll have that white belt on soon enough," Bakari said.

"Will you be able to come down, Bakari?" asked Soliel.

"I'm trying," he said as they walked past a crowd of people coming up from the BART station as they were going down.

The weather cleared up a bit by the time they made it to the front of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Califia did not like the boring brown exterior of the building. There were signs posted that they would be renovating in the future.

Waiting for them near the entrance was Shavonne, Bakari's Brooklyn hook-up and also Langston and Rolita, two of Califia and Bakari's mutual friends from junior highschool. They all hugged and chatted for a bit before going in.

Checking her cell, Califia saw that one other friend would arrive in about a half hour but told everyone to get started and they would catch up. Califia noticed that N'Jobu was nowhere to be found, in fact, the only text message he had contributed to their text thread was "I'm in." But that was two weeks ago. She was actually a bit relieved. Xavier had left a message that he would try to hook up with them all after his pick up game with his boys. He might bring a buddy with him.

Inside the museum, they all opted to use a museum docent for the extensive textile exhibit and had just made it in time to have one all to themselves because of their group size. Califia was adjusting the strap on her purse across her shoulders when Bakari looked past her and said,

"Yo man, I thought you weren't coming?"

Califia froze in place, then turned to see N'Jobu striding towards them wearing all black on black with dark sunglasses. He rocked a black bomber jacket with a snug black shirt, black slacks, and retro black combat boots. Califia saw Rolita and Soliel do double takes as he pulled off his sunglasses to greet everyone in the group.

Bakari and N'Jobu shook hands.

"Everyone, this is my boy N'Jobu."

N'Jobu took a moment to greet everyone personally, He already knew Shavonne, so he gave her a big hug.

When he turned to Califia he did that thing where he said her first and last name like it was an incantation.

"N'Jobu," she said, then quickly glanced down at her museum brochure to break eye contact.
The docent led them through the first two sections of the exhibit that focused on the Middle East and China. They all took time to listen, ask questions, and admire the beauty of rugs and blankets. N'Jobu asked the docent very thorough questions, and the middle-aged white woman, a fellow ginger like Califia was delighted that their group was so engrossed in what she had to share. By the time they were heading towards the Wakanda exhibit, Califia had relaxed around N'Jobu. She didn't know why she was so tense when he showed up. She watched him interact with the docent and Rolita while Soliel sidled up to her.

"I admit I didn't think looking at blankets and rugs would be all that interesting. But I'm learning a lot," Soliel said, linking her arm with Califia's and resting her head on Califia's shoulder.

"I'm glad. I've been trying to get you out here for years."

Califia and Soliel followed behind the rest of the group as they moved into the Wakanda section. A black woman dressed in traditional African clothing stood near the entrance, and a curious thing happened.

N'Jobu was asking the docent about a design on one of the Chinese exhibits, and the black woman took one look at N'Jobu and actually took a step back, one of her hands flying up to the crook of her neck.

N'Jobu turned to look at the woman and his face became neutral for a second before he smiled and greeted the woman in their language. The woman nodded and N'Jobu walked up to her and clasped his hands on hers and spoke to her a little longer and then turned to face all of them. The woman looked at everyone else in the group, smiled and answered N'Jobu. He nodded and the woman gave him a slight bow.

"Everyone, this is Ms. Cebisi Mvaba, she will conduct this part of the Wakanda tour. Thank you so much for being a kind and attentive group," the docent said leaving them with a flustered looking Cebisi who could not keep her eyes off of N'Jobu.

###

He had seen Califia Stevens in person for a total of two times. But this third time gave him quite a reaction.

He hadn't planned on going to the museum after all once he got caught up with school and tests. His cell continued to blow up with their group text plans, and he finally opted to take a break and go once he saw a posting on Serah's IG feed. It was a picture of Serah and Califia drinking wine on an outdoor patio. Both women were smiling, but there was something about the way Califia's grin made her eyes crinkle, that made him want to see her in person again. Be around new energy. He was feeling a little stunted with Andrea, and she was getting a little irritable because he wasn't spending time with her. Ren had been coming around too, but she was still on that one on one bullshit and he wasn't trying to do all that.

He arrived just in time to join the start of the tour and when he saw Califia, he was jolted a bit. She was dressed up and her hair just overwhelmed him. He didn't realize that she had that much. The first time he saw her she had twists, the second time she had cornrows pulled back into a bun, but this time it looked like a giant sunburst and then it hit him. She looked just like the statue of Bast outside the great Temple near the palace in Wakanda. All Califia needed was a vibranium spear and shield, a great cloak draped across her shoulders and her eyes raised to the heavens, and she would be the image from his childhood and beyond. The red heels on her feet accentuated the shapely legs and thighs hidden behind sprayed on jeans and a top that gave him a peek at her shoulders.
He said her name and she looked away from him once they began the tour. Eventually, she seemed to ease into his presence and by that time he was really invested in talking with the docent. Califia's friends were interested in him and his questions for the docent. It seemed to spur the rest of them to interact with the older woman leading them. What was probably a short twenty-minute tour on a regular day turned into a forty-five-minute excursion.

Between the docent talking and the group taking time to examine the displays, N'jobu found himself standing near Califia. He wished they could be alone together taking the tour.

They rounded a corner and N'Jobu saw the large sign that said "Wakanda". They approached the entrance and N'Jobu paused. A Wakandan woman stood near the entrance. He knew she was Wakandan because of the jewelry around her neck and the patterns on her dress.

The woman saw N'Jobu, and the moment her eyes were upon him, she recognized who he was, and he prayed in silence that she wouldn't say anything to give him away. He moved towards her in swift strides and spoke to her in their language.

"I know you know who I am, but please, do not give me away."

He took her hands in his.

"These people do not know I am a Prince, so please, treat me like any other person who has walked through this room."

"As you wish your Highness."

He faced everyone else. He saw that Califia was looking at him with curious eyes. The docent released them to the Wakandan woman, Cebisi.

"Hello everyone. Yes, I am Cebisi. I am from Wakanda. Please, come inside and I can start your visit." Cebisi's English was crisp with a strong accent, much stronger than N'Jobu's. He placed himself away from her, but she would not enter the exhibit hall until he passed through first, and he became worried that this would be a total fail.

"What part of Wakanda are you from?" asked Bakari.

"I am from the Border tribe. My clan lives on the outskirts of Wakanda, it is where our blankets are made," she said proudly. "My family has made all the royal blankets for over two centuries."

N'Jobu chuckled under his breath listening to Cebisi humble-brag. She seemed to relax once he lagged behind the group. He found himself walking with Califia.

"Was this woman Cebisi here when you visited before?" he asked Califia.

"No, it was self-guided that day. I learned so much more this time around."

Cebisi pointed out intricate details, told stories about Wakanda, and gave the group plenty of time to explore on their own.

"The colors are so rich, and I love how every single piece has a meaning to it," Califia said to N'Jobu.

"It's not just the blankets and clothes. If you visit a Wakandan home, their dishes and cutlery will have symbols embedded in the design. You'll find many homes painted with traditional symbols to help attract health, protection, and prosperity too."
"I love that," she said, her eyes all wide and excited by the thought.

He pointed out a small blanket propped up on a traditional Wakandan stool made of Marula wood.

"This is a baby blanket. On top, you see the stitching of symbols that Cebisi told everyone meant "good health", "love" and "abundance". But underneath it, where you can't see it, there are symbols sewn in that project those messages outward to the family and the world."

"What you ask for is what you also want to give to the world?"

"Yes."

"That's sweet," Califia said.

He found himself once again staring at her face and hair.

"There's um...there's pictures in the next section. I think you'll get a kick out of seeing home," she said.

"Lead the way," he said, allowing her to guide him. The rest of their entourage were way ahead of them, and this pleased N'Jobu to no end. He had her to himself.

The photos were the typical ones his country allowed. Wildlife. Mountain ranges. Sheep and goat herders. People from the Border tribe doing the stereotypical things photographers from National Geographic liked to see. Children running or staring at the camera as if they'd never seen one before. His country was well adept at staging images they wanted the world to see. There was an amazing half a wall-sized photo of a sunset taken near the domain of the River tribe. Califia's eyes grew wide when she saw it. He wished he could take her there in person to see it.

"Have your people thought of eco-tourism? I know you said you didn't have the infrastructure for full-scale tourism, but what about small cultural exchange groups?"

"Perhaps in the future," he said.

"You don't sound very confident."

"We have difficult terrain, and our rainy season is very long, and we suffer flooding from time to time. One day though," he said, lying through his teeth. He felt bad. She had a wistful look in her eyes, and she stared at the photo of the spectacular sunset once more.

"Maybe one day I could go there, and you could be my personal tour guide," she said.

Now it was his turn to look and feel wistful.

"I would like that."

"If you could only show me one place in Wakanda, what would it be?"

He pondered a moment. Looked at her face again. He looked at the sunset photo, and when he looked at her again, she had moved closer to him. Their arms were touching. He could smell the coconut mango hair balm she had in her hair. He so badly wanted to bury his fingers in her mane, pull her closer so he could smell her hair even more. He wanted to tilt her head back, lower his face and...

"There's no place you'd want to show me?"
"I wish I could show you all that my country has. But if I could only show you one thing, I guess it would be Black Creek in the river settlement."

"Why?"

"The water is warm year-round because of a natural thermal pocket underneath the creek. And the water is so clear. It's like a natural jacuzzi. They say if you bathe in that creek in your birthday suit, you can cleanse your spirit and feel brand new."

"Skinny dip, huh?"

"I have done it. Believe me, it is true."

He watched her eyes twinkle with amusement.

"So you would bring me to your country just to get me naked in a creek?"

"If it were possible, I would."

She play punched him in his arm.

"You are such a dudebro for saying that," she laughed.

"I am simply telling you the truth. But everyone in my country does that. It is a tradition at Black Creek. Warm water, nudity. No problem. I would be naked too, just so you know."

"Duly noted," she said, still looking up at him.

He leaned in closer and whispered in her ear.

"We will go there together one day. I promise."

He pulled away from her and continued on with the exhibit. She stuck next to him. More photos of Wakandan people. Some wrapped in blankets. Others displaying some of the traditional clothing still worn in parts of the country. He felt his palms sweat and his heart palpitate a little faster when he saw Cebisi and Bakari standing in front of a large picture of the royal family. The others had gathered to look at the photo and when N'Jobu was closer to it, he let out a long breath of relief when he saw that it was an old picture of his mother and father wearing western-style clothing. A ten-year-old T'Chaka was facing the camera and smiling wide with a missing baby tooth, while his seven-year-old self looked away from the camera, his head buried in his mother’s waist.

"This is King Azzuri Udaku, the Wise One, and our Queen Niyilolawa. This young man right here is Prince T'chaka, and this one here is Prince..." Cebisi's eyes widened, her face gone flustered.

While in America, N'Jobu used his own first name and his mother's maiden name for school. Poor Cebisi was afraid to out him. Lucky for both of them, the placard beneath the photo with the description only had his parent's names listed. Both he and his brother were tagged only as "Two young Princes of Wakanda."

"That is Prince Azzuri II," he made up quickly. Cebisi smiled in gratitude.

"Your parents are diplomats, have you ever met the Princes?" Califia asked. N'Jobu saw Cebisi cover her smile with her hand. She was getting a kick out of watching this.

"I have on occasion met the Royal brothers," he said.
"You balling with royalty like that, bruh?" Bakari asked.

"What are they like?" Califia asked.

"The older one, Prince T'Chaka, he's an okay dude. But the younger one, he's the coolest."

He glanced over at Cebisi and she was now laughing aloud.

"Is he lying?" Califia asked.

Cebisi wiped her eyes and seemed to remember that he was indeed her royal Prince, and quickly went back into a pious mode when she looked at his face. He nodded for her to answer.

"Prince T'Chaka I hear is very nice, but, if I may be honest, Prince Azzuri is the people’s favorite." Her eyes were downcast when she said it. N’Jobi was surprised by her answer. He had simply been joking.

"Why is that?" Califia asked.

"He is very much his mother's child, our Queen. When she is among our people, you can see with your own eyes the love she has for us. She is one of us. Not above or below us, but a part of us. He is like that." Cebisi's eyes would not look at N’Jobu. This was the first time he had ever heard anything like that about himself or his mother.

Califia admired his mother's face.

"She's beautiful. She reminds me of that old jazz singer, Abbey Lincoln. Her eyes are so dynamic. God, if I had her cheekbones."

"Co-sign," Soliel said.

It was the end of the Wakanda exhibit. They all thanked Cebisi, and when N’Jobu turned to walk away with Califia, Cebisi bowed to N’Jobu.

"My Prince, it was my honor to serve you today. May Bast be with you your Highness," she said.

"And may she be with you Cebisi. Thank you."

"You are most welcome." Her eyes were once again downcast.

"When I see my mother again, I will tell her of your kind words."

"Thank you, your Highness."

N’Jobu walked out of the exhibit taking his time catching up to Califia and the others. He felt good about the exhibit and spending time with Califia. Being around her friends allowed him to see a more relaxed version of herself, less in your face and more inquisitive and introspective. Something dawned on him as he approached the rest of the group inside the museum bistro. He had told Califia that he would take her to one of his favorite places in Wakanda and have her get naked with him. He berated himself. Thanks for keeping it classy.

Inside the bistro, the others were all seated. Califia had saved him a seat beside her. When she saw him walking over, her face lit up. She held out a glass of white wine for him.

Maybe she gets down like that, he thought as he took the wine from her hand and tapped his glass against hers.
Best Part

Chapter Summary

N'Jobu hangs out with Califia and her friends for the evening forcing him and her to assess where they stand with each other.

Chapter Notes

Hello happy readers!

Was away for some time to catch up on reading new books and trying to keep cool in the summer heat by staying outside. Didn't mean to take this long to update. Enjoy!

Chapter 8

"You don't know babe
When you hold me
And kiss me slowly
It's the sweetest thing
And it don't change
If I had it my way
You would know that you are

You're the coffee that I need in the morning
You're my sunshine in the rain when it's pouring
Won't you give yourself to me
Give it all…"

"Best Part" Daniel Caesar & H.E.R.

The official edict from N'Jobu's parents regarding his getting around the city was that he was never to take public transportation. When he attended the London School of Economics during undergrad, two Dora Milaje were assigned to tail him at all times and put a dent in his social life. He wanted things to be different while he was in the U.S. and insisted that he did not need the Dora Milaje to babysit him.

His imported BMW had been retrofitted in Wakanda to have the latest surveillance and protection tech to keep the Prince safe while he was in America. Bullet-proof, bomb-proof, and laser-proof, the vibranium enhanced automobile could withstand any manner of attack. Even poison gas.

Spending the day with Califia and her friends caused N'Jobu to disobey the edict when he decided to move around with them without the use of his car. Hidden away in his bomber jacket was a light-weight vibranium body shield that he could activate if necessary. Not one time during his first year in California did he ever have to use any weapons to keep himself safe. He kept a low profile, often using fake names in different places to keep off anyone's radar.
It was so refreshing for him to ride the BART system with the group and mingle around regular citizens outside of school. It also meant he could drink a little more and not worry about driving while intoxicated. The sizeable group from the museum voted to go hang out at a popular microbrewery on Haight Street. They arrived in time for Happy Hour and were able to secure several tables that they pushed together near the street-facing window.

N'Jobu sat across from Califia and Soliel who were busy drinking bitter red ales while he took his time savoring a cider Califia had picked out for him to try. It was a ginger-grass cider brew that packed quite a punch. She made sure to have a small carafe of wine available in case the cider wasn't to his liking. His skin felt tingly from the cider, and his brain was buzzing with the conversation and company surrounding him.

He glanced around the table to take in their party: Bakari and Shavonne cozied up next to each other sharing a plate of bacon-wrapped dates with goat cheese. Langston and Rolita tucking into French-fried asparagus and cauliflower. A young man named Reynaldo who appeared to be the youngest of their group and who was carded by the waiter much to the delight of his friends who teased him about his baby face.

Soliel's girlfriend Aunjanue was arguing with Califia and Soliel over a new rap album that dropped online. The three of them shared a meat plate of andouille sausage and currywurst sausage with a side of russet potatoes. N'Jobu picked at his own meal of grilled romaine salad with a heavy dose of bacon vinaigrette. Aunjanue was adamant that her assessment of the album was correct and she was holding court at the table to prove her point.

"The problem is, all of you expect rhyme styles to stay the same. What you all call mumble rap is just a new evolution of the culture," Aunjanue said. She wore a thick topknot of black braids, her dark brown skin having the same reddish tint as Califia. Soliel had her arm around the back of Aunjanue's chair.

"Part of the culture is knowing what a muthafucker is saying," Califia blurted out, causing the entire table to laugh.

"James Brown often sang words that we had no idea what he was saying, but we don't dog him out," Aunjanue leveled at Califia.

"Slow your roll, Aunjanue, James Brown was often doing that Gullah talk, so just because the masses didn't understand it, don't mean people like him didn't. Get on that, Cali," Bakari said pointing at her.

"Gullah?" N'Jobu asked Califia. She took a quick swig of her ale and looked at him.

"My great-grandparents are from Georgia, Geechie country. Um, we're known as Gullah people. They were descended from enslaved Ibo who lived on some of the small islands off the Georgia coast. Their language is a mixture of Ibo, Creole English and a little bit of Muskogee Creek. Native American. They say a lot of James Brown's grunts and groans was Geechie talk."

"Do you know any of it?"

"Me? Nah, that's old-timey talk."

"You should look into learning it, Califia," Rolita said, "my tribe is teaching our young people, but too many of our elders are passing on, so we're losing some things."

"Rolita's people are Yurok. One of the largest Federally recognized tribes in California," Califia said.
"Yurok," N'jobu pronounced, pouring himself a glass of cabernet from the carafe.

He was familiar with the more well-known Native American groups. But he had never heard of the Gullah before. Creoles and New Orleans history were more familiar to him. He knew very little about Georgia or Califia's people. But he found it interesting that the Ibo were part of her roots.

"Speaking of my people, please tell me you all are coming out to Alcatraz on Thanksgiving," Rolita said tugging on her two short braids and snacking down on an asparagus stalk.

"I'm going," Soliel said.

"Me too," said Califia reaching for the carafe and pouring herself a half glass of wine.

"You know I'm down," said Bakari scooting back his chair to give Shavonne room to get up. She headed back towards the restrooms in the pub.

"What's happening in Alcatraz? Isn't that an old prison?" N'Jobu asked pouring the rest of the wine into his own glass. He glanced over at Rolita.

"Several different Native American groups get together to do a sunrise celebration instead of recognizing Thanksgiving," Rolita said. "we've been doing this for over forty years now. I would love for you to come with us," Rolita said.

"I will do that," N'Jobu said, pulling out his cell and updating his personal calendar.

"You have to get up early man, the crack of dawn's ass," Bakari said.

Rolita went into a little more detail about the gathering, and as he listened, N'Jobu began to get a clearer picture of Califia's world. Most of her friends were activists of some sort. She also had a very diverse group of friends from all walks of life who were committed to various social justice causes. Everyone seated at the table was a person of color, and N'Jobu wondered if she had any white friends or peers that she associated with. N'Jobu didn't get a sense of animosity towards whiteness or white people from the group, but he was eager to know if their activism precluded having to engage with other white students. The mere thought of that didn't sit with him very well.

His own very selective peer group was just as diverse, but he did have quite a few white schoolmates he engaged within his department at school and in his social life. Also, his major tended to be filled with more white students. He began to think that Califia and her friends self-segregated much to their detriment. An open hand could do more in the world than a closed fist.

Their waiter came by the table again and N'Jobu requested another glass of cider from the jovial brunette who kept filling his side glass of water every chance she got. The conversation moved onto reality TV shows they were keeping up with, and then the movies they wanted to see. He kept his eye on Califia, enjoying her laughter and the soft chiding she gave her friends when they disagreed about things. When she became passionate about a topic, her voice would raise an octave and her eyes would squint as if she were going to use the force of her will to bend them to her side. A couple of times she jabbed her finger into his shoulder to make her point and he savored her touch. He was finishing his second glass of cider when she reached for it and drank the last cool dregs.

"That's not bad," she said, a smear of her lip gloss staining the small glass she still held in her hand.

"Would you like to share another?" he asked. Before she answered, two men outside knocked on the thick glass of the pub staring at them. She placed his glass back near his hand and he watched her gaze at the men entering the pub. Bakari stood up slapping hands and bumping shoulders with both men. One was a tall slender Latino with tats on his arms and wearing an Angels baseball cap. The
other was a medium-build black guy with twists in his hair and TV star looks. The black guy and the Latino made their way to the empty seat between N'Jobu and Califia.

"Babe," the black man said kissing Califia's cheek.

"Hey, Xavier," Califia said, looking nowhere in N'Jobu's direction. Greetings went around, and Xavier's friend Julian grabbed another chair from an empty table and further added distance between N'Jobu and Califia.

Xavier was affable, everyone else at the table except for Shavonne knew him, and N'Jobu sensed from Califia's terse expression that something was off in their relationship. Xavier was leaning into her, but her shoulders leaned more towards Soliel.

The pub grew louder as more customers filled the brewery, and there was music playing above the din that made it harder for N'Jobu to keep up with all the conversations that were going on. The only person he wanted to focus on was Califia, but Xavier was making N'Jobu vacillate between staying and leaving the group. He didn't like sitting near her with some other dude hanging off her. His jaw kept getting tight every time Xavier dipped near her face and whispered in her ear.

At one point he caught Soliel's eye, and he thought for a moment that she could see right through his discomfort. N'Jobu checked his cell for the time and was astonished at how late it had gotten. They had been in the pub for over two hours. The sun was setting in a fiery crimson splash outside when the check finally arrived at their table. The group left behind a healthy tip for their server, and once they were all outside, N'Jobu had to stomach Xavier throwing his arm around Califia's shoulder.

"There's a bar down the street that has reggae music tonight. Julian's homie plays the drums. Y'all up for that? Free cover charge," Xavier told everyone.

"Free is enticing," Rolita said throwing a light jacket on.

N'Jobu pulled on his bomber jacket and checked his cell again. Andrea was blowing up his phone.

"Are you interested in checking it out, N'Jobu?" Califia asked. Xavier was looking at N'Jobu, his left arm draped over Califia, his hand dangling near her left breast. N'Jobu wanted to reach over and pull the man's hand and arm away from her. His whole day today had been special because he had time to be around her, share parts of himself with her, got to know how her mind worked when she was excited about something, and now he felt restricted because her man was with them. Her man.

N'Jobu swallowed thickly, shoved his hands in his jacket pockets. He had a light buzz and Califia was staring at him with those cat eyes of hers that took on a sultry look from the rays of the setting sun. She pursed her lips like she was about to say something else and Xavier led her away to lead the pack towards the next hangout spot. Man or no man, N'Jobu needed to be near her. He tagged along despite his misgivings.

###

Califia stood near the back of the bar listening to the reggae band do a fair rendition of "Sun is Shining". She was swaying along with the heavy bass rhythms, Xavier next to her with his fourth beer in his hand. She kept her mouth shut after his third beer, but the fourth one was causing him to act a little sloppy in public. The bar was packed with eager dancing patrons, their little posse bringing in the smattering of color in an otherwise predominately white space. Behind her, N'Jobu sat on a barstool enjoying the vibe and downsing a rum and coke. He was only five feet away from her, but she could feel his eyes on her, boring into the back of her head. Xavier had been extra touchy-feely with her in the reggae bar and it made her feel uncomfortable because he was only doing it when
N'Jobu was near them.

The first thirty minutes in the bar had been fun, the entire group dancing on the small cement dance floor. N'Jobu had been snagged by a pretty sandy-haired white woman, and Califia enjoyed watching him sway to the loud music. He was actually a pretty good dancer and she catcalled him when the music got good to him and he flashed her his pearly whites and she felt her cheeks raise up higher than usual when she smiled back at him. That's when Xavier caught a whiff of something between them and started fondling her more openly. He wasn't one for public PDA, but Califia's flirty behavior around N'Jobu kicked it up a few notches.

N'Jobu had switched out his dancing partner for a cute black woman with a sexy frohawk, and the live band high-powered through a classic Dawn Penn jam. Califia's arms were casually draped around Xavier's neck as she watched N'Jobu dance and talk to the woman, his hands sliding up and down the woman's back. N'Jobu wasn't wearing his jacket while dancing, and the woman was rubbing her hands up and down his arms.

Xavier spun Califia around and pressed his hands on her shoulders, rubbing his crotch against her ass.

"There it is baby," he said, singing along with the song and dry humping her, "arch that back girl, show these fools how it's done."

Xavier's hands slid down from her shoulders and held her waist, his hips gyrating and thrusting against her. She stepped away from his grip, turning to face him with a rigid smile on her face. She could feel his dick pressing into her stomach when she hugged him.

"Be good," she hissed at him as she tried to ignore the pokes his hardness was giving to her.

Over Xavier's shoulder, she could see N'Jobu watching her, his eyes gone narrow. She gave him a little wave and he nodded at her. She noticed his hands were riding just above his partner's butt and her lips pressed together in a tight grimace when she felt Xavier's hands grabbing and separating her ass cheeks with his hands.

"Baby you feel so good," Xavier murmured. His mouth crashed into her lips while she was still staring at N'Jobu. His kisses were sloppy and over-exaggerated and Califia endured it until the song ended. As the crowd clapped, Califia pushed away from Xavier.

"I'm going to get some water," she said, hurrying away from him.

Now they were standing together and listening to music, Xavier giving harsh whispers in her ear every other minute.

"Why are you tripping tonight?" Xavier asked.

"You are doing a little too much for me."

"Like what?"

"I don't need you molesting me in public."

"Molesting you? You're my woman. We're having fun."

"I'll keep it buck then, you're not holding your liquor and I don't like how you're touching me."

"You crazy."
Xavier walked into the crowd to get closer to the band. Califia drew in a deep breath and released a sigh of relief. The last thing she needed was for Xavier to get loud and make a scene, embarrassing her in front of her friends. She turned around to go back to the bar and found N'Jobu still sitting and watching her.

"Everything okay?"

"Not really."

She sat on the stool next to him and asked for a coke from the bartender.

"Trouble in paradise then?"

"Tuh," she answered. She drank her coke and watched the band. The room was jam-packed to the rafters, she couldn't even see where her people were, not even Xavier.

"The music is very good," he said.

She stared at N'Jobu knowing he was trying to lighten her mood.

"You are a good dancer," she said giving him a sly smile. She saw his eyes relax and it made her feel better.

"You are much better. I like watching you move."

She smiled again.

"You want to dance?" he asked.

"Not right now, if that's okay. I just need to chill for a minute. Xavier's got my pressure up."

N'Jobu nodded, set down his drink and slipped off the stool.

"You don't have to go," Califia said quickly, reaching out and pulling his arm back. She looked at her hand on his arm and pulled away fast. She hadn't meant to grab him. She looked desperate and her face grew warm.

"Sorry," she whispered.

N'Jobu didn't get back on the stool, but he did stand in front of her. He was close enough so that his thighs were touching her knees. He was almost eye level with her.

"What's the problem with you and Xavier?"

Califia tilted her head back and laughed in a way that had a little bite to it.

"Everything," she stammered, and then caught herself with her open honesty. N'Jobu's eyes didn't press her, but they did make her feel safe. She took a long sip of her coke and leaned in closer so N'Jobu could hear her clearly. She was cognizant of the fact that her knees were pressing hard into his thighs at this point. Her head was still a bit foggy with the drinking she did earlier, but she was comfortable.

"Earlier he told me he had bought tickets for us to go to New Orleans for winter break. But I wasn't even sure I wanted to go. I told him that. He was upset that he paid for a ticket I might not use. That's the first thing." She took another sip of coke, "You really don't need to hear this, it's boring," she said.
"No, keep going. It's good to talk things out with other people. I'm a good listener," he said.

His voice had grown deeper, at least that's how it sounded to Califia. His expression was like that of a Priest patiently taking in a confessional with no judgment.

"Xavier is a great dude. He's smart, educated, about to get a bomb ass job-"

"And very good-looking," N'Jobu said smiling at her.

"No doubt. On paper, he is everything a woman is supposed to want. But sometimes I look at him like it's not enough. Like he doesn't get me. He's the longest relationship I've ever been in, but I feel like there might be something else out there better for me. And I feel like shit for thinking that when other women would give their teeth for a man like him."

She shook her head at how easy that flowed from her mouth. She hadn't even said those things to Soliel or Bakari. But here she was giving somewhat intimate details about her boyfriend to a man she had masturbated over. Many times. Jesus be a rock.

"Serah told me to break up with him."

"Why don't you? You aren't happy, right? Just end it."

Califia's chest hitched a bit and she felt the pinpricks of a small tear forming in her right eye.

"I don't want to hurt him," she murmured and the lone tear fell down her cheek. She reached up to wipe her cheek, but N'Jobu already had his left thumb on her face wiping the teardrop away.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that," he said. Califia took in another deep breath and released it. She felt a shudder go through herself. There. She had finally confessed her real reason for not breaking up. She didn't want to hurt Xavier.

"I keep hoping he'll dump me, or we'll have this huge dramatic fight where I can act belligerent and he just tells me he quits, but it never happens. We are in this stalemate. Comfortably numb. I tell myself there has to be someone that's a better fit for me, but I'm scared there won't be, and what if I leave him on a whim and I never find that other person?"

N'Jobu still had his thumb on her cheek.

"You'll never know if you don't let him go, Califia."

"I'm holding him hostage, aren't I?"

N'Jobu only gave her a sad smile.

"I'm such a selfish bitch. I need to make a decision soon."

"I wish you would," he said, his voice gone husky, almost like a command.

Califia stared at N'Jobu. His thumb traced down her face and touched her lips. The sensation of his thumb on her lips tickled and sparked the skin there. She pursed her lips so that the touch felt like a kiss. Another tear formed in her eye.

"You are beautiful when you are angry, you are beautiful when you laugh, and you are even more beautiful when you cry," he said.

"Thank you," she said, unable to think of anything else to say.
"I wish you weren't with him because I really want to kiss you right now," he said.

The strumming in her heart turned into a gallop as his eyes swept down to her lips. The music in the bar was far away, the voices of the other patrons gone mute in her mind. She opened her thighs and pulled him closer to her, holding onto his arms. He rested his forehead on hers and she closed her eyes. She tried to match his steady breathing, but her own breathing was erratic. She could smell the rum on his breath as he let his hands run up her thighs and rest on her hips.

"Califia," he said.

"Say my whole name," she said, still clutching his arms, afraid to move, afraid to escape his warmth.

He chuckled and whispered in her ear, "Califia Stevens." Her toes curled in her heels, and the tingle from his tongue swiping her ear when he spoke her name felt like the fluttering of butterflies. She could probably cum from him just whispering her name over and over.

She pulled her forehead away from his and cradled his neck with her hands.

"Say my name again," she told him.

###

When N'Jobu opened his mouth to speak her name, Califia pressed her lips into his and slipped her tongue inside his mouth. He didn't back away from her. He didn't tell her to stop. Their tongues swirled around trying to find an acceptable rhythm, and when N'Jobu's hands pressed into her lower back, she ceded control of their mouths over to him. Now in control, N'Jobu plundered the heat he found between their lips encouraged to keep his pace by the soft humming he heard deep in her throat. He slowed down to enjoy the wet smacking sounds they gave off. He pulled her closer to the edge of the barstool leaning back just a bit so that she couldn't feel the strain of his cock growing thicker in his pants.

Kissing her deeply, slowly, wetly, he found his mind feverishly trying to gather his wits. Xavier was in the room somewhere, possibly heading back to them, or maybe even her friends would spot them and break up their joining. He had been dying to kiss her all day but felt the opportunity would never happen with Xavier there, but here they were lip-locked, with Califia sucking on his tongue the way he imagined her sucking on his dick.

"Califia, shit," he growled in her mouth, threading his fingers through the back of her bushy hair and yanking hard on it so that she was looking up into his face from the force of his grip.

Her lips were parted and he could see that magical tongue between her teeth. Her eyes were half closed and up close he could see how thick her eyebrows were. He kissed the freckles on her nose, pulled her hair harder and buried his face on the side of her neck, nipping her on a spot just shy of her collarbone.

He started lightly sucking on her neck, enjoying the whimpers spilling from her lips and the quivering from her thighs. He could feel his dick twitching in his pants, probably already spilling sticky beads of pre-cum inside his boxers. He needed to stop or he would be fucking this girl on the barstool and not giving a fuck who was in the room.

He pulled away from her, panting a bit himself and giving up more space between them. No one seemed to be paying attention to them, so he hopped up on his stool and gulped down the last of his rum and coke.

He watched Califia run her fingers on the edges of her lips to fix the last of her ruined lip gloss. She
closed her legs and tugged on her top, peeling away the material from the sweat on her upper body.

The girl with the frohawk ambled over to N'Jobu and asked him to dance and he jumped at the chance to get away from Califia, escape the dizzying power she had over him now that she had laid that kiss on him. He didn't even look back to see what her reaction was to his leaving her at the bar. He just needed to escape. And time to think.

He had women all over, and was free to kiss, flirt, fornicate and break hearts if he so desired. All his women were free. But Califia had Xavier. She wasn't free. And as much as he wanted her (in his bed, on his face, sitting on his dick), he was not down for any triangle. After that kiss, he needed to fuck her in every position possible before he left for Wakanda. If she fucked the way she kissed, he was a dead man. And she was worth dying for. Courtney, the girl he was dancing with tried getting his attention. They danced to a song called "Night Nurse", and Courtney was body rolling and smashing her cute ass against his groin, keeping him hard. He looked around to see Califia at the bar with Rolita, Soliel, and Aunjanue. They were having an animated discussion from what he could tell, and he wondered if the conversation was about him.

The band's last set was finished and terrible music replaced it from a D.J. who didn't follow the theme of the reggae vibes but instead blasted the audience with Euro-Pop. He felt his cell vibrate. Checking it he saw that everyone was meeting outside to say goodbye for the night. N'Jobu thanked Courtney for dancing with him and went to retrieve his bomber jacket from coat check.

The others were lingering on the corner away from the bar. Califia was speaking to Xavier in hushed tones, and N'Jobu knew she wouldn't break up with him right then, but he prayed that it would be tonight. He hoped she would do it quickly because there was a fire in his spirit that he didn't think he could suppress for very long.

He prided himself on being respectful, but deep down he knew he could fuck her while she was still with Xavier. If she couldn't break up with him because she was scared, he knew he was willing to do it for her. He was a Prince who had never been denied what he wanted when it came to women. He wanted Califia. Wanted her bad. The way she kissed him told him she wanted him too. He felt empathy for her situation. Xavier was a long-term love that had soured. She needed to uproot the man and make room for N'Jobu. Watching the shaky couple speak to one another bugged the hell out of N'Jobu. Now that he tasted those lips and felt those thighs and hips, he was ready to bulldoze Xavier out of the way in a heartbeat.

"I think you should come home with me."

N'Jobu overheard Califia telling Xavier to go with her. Xavier, a little loopy in the legs was pushing her hands off of him.

"Naw, I'm going to hang out with Julian a little bit. I'll be home later," Xavier slurred, kissing Califia on her cheek.

"We'll be fine, Califia. I'll have him home no later than midnight. He won't turn into a pumpkin, I promise," Julian said waving goodnight to everyone. The two men lumbered off into the night laughing together, and N'Jobu eased his way over to Califia and Bakari.

Hugs were given, goodbyes were shared, and N'Jobu soon found himself walking to a BART station with Bakari and Califia. The ride to Xavier's apartment was mellow. They talked about the band, how good the music was and which pale ale or cider they liked the best.

In no time they were walking Califia up to Xavier's apartment.
"Hey, the Syfy channel is having a Godzilla marathon. You want to make popcorn and watch the next one coming on?" Califia suggested.

"Microwave or hot air?" Bakari asked.

"Hot air, with real butter," Califia said.

"You down?" Bakari asked N'Jobu.

He was. He would get a chance to see where Califia crashed, and spend a little more time with her, even if Bakari was there. The night was still young.

###

Xavier's place was small. The bathroom was inside their bedroom. N'Jobu relieved himself of the last vestiges of liquor in his system. Snacking on fresh popcorn and bottled water, he felt clear-headed and fully hydrated.

Stepping out of the bathroom, he couldn't help but stare at the double bed that Xavier shared with Califia. It was unmade. He pushed thoughts of them together in that space out of his head. She didn't want him anymore. There was no need to harbor any envy towards Xavier. According to Califia, he was a good dude, but not the one for her. On a folding chair near their bed, N'Jobu spotted a pair of skimpy bikini panties and a lace bra. He gritted his teeth. Why did she stay here if she didn't want him? She had a grandmother who had a house and friends with places. Hell, she could stay with him and Bakari.

He stopped his train of thought. Slow down, he told himself. She was a chick he wanted to dick down in the worst way. No need to be thinking roommates and shit. His lust was writing checks he knew his ass couldn't cash. He'd lusted after women before, but he hadn't given thoughts to moving them in. It was just his male ego wilding a bit at seeing where another man fucked Califia. He clenched his fists. She was going to be his soon. Stop tripping.

When he returned to the livingroom, Bakari was still curled up in blankets on a bean bag near a plush maroon couch where Califia was seated. They each had fresh bowls of popcorn. Califia passed N'Jobu his bowl.

"Lots of butter this time," she said. N'Jobu sat next to her, keeping his legs on the floor and away from Califia's legs which were curled on the couch. They got through half of a Godzilla movie on Monster Island when Bakari fell asleep, snoring into the beanbag.

"We should leave," N'Jobu said, staring at Bakari slumped low inside the beanbag, the blanket surrounding him covering his face.

"No rush, Xavier's not coming back tonight. You guys can crash here if you want."

"Your man knows Bakari very well, but he doesn't know me. That will probably not be cool with him."

He saw Califia flinch a bit when he called Xavier her man. He stared at her, glanced at her lips, then looked into her eyes again. He wanted to devour her lips.

"Should we talk about the kiss at the bar?" she asked.

"Only if you want to."
"I do."

He waited for her to speak. She was wearing a long button up Wonder Woman nightshirt and thick wool socks on her feet. Her hair was still blooming all over her head.

"It was wrong of me to do that. Especially since I'm still with someone. I shouldn't have put you in a messy situation."

"I don't care."

Califia blinked at him several times.

"You don't?"

"I like you a lot, Califia. I want to spend time with you. It just so happens you are with someone. As soon as you fix that, I will properly step to you."

Her mouth fell open, then shut, then opened again. N'Jobu reached over into her popcorn bowl, snagged a few buttery kernels and popped them into her mouth.

"I think of you all the time, Califia. And the way you kissed me tonight was…whoa."

She chuckled. He reached out for her hand. She looked down at him, then placed her left hand in his.

"What about you? Do you think of me?" The playful lilt in his voice moved her. He kissed her hand, still waiting for her to answer.

"I do, and I feel so guilty about it."

N'Jobu held up a hand to stop her from negative talk.

"The heart wants what the heart wants. Leave all the bad thoughts you have about your situation behind. People grow apart. It is natural. You say you are worried about not finding someone after you leave him. Who am I to you?"

Bakari snored loudly and shifted in the bean bag, but neither one of them was worried about him listening to their conversation. Once Bakari was knocked out, he was out.

"You don't want to answer me?"

"It's just a lot N'Jobu."

"I understand that. But…who am I to you?"

"Someone I'd like to know better."

"As a friend only?"

"No."

He put his bowl of popcorn on the floor and pulled a tense Califia onto his lap.

"Relax," he said holding her by her waist and legs.

"This is weird for me," she said.

"How so?"
"We've only hung out together a few times, but it feels intense each time. We know nothing about each other. And yet…"

"And yet what?"

She shrugged and hid her face in her hands.

"I don't know. It feels like it did when I was nine and had my first crush."

"I am honored to be your grown-up crush."

Califia giggled.

"Can I kiss you again?" he asked.

She nodded and he lifted up his face and found her lips once more. She wrapped an arm around his shoulder and his left hand held her face. The kissing this time was gentle, still filled with longing and exploration, but N'Jobu wanted to relish the moment without waking up Bakari. He made sure not to nibble or suck too hard on her neck, not wanting to leave love bites for Xavier to see in the morning. When the thought of Xavier crossed through his mind again, he broke from their kiss leaving Califia sighing in frustration.

"Can I touch you?" he asked.

She nodded vigorously, and he kissed her again, licking the outline of her lips and then sucking on her tongue, tasting the salt and butter from their late-night snack. Her nipples had beaded through her nightgown, and N'Jobu reached up and tugged on each one through the cloth. He watched Califia bite back a moan when he touched her, so he tugged harder, looking at the protrusions. He unbuttoned the nightgown down to her belly, freeing her breasts. When he saw them in the glow of the television, he looked up at her face, his fingers pulling on each nipple. She did her best to remain silent, but she bit into her full lips, and the vision of that made him squeeze his eyes shut and shift her ass harder onto his dick.

Califia rotated her hips and ground herself into his lap, feeling the swelling of him push back on her.

"N'Jobu, suck on my nipples…please."

He obliged, his lush lips taking turns wrapping around each ripe nipple, sucking and swirling his tongue at varying speeds. He liked how big her nipples swelled, so he kept alternating his ministrations, sucking on one and tugging on the other, the pulling sensation so intense for her he guessed because she was whimpering up a storm on his lap. She started bouncing on his dick and he let one of her nipples slip from his mouth with a loud pop because it was too much for him. He wanted to play with her pussy, but that was too risky. They were already pushing it with Bakari on the floor covered up and snoring like a banshee.

"Damn," she uttered under her breath, her eyes finally opening back up to stare at him, "I can feel your dick….so…big," she gasped. He shifted her on his lap so that she was facing him, her thighs spread on either side of his hips. He could see and play with her big tits fully as she rocked on him. He didn't want to pull up her nightgown to see her panties. It was enough to have her grinding on him. He held her shoulders and alternated sucking on her tits and fondling them.

"Can I touch you?" she asked.

Holy Bast, he wanted her to. But he couldn't. He could barely contain himself with her jockeying on his lap. He didn't even want to lift up her gown and look at her pussy which had to be soaking her.
With his teeth set on edge, he whispered, "No."

The look on her face made him feel horrible like he had stolen a gift from her on Christmas like the Grinch. But then she twisted her bottom lip and bit on it again, and the look of denied pleasure she gave him made his dick jump in his pants and she felt it.

"Calia, sithandwa sam, you have me so turned on, I could cum right now."

"We could go into the bedroom," she said, lifting up. He yanked her back down hard by her hips. She gasped. His eyes narrowed when he looked at her.

"I'm not going into that bedroom with you. When I take you all the way, it will be in my bed. Understand?"

She nodded. The thought of that double bed brought out tight cords in his neck.

"Did you fuck him today?"

Her eyes widened and her mouth parted. But she didn't answer him.

He lifted up her nightgown in the back and slapped her ass hard with a wide-open palm. Her body lurched forward, forcing her to grip his shoulders for balance and she quickly glanced over at Bakari.

"Don't look at him. Look at me. Answer the question. Did you fuck Xavier today?"

He rubbed her full left ass cheek with his right hand, knowing the sting was wearing off, even as his dick swelled bigger from striking her. She took it like a big girl. He slapped her ass again in the same spot. She squeezed her eyelids shut, keeping all sound inside herself. He rubbed her ass tenderly, lifted up the smacked cheek and squeezed it. Damn this girl was too much for him.

"Hit me again and I'll tell you," she snarled at him.

N'Jobu felt his eyebrows raise up on his face. He gave her a nasty smile and struck her other ass cheek twice, hard enough to make her wince and suck on her teeth. He rubbed the tender flesh. Then squeezed both her round globes in his hands. He needed to end this soon.

"Tell me," he whispered. There was a hint of desperation in his voice. She picked up on it and ran with it.

"What if I did?"

She was gyrating on him and he did his best to stay on task, to not shut his eyes and let her dominate him for a while. She was pushing him to his limit. He knew she would, eventually. She started bouncing on him again, learning very quickly that he liked that. Her motion made her titties bounce too, and he sat there watching heaven on his lap. If he didn't get her off of him soon, he was going to nut in his pants. He was too old to have cum in his pants and not inside a woman he wanted. He yanked her by her hair and pulled her face closer to his.

It would be easy to take Bakari home in his car, then drive back to her in his own BMW and fuck the wokeness out of her. But this was not the time and most definitely was not the place. He twisted his fingers in her hair tighter, letting her know she'd better stop playing with him.

"Ow, Jobu…baby," she pleaded. Good God of the worlds. He loved it when she called him that. No
one had ever called him Jobu. He was going to countdown and rejoice on the day he finally blew her back out.

"The question," he said.

"Yes. I did. I fucked him. Early this morning. I fucked him."

"Did you enjoy it?"

"Why do you care?"

The corners of his mouth lifted in a wicked smile that made her bite her lip again. He released her hair, unfastened his pants and pulled down his boxers just enough to release his dick that bobbed against his stomach once it was freed. He grabbed her right hand and placed it on his cock. She squeezed it, gripping the swollen head so tight he gritted his teeth to keep from spilling all over her hand.

"This is your dick now. Understand? I don't want you fucking him ever again. You break up with him. I'm not going to rush you, Califia. But this will be waiting for you."

He let her stroke him. His dick was so slick with pre-cum that they both enjoyed the slippery sound of her hand running up and down his shiny length. She leaned in and kissed him while she stroked him.

"This mine?" she whispered in his ear.

"All yours," he said kneading her tits and plucking on her nipples once more.

She stopped playing with his dick and shoved her fingers into her panties.

"Don't you want to touch me here?"

He released her breasts and zipped up his pants. He drew her back in for another wet kiss then pulled away from her.

"When I touch you there and make you cum, you have to be a free woman."

Califia fastened her nightgown.

"You should go then," she said.

Califia shifted in his lap and stood up, grabbing the popcorn bowls and taking them into her kitchen. N'Jobu adjusted his private parts and woke Bakari up from the floor.

"Let's go, Bakari."

It took N'Jobu nearly ten minutes to get Bakari awake and shuffling to find his shoes. N'Jobu took Bakari's car keys from his pocket. Califia was back from the kitchen watching them.

"Do you need some help with him?" she asked N'Jobu.

"I'm awake, I'm awake," Bakari fussed at her.

"I'm driving," N'Jobu said.

"Bet," Bakari said heading out the front door and down the stairs to get to his car.
N'Jobu stood by the open front door facing Califia. She didn't move towards him.

"I meant what I said. I won't rush you," he said.

"Okay."

A new awkwardness permeated the room. They both felt the shift in the air, the change in their interactions weighing heavily on them. She was not his woman, but he had staked a claim on her. Told her directly. She wanted him too, he was sure of that. The ball was in her court. He wouldn't act until she came to him first. For the first time in a long time, Prince N'Jobu Udaku was at the mercy of a woman for affection that he craved like air. He wanted….no, needed, he needed her to give herself to him. No strings. No wounded lover on her mind.

"Goodnight, Califia."

He left with the vision of her emblazoned on his heart.
Garden

Chapter Summary

Calia tries to hold onto the good feelings she has for N'Jobu as she grapples with making a clean break from an unwanted relationship.

Chapter Notes

Chugging right along dear readers. Prepare for future complications, baby making, International political intrigue, the birth of T'Challa, and some angst.

I thought I was going to pull off two chapters a week, but because I am writing some other things at the same time, I will have to stick with what I can bust out each week now. I may surprise myself though.

Thanks for sticking with this tale!

Chapter 9

Let me love, let me touch, let me love
Baby, give it up, let me drink from the fountain
In the car, on the street, in the dark
Baby, on the beach, in the back of the garden

Ooh, I'm ready, ooh, don't stop
Ooh, I'm ready, ooh, don't stop

Garden—Emeli Sandé

Once the trembling from her arousal had subsided an hour after N'Jobu left, Califia sat back on the couch with wobbly legs and an intense pulsing between her thighs. She felt equal parts acutely agitated and foggy in the brain. What the hell just happened? Raising up the hem of her nightgown to her waist, she pulled on her underwear, only to find that the cotton panties she changed into earlier were wedged between her folds.

Peeling them off and throwing the underwear on the couch, she took a look at herself down there. Her clit was so swollen it looked ready to pop from any friction. Had N'Jobu touched her, she would have keened to the heavens and passed out. She pressed her hand onto her close-cropped mound. The heat there was intense, and the slight pressure she applied caused her insides to clench with need.

Her nipples were still poking through her gown and she couldn't help but fantasize about that man's mouth on her breasts again. She reached over to the cheap IKEA end table next to the couch and picked up her cell. She typed a quick message to N'Jobu:
Let me know you guys made it home safe.

She dropped the cell onto the couch and leaned back, staring at the tv without really seeing it. She had tongued him down. He spanked her ass and it felt delicious. She closed her eyes on the next thought. She had stroked his thick dick, that enticing turgid flesh would probably need two hands to set it off properly.

She jumped off the couch, grabbed her phone and hustled herself into the bedroom where she flung off her nightgown and fell stomach first onto the bed. Lying there naked with just her wool socks on, she needed her body to cool off. From the first kiss on, she knew she had stepped into the danger zone all the way. She had cheated on Xavier. Technically. She tried to rationalize it. She hadn't sucked his dick, and he didn't stick anything inside her. But...kissing and titty sucking was bad.

But it felt so good. God, she wanted more of it. She reached behind herself and rubbed her right butt cheek. It still smarted from where he spanked it more so than the left cheek. Thinking of his hands caressing and squeezing her ass pooled more heat to her center. She rolled over and spread her legs, her free hand giving languid strokes to her clit. It wasn't enough, she needed something inside of her. She wanted to feel full of him.

Leaning over the bed, she reached under it on her side and felt around for her goodie box. She pulled out a purple six-inch dildo. It was nowhere near the length or girth of N'Jobu, but it was all she had at the moment. Work what you got.

Slipping it inside of herself, she angled the dildo so that it rubbed just under her clit with the perfect amount of pressure when pulling it out from the shallow thrusts she gave herself. Closing her eyes, she tried to replay the evening on her couch, especially the expression on his face when he was just watching her straddled on his lap, rocking against him. His lips were ripe with possibility as he poked them out a bit while surveying her body, the nostrils of his keen nose flaring at bit each time she slid down the outline of his cock through his pants, his eyes slicing into her in a way that unnerved and electrified her senses. His hungry gaze was rich with entitlement, as if this was the expected order of nature, him being serviced without question. After the second kiss, all of his touches felt proprietary. It didn't matter that she belonged to another man. Without uttering a word, his tongue and nimble fingers marked her as his.

No matter how many different ways she angled the latex toy, she couldn't get herself off. She was beginning to sweat, drops rolling from her forehead into her eyes. She didn't understand why her orgasm was eluding her. Her private parts were so fat and juicy, like a ripe mango ready to be sucked...so ready to ripple with pleasure, and yet she still couldn't cum. Her brows knitted together in vexation. She could feel drops of perspiration falling down the backs of her thighs.

She fixated on N'Jobu's dick, the treasure that had other women willing to play with him even if they weren't the only one. Had she become one now too? If she left Xavier and decided to hook up with N'Jobu all the way, would she be running into other women on a rotating schedule? Would she become another Andrea, letting him smash yams until the next woman showed up invited or unexpected? Could she be cool and sophisticated like Serah and act like good dick was just good dick, nothing more?

Califa was shocked at herself for how fast she was willing to get N'Jobu into Xavier's bedroom once her fingers had massaged his erection. She had never been with any guy that large and wondered if his other girls had to use a shitload of lubricant to fit him inside. Thinking back on it now, shame fell around her mind. It normally took her at least a month or two to decide to sleep with a man. Even mild petting didn't occur until she knew someone for a good period of time. She didn't judge folks who easily hopped into the sack on first meeting, but her personal history tended to move slower.
She and Xavier didn't have sex together until two months of intense kissing, heavy petting sessions, and clinic visits to make sure they were safe. But N'Jobu? Neither hand nor mouth had touched or licked her womanhood and she was ready to risk it all simply because he told her "No", that she couldn't touch him when she asked.

She felt a heavy tingle in her engorged bud, the hood pulled away from her clit. This tension and non-release was too aggravating, she clamped her thighs together, still moving her toy in and out. She considered switching to a vibrator, but they only made her numb when she was overly aroused.

"N'Jobu, make me cum. Make me cum…," she pleaded into the empty room. She started shaking her head from side to side and bucking her hips, her thoughts racing from image to image of him. She had her lips twisted up and the left side of her face pressed into the mattress when her phone rang startling her. She answered it.

"We made it back safe."

Her lips twisted into an "o" shape as the sound of N'Jobu's voice elevated the tension in her loins.

"Califia?"

"Yes, I'm here," she answered breathlessly over the phone.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah," she answered, pressing her eyelids shut. She had him on speaker phone, the reverb in his voice turning her on so much.

"Tonight wasn't too weird for you, was it?"

"Not at all," she said with a desperate breathiness forcing a biting of her bottom lip. The dildo was deep inside of her. She opened her legs wide again, tapping her clit with three fingers as she listened to his voice.

"Good. I had a great time with your friends."

"Hmmm," she murmured.

"Am I interrupting you with something? You sound distracted."

She tittered under her breath. If only he could see her—knees bent, thighs wide open, a dildo stuck inside her vagina, three-fingered rubbings to her clit all because of him.

"Califia?"

She tried to hold back, but when he said her name his voice was so rich through the speakerphone that it felt like he was there in the room with her. A despairing mewling sound escaped from her throat. She tried to keep it inside by clamping down on her lips, but it slipped away from her mouth and reached his ears.

He was so silent on his end that she thought he had hung up on her.

"Where are you right now?"

"I'm on the bed," she gasped. She heard movement on his end of the phone like he was shifting his position to hear better.
"Are you naked?"

The low rumble of his words coming out of her phone easily had her ignoring the low-level cramp that was developing in her thighs from holding her legs open for so long. She could feel the slick trickle of her excitement leaking down and wetting the sheets.

"Answer me, Califia."

There was a guttural tone in his voice now. An authoritative flavor to his words. She craved more of it. She ignored his request and pulled the dildo out a few inches, then slowly pushed it back in releasing only a heavy sigh.

"Are you playing with yourself?"

"Hmmphh…," was the only reply she gave him. She heard more movement on his end and a squelching sound, like a small bottle being squeezed.

"You were thinking about tonight and thinking about me."

She gave him a humming sound but still didn't answer.

"Open your legs wider."

Her eyes became owl-like as she stared at his number on her phone as if she were looking directly at his face. She did what she was told.

"I bet your pussy is dripping."

"Ooohhh…," she responded, her hips jerking a bit.

"You wish I was between your legs, don't you? Are you using your fingers or something else?"

"A toy," she whispered towards the phone.

She wasn't alone in her self-pleasuring, she could hear the soft fap-fap sound of N'Jobu handling his sex through the phone.

"Pull it out," he said.

She did.

"Now push it back in very slow."

Inch by sweet painful inch, she let the dildo sink back in. Tight. Snug.

"Slower. Do it again," he demanded, a coarseness tinging his words.

She felt like she was melting into the sheets with all the sweat pouring out of her. She shifted her weight, scooting her ass back a bit to restore circulation to her lower body parts.

She fiddled with the dildo and pushed in with such agonizing slowness that she felt like she was going to collapse from exhaustion from all the anticipation of release. Her whimpers grew as she threw her head back.

"I want to cum," she whined, twisting her hips.
All she heard was the sound of his stroking, labored breathing, and grunts on his end. She wished she could watch him handling his cock. Did he prefer stroking hard and fast, or slow and steady? Did he like to twirl his fingers over the fat head, or was he a steady fister like Xavier, just rubbing with impunity with no thoughts at all until something happened?

"Make me cum, baby," she hissed, her voice straining. There was a gasp on his end of the phone, and she could make out the sounds of heightened groans building in intensity.

"Stroke your dick for me, Jobu," she encouraged.

"Shit," he grunted.

"I wish your dick was all up in my pussy, Jobu," she purred into the phone.

The loud groan on his end buoyed her energy to keep going. She was slamming the dildo into herself, thrusting her hips, squeezing her ass cheeks for more tension. She was close. He was going to take her there.

"Jobu," she whimpered, disliking the nasal begging tone in her voice. She wanted to sound confident, ultra-sexy for him, but instead, she was sounding like a whiny ingrate child. He probably wasn't even feeling her anymore.

"That's my pussy you're playing with. Make my pussy cum, Califia," he blurted out.

His voice sounded raw, on the verge of collapsing.

"Your dick is so hard over here, girl....so hard," he said, each word dragged out like he was having difficulty speaking.

"Yes," was all she could get out.

"You better not let anyone play with my pussy. You cum only for me."

"Yes!" she shrieked, gnashing her teeth, the dildo making debauched noises inside her pussy.

"Tell me. Tell me that pussy only cums for me."

A powerful spasm started in the muscles of her back, and then her legs shot straight out as her orgasm crashed down and ripped through her inside and out. The muscles of her walls gripped the dildo tight, and she felt the rippling of hyper-tense throbbing reaching so deep inside of her, she thought her pussy would snap the dildo in two. If she yelled out anything or even called his name, she couldn't remember. Her body flopped on the bed like a limp dishrag, all loose and free. She trembled a bit from the aftershocks, and when she finally pulled out the dildo soaked in her cum, her breathing had returned to normal.

"Oh, shit. That felt so fucking good."

"I'm glad," he said.

"Did you-?"

"I did," he laughed, "you should see the mess you made over here."

"Me?"

"I call to let you know I have survived my journey back to my apartment, and you make me cum all
"Maybe you should spank me. I take punishment really well."

She could hear a pin drop. She heard more movement on his end again. Maybe he was wiping himself up. She wanted to say something nasty like she wished she could lick him clean, but his silence was unnerving.

She sat up on her bed and took him off speakerphone.

"N'Jobu?"

"I'm still here."

"Did I say something wrong?"

"No. I was just thinking."

"About?"

"I do not want to play like this, Califia. If it were anyone else I would not care. I could walk away and not give it a second thought. But the way you called out my name…I came so hard, girl. I am dead serious when I say that I don't want anyone else touching you. I have no right to say that, but that's how I feel. Let's not interact like this again, okay?"

Califia blinked rapidly. She felt like he was reprimanding her. Where did this 180-degree turn come from?

"What does that mean exactly? No interaction at all? Or no phone sex?"

"I think maybe we should not be alone together or speak on the phone together until you break up with Xavier."

The afterglow of her orgasm fading brought clarity to her mind. He didn't trust himself around her. Could she blame him really? She couldn't trust herself not to lust openly for him in public. He had called to check in and she had pulled him into her sexual release. How did it get to this so fast?

"You do understand why I am saying this, right?"

"Yeah, I guess I do. Night, N'Jobu," she said.

"Goodnight, Califia."

Califia took her toy into the bathroom and cleaned it off, quickly returning it to its box under the bed. She crawled back on top of the bed and stared at the ceiling. She felt dirty. Embarrassed. Ashamed.

Her body felt amazing, but her mind was circulating too many thoughts to allow her to fully relax. Lying in bed the rest of the night, she never went to sleep, just witnessed the gradual lightening of the sky outside as morning greeted her.

Before her alarm went off, she was up and packing as much of her personal items she could carry in her backpack and strap onto her bike. The last thing she did was leave a voicemail for Xavier.

###
Califia sat waiting on the top step of her Grandmother's house for Soliel and Rolita to show up. She saw them trudging up the hill towards the old blue house she shared with her Nana, and now an older male cousin who was struggling financially. Every inch of space in front of every home on their block was filled with cars, working families doubling and tripling their tenant living arrangements to help cover the quadrupled rents, thus the overabundance of cars and lack of parking. Rolita had to park her car a few blocks down the hill. She and Soliel were both huffing and puffing by the time they faced the steps that led up to Califia and the front door.

"Ooh, girl, this damn hill," Rolita huffed, plopping herself to Califia's left while Soliel flanked her one step down to her right. Luckily for them both, Califia was a considerate friend and handed them each a bottle of pre-mixed strawberry margaritas. She had taken them out of the fridge when they texted her that they were walking up the hill.

They all clinked their bottles and drank, the afternoon air cool on their bodies. Califia had already gone through the events of the previous night for them via phone. Now she needed their physical support as she contemplated the best way to break up with Xavier.

Soliel and Rolita both confided that they liked N'Jobu from his first impressions at the museum and bistro. But Rolita felt Califia was wrong for having physical contact with N'Jobu before actually breaking up. Soliel disagreed.

"All I can say is that you and Xavier have been having problems for a long time and they don't seem to be getting better," Soliel said as she fiddled with a silver chain around her neck, "break up but don't jump into anything serious. Maybe the two of you need a separation. You can always get back together again later."

"So N'Jobu would just be my rebound?"

"That would be a mistake," Rolita said.

"Why?" asked Califia.

"You need to be alone to truly sort out your feelings. If you jump into anything with N'Jobu, even if it's strictly friends with benefits, you're just using him to not face your issues with Xavier."

"There's no harm in fooling around with a man like that," said Soliel.

"It's too soon," said Rolita.

"For you," Soliel snapped, "Did we not hear Califia tell us this man made her back flex with the phone sex? You can mourn, have introspection, and still have fun with a new guy. I'm tired of these melodramatic breakups where we have to stay celibate while we look over what went wrong. Get out there and have fun. She can multi-task."

"So when you and Aunjanue broke up last year, did you immediately go out and do the horizontal tango with someone else?" Rolita asked.

"I sure did!" Soliel snapped.

Califia laughed and drank more of her margarita.

"Did Aunjanue know about this?" Rolita asked.

"Nope. It was none of her business. I was sad we broke up, but I looked at what I needed to do to fix it, but I also took the time to explore with other people. For the three months we called it quits, I had
sex with several people. I felt great about it. It taught me that Aunjanue wasn't the only fish in the sea and that there were plenty of people out there who could be 'soul mates' if I wanted."

"What made you go back to her then?" Rolita asked.

"Like I told Califia, sometimes you have to step away to remember what made you attracted to them in the first place. Probably a little distance makes the heart grow fonder too. But ultimately, I missed her and what we were together as a couple. We learned to communicate our needs better and just wanted to try again. It worked. But even if it didn't, I was glad I mingled with other partners."

"Would you ever tell Aunjanue that you slept with other people during your hiatus?" Califia asked.

"Why are you air quoting hiatus?" Soliel asked.

Califia just laughed.

"For the record, no. I would not tell her. It's none of her business and we were not a couple. I never asked about her sex life during that time, and I don't care."

"Do you want a hiatus, Califia?" Rolita asked.

"I don't think so."

"Do you love him?" asked Soliel.

"At one time I thought I did."

"Does he love you?" Rolita asked.

Califia shrugged.

"Amor com amor se paga. Love should be paid with love, Califia," Soliel said, finishing off her bottle. "It's obvious to me that you are not in love with Xavier anymore. And it's also obvious to me that you are into N'Jobu. Tell me I'm wrong."

Califia didn't deny it.

"He is really into you, sis," Soliel said, pushing Califia's leg with her hand. "When Xavier walked into Magnolia's, N'Jobu's whole demeanor changed. He did not like Xavier on you at all."

Califia rolled her eyes.

"Am I lying, Rolita?"

"No. There was definitely some extra testosterone floating in the air with those two."

"You need to call Xavier and tell him it's a done deal," Soliel said.

"I should tell him in person, right?"

"Why?" Soliel asked.

"Soliel, she can't just diss him over the phone."

"Then ghost his ass. I'm tired of him anyway, and he's not even my man," Soleil said leaning her elbows on the step.
"Let's say you break up with him. What will you do next?" Rolita asked.

"Get that Wakandan pipe!" Soliel cackled, hitting Califia on her arm.

"I don't know. I like N'Jobu, and we do have insane chemistry. I have so much going on with school and teaching. It's part of why Xavier and I have problems. He complains that I do too much and don't make time for us. I like what I do, it helps our community and makes me feel good doing it. His internship takes up more time than my job or volunteer work. That's why I do a lot of stuff, to keep myself busy because he's not around. The difference is, I respect why he has to put in those hours to get to where he needs to be. He doesn't respect my hours. It's like he expects me to be sitting around waiting for him. He don't pay any bills for me, but gives me lip when I try to catch extra hours at work to cover my needs in this fucking expensive city."

She felt a strain in her neck as her jaws got tight just talking about the things Xavier did to annoy her.

Soliel handed Califia her cell phone.

"Call that man and tell him bye. Right now. Make that dick appointment with N'Jobu and snap that coochie back," Soliel said making Rolita laugh out loud.

Califia didn't take the cell phone. She crossed her arms and tapped her left toe nervously.

"Do you want to meet him in a public space and do it?" Rolita asked.

"Rolita and I can be there if you want. If you think it will be ugly."

"No. I think it's been a long time coming. Yesterday I was feeling terrible about hurting Xavier. But today I actually feel okay. I moved a lot of stuff out of his apartment this morning. There's stuff there that I don't need to have back if it gets funky."

"Call him," Soliel said.

###

The three of them sat in her Grandmother's living room as Califia dialed Xavier's number on her own cell. Rolita held her left hand as the phone rang and rang, going straight to voicemail.

"Xavier. I need to talk to you. In person. Can we meet at the yogurt spot tomorrow around four? I'm staying at my Nana's tonight. Call me when you get this message."

When she ended her call, she stared at her two close girlfriends.

"That wasn't so bad, was it?" Soliel said.

"No. The sooner I do it, the better."

"Does Bakari know about you and N'Jobu?" Rolita asked.

"No."

"You might want to have a convo with him soon too. N'Jobu is his friend, and you two are besties. Awkward," Rolita said.

"True. What if you and N'Jobu are having sex at their place and Bakari hears you guys?" Soliel said, making a face.
"Let me just concentrate on this break-up first, okay you two?"

Califia's cell vibrated. It was Xavier.

"Answer it," Soliel said.

"Get it over with now if you can. See if he can meet you somewhere," Rolita said.

Califia felt her stomach churn and she closed her eyes tight.

"Don't put this off Califia," Soliel said.

"Hello?"

"W'sup? You sounded urgent."

"It kinda is—"

"You took your stuff. You telling me something?"

Soliel and Rolita moved back outside, giving her space.

"Can we meet up right now?"

"Naw, say whatchu gotta say."

His abruptness was throwing her off. She stood up and paced the livingroom.

"I don't want to go to New Orleans with you."

She closed her eyes scrambling for leverage. She was unbalanced by his reduced affect. He didn't sound right.

"Fine. That's going to cost me money though."

"I'm sorry, but I did tell you that I wasn't certain about going. You didn't listen to me."

"Let's just dead all that now. Why did you move your stuff out? You tryna break up or something?"

"Yes," Califia's voice became just as flat as his. She truly was done.

"Bet—"

"Stop. I didn't want to do this over the phone."

"Then you should've stayed here to tell me to my face."

"I wanted to tell you last night, but you didn't want to come back with me. Your drunk ass just had to go hang out with Julian all night."

"Are we done?"

"I guess we are."

"Good, then you can go fuck that nigga you were drooling over."

"What are you talking about?"
"Don't play dumb. You kept making eyes at that African dude all night. Every time I turned around you were all up in his face. Even Julian was telling me how you were acting when I wasn't near you at the reggae spot. You should've asked that nigga to go home with you."

Califia couldn't prevent the malicious smirk that etched across her lips. The irony. She didn't want to indulge his fantasy any further, despite the fact that it happened. Relief surrounded her since there was no mention of being busted for kissing. Thank goodness for tiny miracles.

"I can't even deal with what you are talking about right now. You and I both know our shit has been foul a long time. I'm tired—"

"I'm tired too, Califia. There ain't much more for us to say at this point."

"I'll mail you your key."

"Fine. Have a nice life."

Califia held her cell phone to her chest. It was done. They were finally over. Soliel and Rolita entered the house again, their worried eyes searching her face for a reaction.

"It's officially over."

"How are you feeling?" Rolita said.

"Okay. I feel okay."

Soliel's fingers interlaced with Califia's.

"Sit down, sis," Soleil said, leading her to the couch.

Tears began to flow freely from Califia's eyes. A slow trickle of stress release fell away with her tears. But there was a sadness there too. A sense of failure for not wanting to try harder with him. A sense of trepidation towards being unattached. However, she could honestly say a weight had been lifted.

"I'm crying, but it's a good cry."

"Of course it is, love," Soliel said, rubbing her back.

"I'll order a pizza and some Pepsi, and we can pig out and cry together," Rolita said opening an app on her phone.

"Good idea. We will purge this day away and talk about your future. And N'Jobu," Soliel said.

N'Jobu was the last thing on Califia's mind. She was thinking of all their mutuals questioning the breakup, all the speculating and gossip that would flow.

"Can you both just keep this to yourself right now?" she asked her two closest female friends.

"Of course," Rolita said.

"You didn't even have to ask," Soliel said.

"I'll make us some tea and we can wait for our pizza," Rolita said.

"Thank you. Both of you."
The front door opened and Califia's Grandmother walked in with a grocery bag, followed by her cousin Kenny who was hauling the rest of their bags. Nana Jean saw the girls perched on her couch with her granddaughters' face looking distraught.

"What happened, baby?" Nana Jean asked.

"I broke up with Xavier."

Nana Jean didn't look surprised, but she wasn't one for coddling her granddaughters when it came to men.

"You need anything?" Nana Jean asked.

"I'm good Nana. We're going to eat pizza and watch tv."

"Okay then. Good to see you girls. It's been awhile."

"Yes, Ma'am," Rolita said. Soliel jumped up and took the grocery bag from Nana Jean.

"Thank you, Soliel," said Nana Jean, leading her into the kitchen in the back.

Kenny just dragged his eyes over Califia's somber expression.

"You sure you good, Cuz?"

"Yeah, Kenny."

"I can yoke a Nigga up——"

"Trust me. I broke up with him."

"A'ight then." Kenny shuffled off into the kitchen.

Califia's phone vibrated. Bakari. She answered to distract herself.

"Girl, what's going on? I was online and saw Xavier changed his status to single. What happened?"

Califia felt her heart bruise. More tears were flowing. She went outside to sit on the steps alone.

"I just broke up with him," she said.

"Are you alright? Do you need me to come get you?"

"I'm at Nana's. Soliel and Rolita are here with me."

Califia wiped her eyes, grateful for the support of her friends. Bakari was ready to roll for her and it brought a needed smile to her face.

"Man, I knew y'all were struggling, but I didn't want to be all up in your business."

"It needed to be done. It's over."

"You sound a little shaky in the voice, Ma. You need me to come over too? I'm an expert on break-ups."

"You and Shavonne are through already?" she wise-cracked.
"Hell naw. She might be the one."

"For real?"

"For real."

"Okay now, good for you. She's hella cool. I like her."

"You wanna go out and get some drinks? Chop it up?"

"Nah. Rolita ordered some pizzas. We're going to stay in. I don't have the energy to be out in public right now."

"Me calling probably didn't help, huh?"

"I just didn't want people to know right away, especially online."

"Well X didn't waste any time posting, that's for sure."

"He was ready to bounce just like me."

"You really think so?"

"I know so."

"Well holla at me if you need something?"

"I will."

Twenty minutes after the pizza arrived, Bakari was at Nana Jean's front door with a bottle of Hennessy. When Califia saw him on her grandmother's steps, she burst into tears again and hugged him tight. He was always there for her.

Nana Jean found them all spread out in her livingroom the next morning snoring, with two pizza boxes and an empty liquor bottle on her coffee table.
You're The One

Chapter Summary

N'Jobu has doubts about pursuing Califia. A chance encounter deepens that concern.

Chapter Notes

Again, thanks for keeping up with the saga! We are getting close to consummation smut (lol) and Wakanda nobility drama in the land of N'Jobu's birth. We'll soon meet T'Challa's pregnant mommy and learn about some sibling rivalry between T'Chaka and N'Jobu. I apologize, but I love slow burn push pulls, but I promise N'Jobu will give Cali that work soon! Hang in there!

Chapter 10

"You know I want you baby
You know I do
I'll give you my heart and the rest is up to you
You ain't no good for me, I know it's true
But you don't have to be
Cause I do it for the thrill, for the rush
I do it for the pain, for your touch
When I OD, when it's too much
If I survive, baby you're the one
You're the one"

Kaytranada – "You're the One"

"...JobuJobuJobuJobu...."

Her voice through the phone made his body spiral out of control. The begging to make her orgasm. The snippets of noise he heard that could only be the toy between her toned thighs. That sharp cry she gave before she was tongue-twisting his name over and over.

He gripped his erection, the taut flesh spasmed once, twice, three times before he spewed hot semen across his bed, ruining his sheets. His balls ached from the draining even though his dick was still somewhat hard. That twinge of dull pain he felt was his body's way of yearning for physical contact with a woman. An orgasm that good only primed the pump for him to want more. And soon.

As he listened to Califia's measured breathing over the phone, he seriously thought of calling up one of his special friends to come take care of him properly so he could get Califia out of his system. He would have to suffer the fantasy of wondering what her face looked like when she came. Did she close her eyes? Was she a crier? Did her body bend or go rigid? Did her pussy grip tight and milk a dick, or become a soft receptacle of pleasure? What did she taste like?
His mind was full of pleasant thoughts until she mentioned that she could handle spanking. At that moment, he had to shut it all down. Spanking belonged to his women. His skills were immaculate when it came to that form of discipline, and he couldn't stand the thought of not being able to do it with her when she was tied up with some clown who didn't understand or value her worth. It was best not to play flirty games with her if he couldn't have her the way he wanted.

He made his voice neutral when he told her that he didn't want to be around her alone. He was adamant that she sever her relationship with Xavier.

When he finished the call with her, he stopped to analyze his reasoning for telling her that he didn't want anyone else touching her. It was a ridiculous notion, something he never said to his other women. But that's how he wanted it. He wasn't trying to pin down a girlfriend. Califia was just his newest conquest. He didn't want her distracted by anyone else before him.

Once he had her a few times, he knew she would simmer down to a low boil in his system and he would be onto the next. The excitement was the chase right now, and it was extra stimulating because she belonged to someone else. He was taking perverse pleasure in knowing he was provoking another man's woman to leave him. The moment Califia kissed him he knew he couldn't pretend to care about being respectful anymore. Her mouth, her tongue, her tits, and that thick backside of hers had him on edge.

Shit.

His dick was still hard. Jutting out between his thighs and ramrod straight. A shower would help. He changed the sheets on his bed first, then treated his horny body to a frigid shower.

When he was situated in his bed all warm and quite comfortable, he entertained the idea of letting her make all the moves from now on. He was still going to see other people, but he would wait for her to act. In fact, he wasn't going to touch her until some time had passed once she broke up with Xavier. When he had the opportunity to get her in his bed, he was going to make sure she would forget Xavier and any other man she rebounded with. He wanted her body to remember him forever once he left America and went home for good.

###

After his early morning run, and before his afternoon classes, N'Jobu took the time to look over betrothal march and coronation clothing designs. His mother fast-tracked sketches and photos of swatches to his computer, so he sat at his desk partaking of dark bitter tea shipped from home as he looked over the numerous pictures.

During the three weeks he would be in Wakanda he would change outfits three times a day on average. T'Chaka, once crowned, would wear traditional dark robes and slacks with the family coat of arms stitched into the fabric. N'Jobu, denoting his status of the second son in line, would bear the family crest on his shoulders or on a stole draped over his chest.

N'Jobu loved color, so he was pleased his mother was allowing vibrant shades in several of the suits and robes he scrolled through. One suit, in particular, caught his eye, a flashy iridescent blue silk number with tapered lines and deep folds in the waist. He decided to wear that for the crowning. A deep persimmon colored wool djellaba also caught his eye, and he filed it away as an afterparty outfit for when he snuck out from the palace and partied with his friends from the top tiers of nobility back home. He was already girding his loins for all the ribbing he would take from his still single childhood friends. He was also ready for them to bend his ear about favoring their sisters as potential Princess material.
There was some traditional attire he would have to wear regardless if he liked it or not, but it was part of the royal protocol. Lately, he was favoring rather tight suits and robes. A brother liked to stunt back home, and if he had to go on public display for an arranged marriage, he was going to outshine a prancing peacock. After checking for shoes and sandals, diamond studded earrings and silver rings, N'Jobu headed for class.

He would be returning to the states a few days after the new term started, so he needed to collect syllabus materials and books to take with him during winter break. He floated through his classes, ignored texts and voicemail from Andrea and Ren, but took calls from Serah and a woman, Bridgette, who he had been crazy about but she dumped him for being secretive. The one woman he thought he could be serious with. The one who accused him of being an arrogant African prick. She was back in town after being away on a project for her job in another city.

Bridgette was doing well, and he felt like she was fishing around for a hook-up excuse. He gave her one, mentioning his idea of having a holiday party at his apartment before he left for Wakanda. He knew he was clutch when she texted him back after they spoke to tell him to remind her of the party. She'd be checking for him again real soon, he was sure of it.

When he was done with his classes for the day, he used the school gym to work out a bit, working on his biceps, thinking of the women he had chosen for the first round of possible wife material. He had made a list of five that he found favorable. He would go back and forth with his parents because he knew they had their own list of picks. His paternal grandmother held considerable weight in the choosing, but he hoped his parents would favor his list and back him against his grandmother if she started throwing her influence. The intense vetting process would begin in the new year; however, the first step was to formally come out to his people and the circus of speculation that would start as to who the newest royal in the Udaku family line would be.

By the time he returned to his apartment, Bakari was back home on his phone and using his gaming console in front of the tv.

N'Jobu showered and changed into a comfortable pair of lounging slacks and a university t-shirt. He worked in the kitchen to prepare a meal of sautéed vegetable medley with a pork loin roast that he'd left marinating in spices all day. He played music on his phone and worked with quiet efficiency, the tantalizing smells of the pork roasting in the oven wafted throughout the apartment. He could hear Bakari on his phone with the occasional curse word thrown out when one of his RPG characters died.

Eventually Bakari came into the kitchen to be nosey about what was cooking, still on his phone yammering away and popping open a bottle of hard lemonade. He sat at the kitchen table watching N'Jobu stir his vegetables on the stove then directed his attention back to his phone. It was then that N'Jobu overheard that Califia had left Xavier. She wasted no time, he thought. The urge to call her came over him, but he pushed back on that. He wanted her to come to him when she was ready. A fleeting thought of her on his lap made him smile a bit as he sat down at the kitchen table and went through his phone for messages. Bakari didn't mention any more details over the phone, but when he hung up, N'Jobu thought it was a good time to let his friend know his intentions.

"Califia broke up with Xavier?"

Bakari put his cell down on the table.

"Yeah. I stayed with her last night at her grandma's."

N'Jobu gave Bakari a quizzical look.
"Soliel and Rolita were with her, and I went over to check on her. She was feeling really bad about it. But she was good this morning when I left. The grapevine got out though, so I know dudes are lined up ready to get at her."

"You think she'll start dating right away?"

"To me, that's the best way to get over a breakup. Just jump back out there. She really liked Xavier though."

"Was she in love with him?"

It was Bakari's turn to give a questioning look at N'Jobu.

"Why you care if she was in love?"

N'Jobu just flexed the fingers in his left hand and Bakari put both his hands on the kitchen table leaning towards N'Jobu.

"Wayment, you checking for her?"

"Yes."

Bakari leaned back and gave N'Jobu a long hard stare.

"You serious? You know that's my homegirl right? Not just my friend, but like, my sister. Family."

"I know this."

"Dude. You hit 'em and quit 'em. That's not Califia."

"She is an adult."

"You not hearing me, man. She's not to be played with."

"I like her."

"A lot of niggas like her, bruh."

"Do I need your permission to check for her?"

N'Jobu's eyes hardened in expression as he tried to determine Bakari's true feelings about his desire to pursue Califia.

"Look, Cali can do what she wants. I'm just telling you that I don't like the idea of you with her because you're not into relationships for the long haul. And if you two get into something and it goes south, then I'm stuck in this fucked up triangle of awkward interactions. You my boy, but she's family. I need you to comprehend that."

"So if she and I end on a negative, we can't be friends anymore?"

"I'd still be your friend, but it would be weird for me. Can't you be happy with the baddies you already banging? You got like half a dozen. Why her too?"

"I just like her."

Bakari squinted his eyes at N'Jobu, then wagged his finger at him.
"See, I knew something was up at that karaoke shit. And the museum. The vibe between you two was a little off."

N'Jobu smiled then went to turn off his rice cooker.

"Bakari, I enjoy women. Smart women with passion—"

"And ass."

N'Jobu chuckled at that.

"I would never intentionally try to hurt Califia. I really am interested in her as a person and not just sex—"

"Ugh, don't say that."

"It's your fault that I'm into her."

"How's that?"

"You made me go to that BSU meeting. You brought her here to our apartment. If I never saw her, I wouldn't be at this point."

"She might get back with Xavier though."

"No, she won't."

"How you know?"

"I know. I talked to her."

"You've only hung out with her like, what, two times?"

"Enough time to chat."

"This is making me hella uncomfortable. You better not hurt her. On God, if you ever make her cry I will kick your ass."

"I won't hurt her. You should worry about me. You know she can handle herself. She'd probably kick my ass with her capoeira."

"I'd be right there with her. Believe that."

N'Jobu pulled his pork loin roast from the oven and let it sit on the stove to rest. Bakari watched him scoop seasoned rice out of the cooker and fill up a ceramic serving dish. Fixing them both plates of food, N'Jobu wanted to reassure Bakari.

"Califia is a smart woman. She can handle herself with any man, including me. Who knows, she may not even want me."

"Nigga, stop tryna downplay your game. I can see she's into you. You just need to know one thing, don't fuck with her. She not only has me but some hard ass cousins that do not play when it comes to her. Street niggas, bruh. Like 'keep that thang on 'em' niggas. Tread carefully."

"I will."
Bakari shook his head. They both ate the food N’Jobu cooked, music still playing on N’Jobu's phone.

"I want us to have a winter break party," N’Jobu said.

"Here?"

"In the all-purpose room. Management has been turning on the heat lamps by the pool, so we can have a nighttime pool party."

"Pool only stays open until ten though."

"We can start the party at five. If the pool is too cold, we can use the jacuzzi. I'll cater food and drinks so no one has to bring anything."

"Make it BYOB, that way if people drink too much, it's not our problem. We can provide soda and water."

"Sounds good. You can invite your friends from your drumming group and really shake it up around here. I already reserved the room for December twenty-first."

"Am I inviting Cali, or will you be wanting to do the honors?" Bakari had a smirk on his face.

"You do it."

They ate the rest of their meal in silence, both occasionally peeking at their cell phones. N’Jobu found Bakari staring at him while he finished up his second helping of rice and vegetables.

"What?"

"I feel like I need to warn you about Cali."

"Warn me?"

Bakari pondered what he wanted to say, causing N’Jobu to feel some unease.

"She's not like these women you deal with. I told you before she had a rough home life, and that is real talk. She doesn't trust a lot of people and she's really sensitive about her dad. I wasn't expecting you to like her in that way, so I wasn't going to speak on her personal shit."

"Personal shit?"

"You know her dad is in prison."

"My first fumble with her."

"He's in prison for life. He killed this dude that was molesting kids from our hood. This eats at her all the time. She can close up real tight sometimes when she comes back from visiting him."

Bakari's face became pensive. N’Jobu pushed away his plate.

"The dude he killed was a cop. A bad one. Nobody could prove shit on him, that whole blue wall bullshit, but he was going after little Black girls. He went after Cali's friend and messed that little girl up. Dante, Cali's dad, he filed complaints about the cop. Nothing happened. So he confronted dude. Cop pulled a gun on him and Dante cold-cocked him and dude fell and hit his head. Went into a coma and later died. Blood clot in the brain."
N'Jobu took it all in, trying to imagine a young Califia losing her father after he tried to stop a monster.

"Dante was a big-time community activist, so this all blew up on the news. Cops got a little funkier with the hood and Califia's family got death threats for a long time. That's why her grandma lives in the Outer District and not in Oakland anymore. I think the cops still keep tabs on her family. Even after all these years."

"There's no chance of parole for her father?"

"She tries to get money and good lawyers for her dad, but most folks don't want to take the case. My parents don't practice criminal law, but they helped get Dante a lawyer who was fighting for him. But it's Oakland. Cops get away with shit. They actually got rid of three cops who stepped forward and said ole boy was trash. I think those good cops got pressured or threatened. Two were transferred and one was fired. The fired one was Black."

N'Jobu felt his heart filling with sadness for Califia.

"She rides a bike so she doesn't have to have car expenses. The money she saves she puts towards trying to hire this lawyer from back east who has an excellent track record. She's been saving for three years. Her mom got divorced and re-married. She doesn't get along with her mom and her step-dad. She also has two younger siblings she doesn't see because she feels like her mother didn't hold it down for her dad. My parents took her in when her mom moved to Jersey, so when I say we are family, I mean that shit dude. I grew up with her, lived with her, fought knuckleheads in the streets with her. She ain't no regular chick," Bakari's voice broke a little, and he wiped a tear from his eyelid.

"I hear what you are saying, my friend," N'Jobu said.

"Don't tell her I told you all that. I would prefer she tell you on her own when she wants, but I couldn't hold it in. Especially now that you want to get with her. She carries a lot of hurt and I try my best to keep her happy and upbeat. She's finally gotten to a place where she can chill a bit. She'll get through the Xavier shit, but I don't want her—"

"Bakari…stop. I said I hear you."

"I hope you do."

N'Jobu cleared their dishes, placing them in the dishwasher, and then put away the leftover food. Bakari still sat at the table, watching N'Jobu move around the kitchen.

"If you don't want me to get with her Bakari, just say so."

"Y'all grown."

"I don't want you to be flippant about it. Be honest. You want me to leave her alone."

"I know you can't. You look at her the way women look at you. I just want you to be honest with her every step of the way."

"I am always honest."

"I mean letting her know that there's no future for y'all."

N'Jobu stopped in his tracks.
"I don't want her to fall in love with you."

"You are getting way ahead of yourself—"

"Look at Andrea. Dude, you have that girl's nose wide open. Her and Ren fill up the answering machine all the time. I'm not letting you do that to Cali—"

"Can we even have a first date to see if we are compatible?"

"Compatible, nigga you funny."

Bakari left the kitchen and N'Jobu followed him.

"You wanna play?" Bakari asked, holding a control console out to him. N'Jobu sat on the couch with him as they fired up a zombie apocalypse game. Playing through various levels, N'Jobu wondered if he should give up on Califia. It clearly bothered Bakari.

Maybe she was just an itch he wanted to scratch. He was used to getting everything he wanted in life that he never considered the idea of leaving some things alone. Maybe going after a wounded woman was asking for trouble. Could he give up never kissing her again? Never knowing what it would be like to wake up with her after a night of invigorating sex? Never having her sit on his lap again so he could look up into that freckled face of hers? Never touching her breasts again? Never knowing what magic could lie between her thighs?

Bakari would never verbally tell him to leave her alone. But he would pout. Give him looks. Lay in wait for N'Jobu to find a new girl and then berate him for being how he always was with women. Was it worth all that?

The apartment phone rang, and they both sat on the couch listening for who it was. Bridgette's peach cobbler sweet southern drawl oozed from the voicemail. N'Jobu picked up the phone. Bakari only smirked at him again.

"Hey, Bridgette," he said, not bothering to leave the room and still playing the video game.

"City Lights Bookstore has Gabriela Amador coming in on the tenth. Would you be interested in going? We can have coffee afterward and catch up."

"Sounds cool," he said.

"Great, I'll text you deets. Can't wait to see you."

"This coming from the woman who told me I was a prick."

"Arrogant prick, don't forget," she laughed.

"See you on the tenth."

He hung up with a smile on his face. Perhaps this was divine providence. Bridgette coming back into his life.

###

The second floor of the City Lights Bookstore was crammed with people eager to see the writer-dancer-activist Gabriela Amador. Rain and light fog made N'Jobu dress in a thick blue jacket with a dark blue scarf wrapped around his neck.
Standing next to Bridgette, he noticed a few admiring stares aimed their way. Bridgette was his height with bone-straight blue-black hair that reached her collar in a stylish asymmetrical cut. She wore a vintage Burberry coat that clung to her form in all the right places. Her face was heavily made-up, the tawny coloring of her skin a bit moist from the drops of rain that fell on her when they walked inside the bookstore. Two hours before they had a quick dinner together at a Korean noodle shop, so they were both feeling quite full and very caught up. His instincts had been correct with her; she wanted him to be open to getting back together.

A fine-boned and elegant woman the same rich color of his mother stood in front of a lectern and spoke with a full-bodied Spanish accented English. Gabriela Amador was fifty-five years old and looked forty. She still had a dancer's body that she carried like a young ballerina with delicate flourishes from her arms when she waved them to make a point. Her lecture was on Post-Colonial Afro-Latino Dance in the Americas, and she touched upon quite a few political points as her talk grew more passionate. Her audience was spellbound, and N'Jobu found the content of her talk fascinating.

As the talk ended, a short Q & A followed and a young sable-haired hipster with a fancy mustache asked Gabriela about the connection between dance as an act of rebellion in today's society. Gabriela spoke of West Indian stick fighting and when she mentioned capoeira and its history, a large group of people to the right of the lectern started cat-calling and pointing at someone in the front row. N'Jobu strained his neck trying to see who they were pointing to.

"You know capoeira? I should've known when I saw you on campus earlier, come," Gabriela said, clapping her hands.

N'Jobu still couldn't see who the people in front were making noise about.

"Here, someone move this, I want to Ginga," Gabriela said.

A bookstore employee moved the lectern and Gabriela took off her heavy sweater and handed it to a woman standing behind her.

"Now don't worry everyone, we can play in this small space. Capoeira was a secret martial art that enslaved Africans in Brasil brought with them from the Congo. It is in the dance that you can see the warrior. Slaves had to practice this craft in secret, so they hid it as a dance in front of their slavemasters. What we call play is really fighting in plain sight."

There was movement up front and then N'Jobu felt his insides shiver when Califia stood up to face Gabriela.

"Normally we would have a berimbau playing…what is that? Oh, wonderful," Gabriella said to the bookstore employee who had her cell phone out.

"This young lady is going to pull up some music for us on her phone," Gabriela said.

The employee held her phone to the mic on the lectern, and as soon as the music hit, Gabriela shuffled forward with her hands held up. Califia wore only a loose yellow blouse and leggings, her 4C hair in thin two-stranded twists as her hands matched up with Gabriela's. They took turns rocking forwards and back, Califia letting the older woman lead the demonstration. Gabriela wasted little time in kicking out her legs within her snazzy green culottes and showing Califia that age did not diminish skills.

The room grew tense watching the women move so fluid within the tight confines they were in, and then Califia did a handstand and play fought Gabriela with only her legs and purple sock covered
feet. The skill it took to use only her core and legs impressed the audience until Gabriela did a handstand move that had her posing in midair with one hand. Califia jumped back on her feet and hugged Gabriela hard and the audience gave Gabriela a standing ovation.

"I still have a few tricks up my sleeve!" Gabriela told the crowd.

N'Jobu was beaming ear to ear watching Califia. Gabriela put her arm over Califia's shoulder.

"Listen…listen, this afternoon I was at San Francisco State with Professor Delaney's dance class and I want to tell you, the most brilliant talent is in her class. And this young lady right here, oh my, you must all come and see their Winter Program. I saw a bit, and it is outstanding, this woman here is outstanding. Can you tell them a bit about it, maybe the piece you are doing?"

Califia turned to face the audience for the first time and when her eyes caught N'Jobu's, she seemed flustered for a moment, but then looked away from his face.

"Uh, yeah. Hi, I'm Califia Stevens, I'm here with some of my classmates from SFSU School of Theater and Dance, and we are doing eight performances starting next week, November seventeenth in the McKenna Theatre. Actual dates are online…" Califia glanced at Gabriela to see what else she needed to say.

"You must see them. They embody a lot of what I spoke of here tonight. There is a section they do where they take songs that are fairly well-known, but they subvert the lyrics to interpret it with dance in fresh new ways, and this jewel right here…she takes "I Put A Spell on You" and turns it into a love letter for the African diaspora and Indigenous peoples in the Americas and it is magnificent. Who was the young lady singing for you?"

"One of my best friends, Rolita Nose."

"Por favor, if you want to have an early Christmas present go see the show."

There was applause, and then Gabriela gave Califia a deep hug. Afterwards, a few people from the tightly packed audience approached the writer with copies of her books.

"Folks, we have a table set up downstairs for Gabriela to sign, so if you could please meet us downstairs, we'll have more space," said another bookstore employee.

Bridgette and N'Jobu each had a copy of Gabriela's book, so N'Jobu retreated with her downstairs.

"I want to go see that dance show now," Bridgette enthused finding a spot in the line that was waiting for books to be signed. N'Jobu nodded. But kept his eyes on the stairs waiting for Califia to come down. When she did, she was surrounded by people asking her questions.

When she saw N'jobu again, she nodded in his direction. Bridgette held open the book to show N"Jobu a picture of Gabriela doing capoeira when she was younger, around twenty. N'Jobu could only watch Califia hanging out with her classmates. He wanted to go speak to her, but he opted to stay in line with Bridgette to get his book signed. He wanted to let her know he knew about Xavier, but he felt tacky about approaching her when he was there with Bridgette. He reminded himself that she had to make the moves, so he composed his excitement at seeing her.

Gabriella Amador was escorted to the signing table and the line moved at a nice pace. Bridgette and N'Jobu were sixth and seventh in line, so it didn't take long for them to get their books signed and for Bridgette and him to ask Gabriela a few questions about her home back in Honduras and to take a few pictures. With their books signed, Bridgette seemed excited and leaned into N'Jobu.
"This was so much fun. Actually, this whole time has been great with you. I missed you. I'm glad we had a chance to talk."

"I'm glad too."

N'Jobu kept fighting the overwhelming urge to turn his head and search for Califia's face. He didn't want to give off facial cues that Bridgette may see and know that he was interested in someone else. All day today he had been looking forward to being with Bridgette and maybe really catching up with her in the biblical sense. Why did Califia have to be at this bookstore? It made sense that she would be given the fact that her class was here and the author had been at her school earlier, but damn, the circumstances were not working in his favor.

Bridgette glanced at her watch.

"You want to grab some coffee?"

He didn't.

"Can we take a raincheck on coffee?"

Her lips tightened and her eyes seemed to go clouded with disappointment.

"I'm just a little tired. I think the change in weather is wearing on me. How about we do dinner next week?"

Bridgette ran her fingers on his scarf.

"Are you cooking?"

"I want to try this new restaurant that opened on the wharf. Are you agreeable to that?"

Once again, she looked disappointed.

"Sure."

"Great. Let's say Saturday around six?"

She nodded and he pecked her on her cheek.

"You ready?" he asked.

"I can catch a Lyft. If you're not feeling well, I don't want you having to drive me home and then doubling back, especially in this weather."

She ordered a ride from her phone app and he walked with her outside. They waited on the corner and within five minutes, her ride appeared.

"See you next week," she said. He opened the door to the back seat for her. She waited for another kiss, but he simply smiled and held his hand out to protect her head from hitting the car roof.

He waved her off and held his left palm up in the air. It was drizzling again. He walked back into the bookstore.

###

Califia saw N'Jobu walk back inside the bookstore. He was alone. She felt a nervous tickle in her
belly as she watched him scan the room. Was he looking for her? Oh please…

She scooted behind a bookshelf with a large gap where she could trail his steps without him seeing her. He glanced about and then he headed towards the stairs. She watched him carry his frame to the floor above and she stayed put, feeling her heart thump like a rabbit in her chest. It was thrilling watching him move through a room, and just as thrilling to see other people watch him. That magnetism of his was a joy to behold, especially in public.

Should she go upstairs and pretend to be nonchalant while bumping into him? Or go stand outside in front of the bookstore so he could see her through the glass all dramatic? She felt giddy, her cheeks stretching from the hard smile on her face. How did he know about Gabriela Amador? Who was that woman with him?

Califia moved around to another bookcase, one that was close to the entrance so she wouldn’t miss him, but it would still be hard to see her. She ran her fingers along a row of books, pretending to look at them with eager inspection, but all she could ponder was how dashing N’Jobu looked, especially with that scarf twisted around his neck and his fresh line up. His goatee which he had kept light was visibly thicker and made his face even more handsome.

It felt like forever since she had been with him, and in all that time (nearly two weeks) neither one of them had called the other. When she needed to practice with Bakari, he came to her grandmother's house or they met in the community center or in the park. Dance rehearsals had gotten so intense that she could only think of practice twenty-four seven. She had to take a break from working at the community center and dropped teaching dance classes in Richmond.

Gabriela Amador was a friend of her dance teacher, so she was thrilled to meet her at school. Gabriela stayed through the second half of their full rehearsal, so she was able to see a lot of Califia's work. She could only beam thinking about the kind words Gabriela told the people at the bookstore. She was too nervous to ask her about capoeira at the theater, so when her classmates gassed her up at the bookstore, she was beyond geeked to play with a woman master of the art. Capoeira seemed to be blossoming in many Black diasporic communities lately.

For her, dance and capoeira gave her control of her life. Mastery of her body. For so long after the imprisonment of her father and the equally felt loss of her childhood friend whom her father tried to stand up for, Califia never felt safe. Or protected. Predators were everywhere, and once her father was taken away and her mother fell into indifference and despair, it was capoeira and dance that gave her some power back. Made her feel less afraid. Her body was hers and she could protect it, make it do things that other people couldn’t do. If boys or men groped for her when she was younger, she would suck and buck with the best of them. Mastery of her body helped her get through the chaos that often consumed her surroundings. This vessel she carried was all that she needed. She was grounded in that belief. And if she ever had children, she was going to make sure they knew how to fight just like her. Shake the table of the world if they needed to.

"Califia Stevens."

The hairs on the back of her neck rose with the sound of her name coming from his lips. She closed her eyes and held her hands close to her chest. Jesus, this man. She turned around and looked up slightly to see those dark dreamy eyes peering back into her own.

"N'Jobu."

"At your service."

"I guess we can talk to one another here."
He smiled.

"Seeing as we are not alone, I think we are safe," he said.

"Didn't expect to see you here."

"I was quite surprised to see you doing your thing in a bookstore."

"Ohmigod, was Gabriela not the shit?"

And just like that, they were going back and forth, like two weeks had never passed, like this giddy energy was always going to be between them. Califia felt her eyes taking in the minutiae of his face, a silent desperation to hold onto to every detail of him just in case time marched ahead of her, taking him with it for another long-term separation. How could this man possibly get finer in fourteen days?

She didn't want to ask him, but she hoped he would come to see the dance concert.

"My friend Bridgette told me about this place."

"Oh, that's who you were with. Your friend. Bridgette"

"It is what it is, Califia. The good thing is, I got to see you."

He reached up and rubbed her arm. She leaned into his touch.

"I broke up with Xavier."

"I heard."

Her eyes widened a bit.

"Word gets around," he said.

She only stared at him, not sure if he was expecting her to say more about where that put them. She decided to play it close to the vest.

The initial shock of the uncoupling had passed her. She was confused at how much she grieved over Xavier considering she broke up with him first. She spoke to a counselor at school who explained to her that break-ups could feel like a sort of death, that relationships went through their own Kübler-Ross type grieving stages too.

At this point in time, she felt strong. Open.

"Just so you know, I'm doing fine."

"Good."

Was he going to "properly step to her"? That's what he said he was going to do once she broke up with Xavier. He only stared back at her with platonic eyes. Perhaps she missed her chance. Perhaps that Bridgette chick had already taken up all his interest. She was feeling less excited now about her chances. Maybe she should've called him right away to at least let him know that she was free. A thought flashed through. She could play the book game with him and maybe gauge his interest in her.

"You want to look around? This bookstore has three floors," she said. He smiled.
Califia found herself sitting across from N'Jobu inside a random mom and pop coffee shop not too far from the bookstore. They both sipped thick espressos, and both had their cell phones out. They had finished browsing through City Lights, and Califia had mentioned grabbing warm drinks and getting to know each other via books.

"It's simple. We each list five books that best describe either who we are, our worldview, or something we are passionate about," she explained.

"And this is supposed to reveal our true selves?"

"Something like that. One thing I was happy to see when I went into your apartment was a bookshelf. With pretty decent books on it, I might add."

"Couldn't we just talk about those things?"

"We could, but I feel like reading can be a little more intimate," she said.

A sly look crossed N'Jobu's face when she said the word intimate.

"You go first," he said.

"Octavia Butler's 'Kindred'. The Autobiography of Malcolm X—"

"I have read that one."

"Read it again. Toni Morrison's 'Beloved'. Angela Davis' 'Blues Legacies and Black Feminism'. Edwidge Danticat's 'Krik? Krak!'"

N'Jobu typed into his cell.

"You read all of those first, then you give me your list of books when you're done."

"Why don't you want my list now?"

"It works best if one person starts. In my experience, it gives deeper meaning in the thought process of choice for the second person."

"Does your list ever change?"

"Sometimes, it depends on my mood. And the person."

Califia looked outside the coffee shop window. It was sprinkling.

"I better go before it starts pouring," she said. She pulled on her biker jacket and adjusted her boots. Cradling her helmet at her side, she stood up.

"Let me give you a ride home. You can get your bike tomorrow. It's not safe in this rain."

"It's just sprinkling and I'm not leaving my bike out here. I know how to ride in this weather."

Califia headed out the door and N'Jobu fell in step behind her.

"Listen to me, Califia. I'm right around the corner. I'll get my car—"

"I'm good."
She squeezed his arm and strolled around the corner.

###

N'Jobu ran to his car like he stole something. He felt the light rainfall as he booked it two blocks with his newly purchased book shoved into his jacket. He wanted to follow her in case the weather turned worse, and he could maybe convince her to get in his car.

Once he was strapped in and started his motor, he saw Califia zip past him, her helmet bright and shiny and beaded with raindrops. He made an illegal U-Turn in hot pursuit. It was a little after eleven at night, late, but still enough traffic that forced N'Jobu to really focus on keeping Califia in his sight as well as watching for other cars.

He thought she would head in the opposite direction towards her Grandmother's house, but she was whipping through lanes in the direction of the Bay Bridge. Where was she going? Who was she going to?

He was able to catch up with her and actually pull alongside her at a red light. He honked his horn and rolled down his passenger window. She lifted up her visor.

"I'm going to follow you in case it comes down harder," he yelled just to make sure she heard him.

She gave him a slightly annoyed look, but then she smiled.

"N'Jobu, I've ridden in actual rain before. I also have excellent tires made for this."

His eyes traced her entire appearance and he was in awe of how sexy she looked. The aerodynamic helmet. The matching jacket and boots. The sleek bike. Her body outlined in her leggings in that perfect way of hers draped across the seat. She was made for that motorcycle. He was ready to drag her into his car and back onto his lap. She swiped her hand on her visor and the moment the light turned green, she shot off down the street, cutting in front of his lane. A smile curled his lips. He was ready to chase her down.

She tried to shake him down a few streets, but he kept close, the weather actually clearing up but still curling with light fog. He was worried about oil slicks from the fresh rain, but the way she was handling her ride with the expert cruising, perhaps he didn't need to worry at all.

She started showing out once they approached the bridge and got past the toll with their FasTrak passes. She got far ahead of him allowing other cars to get between them on purpose. He saw her do a quick lane switch and he couldn't help but feel his chest swell with admiration at how thrilling it felt to speed across the bridge, his eyes on her ass as she actually sat up a bit and looked behind herself to see where he was. She flipped him off and he laughed loud and long in his car as he sped up and got behind her.

She eased up on her speed when there was some slight crowding on the bridge once they got closer to the end. He pressed a button on his steering wheel and pulse scan shot out and traced the heat signature of her body and bike. Her image showed up onscreen on his dash, and now he could have his own personal GPS of her in case she tried to shake him again once they got off the bridge. The body heat scan only worked as long as she was at least two hundred feet near him. He thought of shooting a tracker onto her bike from the car, but that seemed a bit much. The scan was working fine.

Off the bridge, she headed into Oakland with a swiftness and he kept up pretty well. At a yellow light, she gunned it, leaving him to sit at the red. He shook his head as he watched her turn into a
small dot on the horizon. By the time the light turned green again, he had lost her.

"Call Califia," he told his car's internal communications system.

Her voicemail kicked in.

"Califa, where are you staying tonight?"

He didn't really have to ask. Looking around where he was, he recognized the area. She was going to Xavier's.

###
Chapter Summary

N'Jobu and Califia make the leap of faith.

Chapter Notes

Hello readers. Our next installment where fate makes that final turn that will lead our two star-crossed lovers down that road of no return. Thanks for hanging with me on this adventure.

Also, I use songs at the beginning of the sections so folks can (if they want to) check out what I was listening to while writing. This particular song is very specific to this artist and this performance by Alice Smith. Below is the link for the version I was vibing to as I wrote. It is an incredible performance by Alice and my fave rendition of this song on Youtube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShZv9aqXf7w

"I put a spell on you
Because you're mine
You're mine
Mine
I love you
I love you
I love you
I love you
I love you
I love you anyhow
And I don't care
If you don't want me
I'm yours right now
I'm yours right now"

Alice Smith re-make—"I Put a Spell on You"

N'Jobu parked his car across the street from Xavier's small apartment complex. He saw Califia's bike sitting in a carport in front of the units. He waited a few minutes to get his bearings and called her number again through his car. She picked up after the fourth ring.

"Hey," she said, her voice airy and light.

"You made it to your destination."

"Yeah. I told you I could handle a little rain."
"True."

"I appreciate your concern though. Are you still driving home?"

"No. Actually, I am right outside."

"Outside?"

He heard her moving around inside the apartment through the phone and then the front door opened. She walked out onto the top of the stairs and looked towards the street. N'Jobu stepped out of his car and walked towards the apartment building. He watched Califia ease her way down the stairs.

He met her at the bottom step and she had a slight grin on her face.

"You were able to catch up."

"Something like that."

His eyes glanced up at the open door of the apartment.

"Why are you here?"

Her eyes went downcast as she fidgeted the toes of her bare feet on the step.

"Xavier went to San Diego for the weekend with his friends. I have some relatives who are staying over at my grandmother's and I really don't want to be around them the next two days, so I'm crashing here so I can study in peace."

Her eyes searched his and he tried to act as if it didn't bother him, but it did.

"Are you really broken up, or is this a trial separation?"

"We are not together. He knows I'm here. After Sunday, I'm leaving the key and I'll be at my grandmother's."

He didn't like her being there. It didn't matter if Xavier was gone. She was still here, in his space. Their energy together would still be surrounding her. She would be sleeping in his bed.

He didn't have the right to be upset that she was here, but he was feeling a particular way. A new sensation actually. He was feeling jealous. Something he had never been before. It was a cold prickly sensation, this idea of possibly losing her to someone else, someone unworthy. In his heart, he felt like she was his, and even the specter of Xavier hovering in her consciousness was making him queasy inside. It also made him feel weak, something he could never be.

"I want to go out with you."

He wanted to kick himself, that was not the smoothest line to give her as his words came out in a needy rush. But she gave him a beatific smile and his heart snapped back into a place of ease.

"When?" she asked.

Califia's eyes crinkled with such a look of bliss that N'Jobu wanted to hug her. His conversation with Bakari about her life swirled inside his head. Her trying to hold a world together for her father, an estranged mother thousands of miles away, and her sense of responsibility towards others must be overwhelming. Where did she go to find comfort for herself? Snatch a little happiness for herself?
He felt his eyes soften as he took in her face. He sauntered closer to her, the step she was perched on made them stand eye to eye. Xavier was not here. She wanted to study alone and away from distractions. She deserved this peace, not his secret irrational jealousy.

"You have a lot going on and I can be flexible for you. Tell me when and—"

"Next Saturday, after my performance. Show starts at seven and ends around nine. Come see me dance and we can go eat afterward. I know a spot that stays open late. If that's okay with you."

"That is excellent with me….oh, wait. I apologize, I made plans for next Saturday. How about Sunday?"

"That will work. Same deal. Dinner after the show."

"Okay, next Sunday."

She blinked and closed her eyes, touching her eyelashes.

"I just got hit with a raindrop," she said, rubbing her eye.

More heavy sprinkling fell around them, and N'Jobu wiped her eye for her then held her face in his hand.

"You are something else, Califia," he said.

Her head tilted to the side a bit and she touched his hand with her own.

"So are you."

He went for it, pressing his lips to hers, closing his eyes and only wanting her in his arms. The warmth of their kiss bloomed into a sweet tangling of full lips, raindrops, teasing tongues, gentle sighs of contentment, and a yearning for more. His arms swept down to surround her waist as her hands curled around his neck.

Sweet turned into savory, and savory became sensual as N'Jobu released her lips and dipped the tip of his tongue into the sensitive curve of Califia's ear. He liked how she responded by arching her neck and soon his tongue was tracing the skin there and then nipping at it with teasing bites. More water fell from the sky but they didn't care about it. Califia sucked in a breath between her teeth when he began nibbling on her neck. He was going to leave a mark on purpose this time, claiming her with his love bites.

She pulled his face away from her neck just so she could look into his eyes again. What he saw reflected back to his own eyes were all the things he was feeling in that moment; the excitement of being with someone new, someone who turned on his mind as much as his body.

"You better go inside. I'll call you," he said. She nodded but kissed him again, this time holding his face with her hands, her tongue seeking out his. His hands reached down and squeezed her ass. He heard and felt her gasp inside his mouth and he took that opportunity to push her into him. Her body writhed against his and that was his signal to stop.

"Go in before you get us in trouble out here, girl."

She pouted and nipped at his lips with her teeth, causing him to groan a tiny bit. She started sucking on his bottom lip and that's when he slapped her ass. She released his lip and her head dropped onto his shoulder and he felt her body shudder. They were both damp from the slight precipitation.
"Slap my ass again, baby," her throaty voice made him glance around the apartment complex and the street. No one was around, and it was past midnight. It was just them and the light rain. With her pressed into him, he used his right hand to slap both her ass cheeks. Her mouth was jammed into his shoulder suppressing an intense squeal. He rubbed both ass cheeks with wide gentle circles. Her thin leggings were soaked and he allowed his hand to squeeze the cleft of her right ass cheek. He whispered in her ear.

"You have to let me know when to stop if it gets to be too much, use a word to let me know."

"Just spank me, I'll let you know."

"No, you have to give me a safe word. I'm serious. Any word."

Both his hands traced her plump behind, rubbing, squeezing, and lifting up the cheeks.

"Red."

Red was easy. Basic.

Califia poked out her behind a bit, still leaning her head into his shoulder. He took his right hand and rubbed her left cheek again. He could feel her tensing up, waiting for the sharp pain to come. He gave it to her, spanking each cheek rhythmically, allowing space between each hard slap to rub, knead, and soothe her. She bit into his jacket, using all the power she could muster to keep from crying out to the entire neighborhood.

They created a satisfying pattern of spanking and nurturing, and he couldn't believe she had him outside in the middle of the night, on her ex-boyfriend's apartment steps letting him do this to her for nearly twenty minutes. He kept the spanking at a beginner's level for her with an occasional shock of intense contact. When that happened, she would gasp into his ear and say "Bay-beeee," with such carnal longing that it made his knees shake.

"You like this?" he asked, the unsated hunger in his voice hard to disguise.

"Yes!"

"Tell me you like it," he hissed into her ear.

"I like it…I like it…bay-beeee…"

"Tell me all this ass is mine…say it!"

"It's all yours, it's all yours…"

"You like having this fat ass spanked, huh?"

"Yes! Don't stop…huhnnnn…don't stop!"

He checked in with her after every third slap, and at one point he tilted her head back to look at her face. Her eyes were on the cusp of going unfocused. He decided to stop. It was enough for her even without her saying "red". He hugged Califia tight, holding up all her weight for her, allowing her to rest and regain her own physical bearings again.

"How are you feeling now?"

"Good. I feel like I'm drunk to be honest."
The rain had become a light sprinkle once more. She threw her arms around his neck, pressing her wet face against his once more.

"I feel, …I feel hot all over…but the rain is cooling me at the same time. It feels really good. Next time, I want you to go harder."

"You're killing me," he whispered in her ear.

She kissed him again, licking his lips, sucking the tip of his tongue, and giving light scratches to the back of his neck with her fingernails. They weren't fancy French tipped wonders like Serah's, but the way she had him purring was good enough in her book.

"Can you walk up the steps by yourself?"

"Yeah, I can."

He pulled away from her.

"Go," he said, pushing her back up the steps.

She held onto the railing and made exaggerated lunges up the steps, flexing her butt just to tease him.

"Goodnight, N'Jobu," she said at the top of the stairs.

"Goodnight, Califia."

She closed the door. Once she was gone, N'Jobu tumbled back away from the steps.

"Whoo, shit," he mumbled, staring back up at the apartment. He started laughing as he walked across the street, taken by surprise at what just transpired.

When he got inside his car it was the first time he noticed how tight his erection was in his pants. He had been so focused on Califia and the pleasure she received just listening to her being spanked that he had lost track of his own physical sensations, even the rainwater that drenched his clothes and face. His cell phone vibrated and he picked it up. Califia had sent him something. He swiped his phone and his eyes almost fell out of their sockets. She had texted him a picture of herself bent at the waist, her leggings and panties pulled down to her knees with her butt thrust out. There were deep red marks on both round cheeks. He tapped the photo to make it bigger just to make sure, and yes, he could see it, the delicate curve of her vulva.

Look what you did, lol!

He read the text again and then stared at the picture.

"Damn, baby," he said. He couldn't wait to get back home. He needed release right away. Undoing the buttons on his pants and zipping down his fly, he glanced around his car. No one could see him. He reached into his boxers and pulled out a brick hard dick. This girl let him spank her in the rain and sent him proof of his markings on her ass. He made the picture even bigger just to try and catch a better glimpse of her pussy.

He flicked his thumb over the head of his cock and imagined lining himself up against her opening. He would have one hand on her neck pushing her down, and the other gripping his dick and dragging it up and down on her entrance. Her pussy looked fat and inviting, and he wondered if she realized that her cell camera had taken more than just her reddened backside.
She probably pulled down her stuff and took a quick snap, not even noticing her juicy slit was showing. He bet that she probably had a mean arch, and shit, what would it be like to sink into her while she held her cheeks open with her own hands, letting him pound that ass to shreds?

She told him she wanted him to spank her harder next time, and that's all it took for him to cum in his car, shooting thick ribbons of his seed all over his pants and leather seat.

"Ah dammit!" he moaned, jerking out the last spillage of cum. He reached behind his seat and rumbled inside his gym bag, pulling out a hand towel. He wiped himself and the seat and balled up the towel, stuffing it back inside the gym bag. He started laughing again and looked up towards the apartment. She was probably up there now, legs open and rubbing tight circles on herself. What he wouldn't give to watch her writhing on a bed and calling out his name. Only his name.

He couldn't wait to see her again.

All the training, clean eating, late night rehearsals, foot aches, backaches, and no dick came down to this night.

Califia sat on the floor of the theater dressing room stretching out her legs. Other dancers milled around, stretching, checking the tape on their ankles, flexing arms and shoulders, fixing hair and make-up too.

Califia had Soliel braid her hair tight with cowrie shells and gold beads. She had a buttload of costume changes and one of the numbers required her to wear an exaggerated paper mache mask that smelled like musty armpits.

Standing up, Califia flexed her ankles and then rolled her neck and shoulders. The nervous energy was eating her up like it always did before a performance. She ran choreography through her head, especially the final piece she was in. Rolita was chilling in the green room where she would stay and watch the show on a monitor until it was time for her to join Califia onstage where she would sing. Califia wasn't in the first number and this irritated her because the director changed the order of performances the week before. She always preferred to come out of the box like a thoroughbred in the first dance, releasing pent-up nerves so that she could ease into her natural performance groove. Instead, she would be waiting on deck going stir crazy hanging onto her dance edge.

Most of her friends would catch the show over the first weekend. She made sure to have a ticket ready for N'Jobu at the box office for Sunday's performance.

The stage manager pulled all the dancers together to give last minute info, and then their dance teacher had them say a group prayer. Califia then went to sit with Rolita in the green room.

"How are you?" Rolita asked.

"You know how it is."

"Reese is already here. They'll pull him in after intermission. Layla and Bonnie will be here by eight."

"Cutting it close."

"If they're late, Reese and I can do it alone."
"But it sounds so good when they sing back-up for you."

"I know."

"Don't forget to stay low when I do that last turn, I almost kicked you in the head at dress rehearsal."

"If you kick me, I'll pretend it was part of the choreography."

They both watched the opening number, a slick throwback of 1950's swing dancing in the middle of an old-fashioned civil rights march performed to an old Kendrick Lamar track. The irony of the song was that nothing had really changed even though Lamar's earnest chorus of "It's gonna be alright" boomed throughout the theater. Califia opted not to participate in that number because it involved some dancers playing cops and going after other dancers with batons. There were some tricky onstage costume changes that made the civil rights dancers become modern citizens but the cops stayed the same.

Once Califia saw the cue that it was time for her to be in the wings on deck, she left Rolita to join the next number. She did a short meditation to focus her mind and align her thoughts with her body and the spirit of the entire program. She checked one last time for the security of the straight black wig she had pinned tight to her head. She had another female dancer check the back of the black skirt she wore. It came down to her knees. Her black leotard was brand new, ultra-thin and itchy. She couldn't wait to change out of it.

"Girl, your make-up is on point. Who did your eyes?"

Califia looked over at Patrice, one of the best dancers in their class who was looking all in Califia's face. Califia loved performing with Patrice because that girl made everyone work harder to stay on her level. If Califia considered herself the equivalent of Venus Williams in their group, then Patrice was the Serena Williams hands down.

They both came into the program as eager freshmen trying to gain top dog spots. Both were competitive and both could be petty to one another when they were younger. But there came a point where they both had to concede that each of them had particular skillsets that worked in their favor. Patrice had the better technical skills because Califia came to dance later in her teens. But Califia had personality and passion. Together they were fire.

Califia batted her lashes at Patrice.

"I did it myself."

"Bitch don't lie, Katy did that."

Katy was busy running up and down the line of dancers checking her work.

"Nope Patrice, Califia actually did it herself this time," tossed Katy over her shoulder.

Califia stuck her tongue out at Patrice. Patrice stepped closer to her.

"You ready to do this?" asked Patrice.

Califia held out her pinky finger, and Patrice hooked hers with it, a good luck tradition they had developed over the years.

"Break a titty, hoe," Califia said, and Patrice fell out laughing.
The music went on first with a voice-over narration done by a drama student. The music was a salsa-tinged number with funk undertones. The drama student recited a poem by a poet Califia didn't know, but it worked in time to the music, and by the time the stage lights came on and Califia followed Patrice's lead front and center, she already knew that they had kicked the show up a notch.

There were seven dancers in this piece, all women, and all wearing the same long straight wig and black skirts. Califia wasn't sure what aesthetic the wig was bringing, but she had fun swinging around the stringy hair.

The stage lights were blinding, so Califia couldn't see the audience properly, but she knew it was a packed house because she could hear and feel the energy in the room. The music had everyone hyped, and when an audience was hyped, Califia and Patrice would always take their dancing to another level. And right at that moment, Patrice had gone supernova, dragging Califia with her. They swirled their skirts, flipped their fake Becky hair on their Black girl heads and tried their best to gas the other one up by yelling "Aye!" every time one of them rolled their hips with an extra booty dip that was not part of the original choreography.

Halfway through that performance, Califia was actually able to breathe easy, the thoroughbred in her was able to stretch out those legs and run the way she needed to. A man in the audience, probably a person of proud Latino ancestry called out "Más te vale bailar!" Califia hollered back, "Estoy cocinando, Papi Chulo!" and only those who knew Spanish laughed.

When Califia's first performance of the night was done, she knew the rest of the evening would be a breeze. The first hour she had the heavy load of being in several numbers almost back to back. By the intermission she had time to freshen up, change, and check in with Rolita. The backup singers arrived on time and all she had to do now was perform two more background dancer work and then wait for her solo at the end.

He didn't see her in the opening number.

N'Jobu sat with Bridgette on the far left of the McKenna theater with a full and eager audience. The restaurant date on the Wharf went well and he was surprised when Bridgette sprung the dance tickets on him. He considered blowing off the tickets and taking Bridgette for a nice drive out of the city, but she was excited about going, and truth be told, he did want to see the opening night to support Califia. He had sent her a text earlier in the day wishing her luck and was bummed when he missed a call from her right before he left for dinner with Bridgette.

Normally he would feel no hesitation about going to a place where he knew another woman he had fooled around with would be, but something in the back of his mind made him feel cautious. Califia would have no idea he was there, but he still had reservations. He kept hearing Bakari's warning in his head.

Bridgette looked amazing in a lavender wrap-around dress and she held his hand in her lap as they watched the first performance together. The dancing was upbeat despite the subject matter of police brutality. The program he held in his lap said the piece was called "Living While Black".

He clapped politely when it was over and then Bridgette curled her fingers into his, holding part of his arm against her shoulder. The lights went out and heavy salsa rhythms surrounded the audience. Some poetry was recited and when the lights came back up, a group of women stormed the stage, their dance moves aggressive and commanding the attention of everyone. N'Jobu felt in his gut that
Califia had to be in this number, even though all the women had the same hair and skirts. He was able to narrow his guess to three women with clear Black body types, and then a grin spread on his face when one woman rolled her hips the way he knew Califia could, and when he heard her voice yell "Aye!" to another dancer who twirled around her, N'Jobu found himself rocking in his seat to the music.

Bridgette was into the performance too, snapping her fingers, her head bopping in time to the music.

"This makes you want to get up and move!" she told N'Jobu.

"That's got to be Califia," N'Jobu said.

"Califia?"

"She's a friend of Bakari. The dancer that Gabriela Amador was with at City Lights. That's her on the right."

"Oh, her. That's right. You know her?"

"Yes."

"You can definitely pick out the Black women up there, they are showing out right now," she said.

N'Jobu kept his eyes on Califia the rest of the night. He was finally able to see the totality of her dancing gifts, and she was a beast. During one futuristic number, her moves were so fast and tight that it took N'Jobu's breath away. He leaned forward in his seat trying to take in every step she made. Bridgette was singing along to the song.

"Yasss! 'Take it down, wanna see you, work it, oh my god, pose bitch!' This is a forever mood, N'Jobu!"

He had no idea what Bridgette meant by "forever mood", but she was enthralled with Califia cutting up on stage, so it must've meant something good.

"She is killing it!" Bridgette said.

N'Jobu could only nod and be mesmerized.

###

Rolita had changed into a traditional Yurok bark skirt decorated with seashells and dried juniper berries that hung on long strings. Ropes of shell necklaces hung across her neck and chest as she placed a small woven cap on top of her head. Rolita's back up singers, Bonnie and Layla wore simple white maxi dresses. Reese, the guitar player, was already placed on the stage waiting for his cue.

Califia wore a simple sleeveless leotard that was very close to her skin tone. She checked to make sure the shells and beads in her hair were secure and then she held hands with Rolita and the other two women.

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combat ignorance was to be truthful and start their performance being real as fuck and going all out. Califia originally wanted to perform naked, but the director and school nixed that idea. She offered to paint her body but the university still said no. She spent a pretty penny finding dance clothing that would make her look as close to nude as possible. The way her nipples were sticking out and the way the thong cut of her leotard revealed her entire ass, she might as well have been buck naked.

Patrice came up to Califia right before she stepped on stage.

"Stunt on them, sis," Patrice said hugging her.

"I will," Califia said. A special make-up filled with pyrite dust was sprinkled on Califia's skin to represent gold dust.

The stage manager swept in waving her hands at Rolita and Califia. Showtime.

Califia followed Rolita, and a stagehand gave mics to Rolita and her back up singers. Entering stage left, Rolita handed her mic to Bonnie and picked up a sage bundle that sat on the stage floor inside an abalone shell. She lit the sage and purified Califia and herself, blowing tendrils of smoke into Califia's face, then waving her hand to smudge herself also.

When she was done, she put the sage back into the abalone to burn out as she took back her mic.

"My name is Rolita Nose. I am a member of the Yurok tribe, the original people of this land that you settlers sit on."

Califia could here a few polite coughs and murmurs in the audience.

"We would like to dedicate this performance to our ancestors, my people who were here first and to my fellow Yurok who still survive and thrive on this land, our land. And to Califia's ancestors who were stolen and enslaved here, and to her people who today fight the good fight. We are still here, and our ancestors stand with us tonight."

Someone in the audience clapped and shouted "Yes!" as another person gave a loud "Shhhh!"

Rolita then said a Yurok prayer in her own language. Califia shook out her arms and gave Rolita another hug. They pressed their foreheads together and Reese began strumming chords on his electric guitar. Bonnie and Layla began to hum the opening riff as Califia took a step back behind the curtain to breathe.

Projected onscreen in the back of the stage was a giant outline of Americas with Africa inside of it. Califia waited for Rolita to sing the first line of "I Put a Spell on You", and when she heard it, she spun out onto the stage and just seized the audience in her
hands with her exquisite interpretation of the song.

N'Jobu dropped Bridgette's hand and sat forward in his seat, his breath caught in his throat. There was a delicate, almost fragile and yet assertive quality to the dancing. Califia incorporated ballet-like footwork with sweeping west African influenced leaps. It was like she was bringing them a blend of Europe and Africa, forcing them to witness a forced hybrid of movement. She matched the intensity of Rolita's singing, and what had always been a quirky old song became a searing indictment of history, culture, and a great demand that the audience remember what they saw and heard on this night.

Califia stopped in the center of the stage and looked directly out into the theater, her face filled with rage and curiously enough, a gentle look of unrequited love. She then lifted her right leg up into a straight 180 in the air and spun in an entire circle with just her toes and the audience gasped and clapped as she twisted herself and the music into manna for them to eat. As if she were telling them, Yes, you will fill your bellies with this and it will nourish you in ways that you didn't think you needed.

Rolita's voice was the sauce that made the performance even more special, the heartbreak and yearning and sense of betrayal. She moved to be near the front of the stage like she was really putting a spell over them with her vocals. Reaching out her fingers like she was casting a divination upon them, she sank down to her knees throwing up her hand and head just as Califia leaped into a Chinese split above her. Califia held one arm above her head as she leaped, her other hand cast downward, and in that split second, it appeared that the two women touched fingers and the crowd went ballistic, clapping as Califia completed a series of turns, tossing in a capoeira move and then walking like a golden Queen towards Rolita where the music ended as they touched hands again.

The lights went out and the entire McKenna theater leaped to their feet, N'Jobu being one of the first ones to jump up. The standing ovation going for a full minute before the lights came back on where they could all see Rolita and Califia holding hands and taking a bow. The ovation continued and it appeared to overwhelm Rolita and Califia as they both hugged and wiped tears from their eyes.

"Oh my God, oh, my God," Bridgette said, staring at him with tears streaming down her face. She reached up her hand and wiped tears from his eyes. N'Jobu smiled and wiped his eyes for himself.

"That was incredible," he said.

"Look at my hands, I'm shaking," Bridgette said.

The clapping died down as Rolita and Califia and their little entourage left the stage. Very quickly, the entire troupe of dancers from the show returned to the stage for a final bow with more rounds of applause and then it was over.

N'Jobu had to sit down for a moment to collect himself. Bridgette had her compact out, fixing her eye make-up and smiling at him.

"I'm so glad we came to see this. Gabriela did not lie. Do you think we can go see her?"

N'Jobu stared at Bridgette.

"Who? Califia?"

"Yes, her and the singer. I want to let them know how amazing they were. A sistah needs to hear it from another sistah sometimes," she laughed.

Bridgette held a hand to her chest. She was really feeling the moment. So was N'Jobu. Yes, he
wanted to wait for Califia and tell her all the things Bridgette wanted to say, but he didn't want to do it with Bridgette there.

"They might take awhile coming out to leave, maybe you should just email the department or hit them up on social media."

"Oh, come on, don't you want to tell your friend in person? We're here. Let's go wait in the lobby."

Bridgette slung her purse over her shoulders and reached out for N'Jobu's hand.

"C'mon," she said.

He took her hand and they walked out of the theater and into the lobby.

###

Backstage Califia was flying high like an eagle. In all her four years in the dance department, this was by far her best performance night. Not only for her stamina in the number of pieces she danced in, but for that closing with Rolita. She co-choreographed the number with her teacher, and along the way, there were disagreements about what should stay and go, but she was so pleased with the final outcome and the crowd's response. She would look at recorded footage of it later to see if there were any things she needed to change, but the fact that she didn't kick Rolita with her leap was the best part.

She changed into an oversized dark blue tracksuit and her purple Chuck Taylors. Tossing a beanie on her head, she walked out into the lobby with Rolita.

"I'm hungry," she told Rolita.

"Tacos?"

"Tacos," she said slinging a retro fanny pack around her waist.

They both received congratulatory words from patrons as they squeezed through theater stragglers who were still milling around and talking about the show.

"Can we drink too?" Califia asked.

"I have church tomorrow," Rolita said.

Califia pretended to throw a fit.

"Califia!"

She and Rolita turned and saw N'Jobu waving at them from outside the theater doors. Califia grabbed Rolita's hand and ran towards him. She was about to hug him with overzealous enthusiasm. In her mind, she thought he had blown off his plans just to be with her, and then she saw Bridgette's arm linked in his and her momentum cut in half. If there was a record scratch moment to be had, this was it.

N'Jobu stepped forward and gave her the most reserved hug.

"Congratulations on that performance," he said.

He stepped to Rolita and gave her a hug too.
Bridgette's arm automatically returned to his when he was done greeting them.

"Hey, N'Jobu," Califia said, all the wind knocked out of her sails.

"This is Bridgette, she got us the tickets tonight as a surprise. She wanted to meet you."

Califia forced a smile on her face as she focused her eyes on Bridgette.

"So cool to meet you both. You were so great. It made both of us cry," she said holding out her hand to Califia.

Califia shook her hand, followed by Rolita. N'Jobu was scratching his face in a nervous gesture.

"I'm happy to have made you cry," she said, her eyes not leaving N'Jobu's.

"Rolita, you have such a gift in your voice. You are truly blessed," he said.

Rolita gave a cheesy grin as both Bridgette and N'Jobu spoke to her. Califia could only stare at N'Jobu and his woman friend, wondering who she herself was in this scenario. Who did she want to be? Andrea, or Serah? The twisted feeling in her gut made her try to play off the annoyed feeling she had. She wasn't angry. Not exactly. He had told her he had prior plans. He wasn't the one who bought their tickets. He was just doing his usual thing and his "friend" had tickets. He loved the show and loved her work in particular. That was fine. That was okay. She couldn't even concentrate on what anyone was saying, she just kept staring at N'Jobu's face. He was just a guy, relax.

But she couldn't relax. She wanted him to hug her and kiss her, take her hand in his and whisk her off somewhere special. Just the two of them.

But no.

He had come to the show with someone else and was leaving with someone else, perhaps going off to have dinner and drinks and great conversation. That was what she wanted to do on Sunday. Now she felt like their date tomorrow would be a second-rate copy-cat version of the one he was on now.

All the texting and talking they had done all week felt disingenuous to her now. He had read the Angela Davis book first and they spent that week talking about Angela's career, her other work, and why womanist theory mattered to Califia. And he had been so engaging over the phone. Their talks all week never ventured into the sexual realm, in fact, they didn't even speak about the picture she sent him.

God. How stupid could she be? N'Jobu probably had a slew of nudes and nasty texts on his phone already. How special could she be? And look at this big Goddess bitch right here. Bridgette. Looking like a whole thick ass snack in that dress. They would probably be smashing later, and she would ride that fat dick, and he would spank her until she was cumming…

N'Jobu was staring at her.

"Yeah?" Califia said, trying to remember what the hell anyone else had said while she had undergone a brain fart of jealous thoughts.

"You okay?" he said giving her a guarded look.

"Um, I'm tired. Yeah. Thanks for checking out the show. We gotta dip. Nice to meet you, Bridgette."
"It was great to meet you, ladies, too," Bridgette said. N'Jobu hugged Rolita again, and then he leaned in and hugged Califia, whispering in her ear, "I'll call you later."

Bridgette was holding N'Jobu's hand as they walked away in the opposite direction.

"That was awkward. I felt some tension there," Rolita said.

"Let's go eat."

"You don't want to talk about what just happened?"

"Nothing happened."

"Aren't you supposed to be wanting to hook up with him?"

Califia didn't say anything, just started walking towards the nearest BART station.

"I know you're not okay with him being with other women. You should tell him."

She was Andrea right now. This is what that shit felt like. When Serah came into that apartment months ago after N'Jobu had screwed the shit out of Andrea, this was how Andrea must've felt when he told her to leave so he could be with Serah next. Califia had sat on N'Jobu's loveseat and laughed at her. No, she needed to be a bad bitch like Serah.

So what if this nigga had hoes around the world? He wasn't in a committed relationship, didn't seem interested in a committed relationship, and he was honest about his shit. She shook her head. She really didn't want to deal with community dick. She didn't need drama created on her end. Maybe it would be better to see other dudes who weren't interested in rotating women around a schedule. Or maybe, …maybe she needed a break from men. She was graduating in June and a new chapter in her life would start. Maybe it was best to stay celibate and single and focus on only her needs.

Who was she kidding? What she needed was him spanking her again, that sweet hot pain spreading from her ass to her back, from her thighs to her nipples and her face. She could just shiver with excitement thinking about last week and his hands on her. He seemed shocked at how fast she had taken to being spanked, but what he didn't know was that she craved it. A previous boyfriend before Xavier used to spank her and she loved it. She just didn't like the guy well enough to keep him for long. She tried to get Xavier into it because most guys enjoyed the occasional ass slapping in the middle of coitus, but to get that consistent flow? Priceless. Xavier was not the guy for the job though, he couldn't get with it.

What amped her the most about it now was how fast she took it from N'Jobu and how fast she could get into that subspace sensation, that heady trippy place of peace that spanking often took her. It was a high better than weed. She didn't want to give that up. It was too hard to find dudes open to that type of stuff. N'Jobu was under the impression that she was a newbie to that type of kink. If only he knew.

Califia and Rolita ate tacos and talked about the show, and when they parted, she was determined to be a big girl, a boss like Serah. She wanted N'Jobu. She was going to have to navigate and reign in her feelings about him seeing other people. She enjoyed talking to him about books and school. She was eager to sleep with him too and desperately wanted to wear any and all marks from his hand on her bottom.

Could they make it work?
In his shower at home, N'Jobu rested his arm against the tile allowing warm water to rush down his back. After dropping Bridgette home at her apartment, he came home and stared at Califia's picture on his phone. He replayed the beauty of her dancing tonight, the passion she had on her face on that stage. He thought of the way she came running to him when he called her outside the theater. That expression of happiness he felt come over his own face at seeing her.

It felt like a punch in the heart when she reached him outside the theater and saw him standing with Bridgette. In an instant he watched her face turn from joy to sadness. He never wanted to see that look on her face again. Ever.

Driving home in his car he deleted all the numbers on his phone that belonged to any woman he was currently fucking. All except Serah. Only because she was now serious about a man she met in Florida, and their relationship had been over for some time in that way.

From here on out until the moment he was summoned home, his only woman was going to be Califia Stevens. He himself may just be a Prince, but he was determined to make her his Queen for as long as his time in the States permitted.

Revisiting her picture, seeing the marks he made on her, experiencing her willingness to go there with him no matter where they were...that had him in his shower, tugging on himself, fondling his balls, imagining all the nasty things he wanted to do to that woman. He turned off the water for a moment, just so he could enjoy the steam that engulfed him. The heat felt so good to his skin, he imagined it being the embrace of Califia, her hugging him from behind, her hands snaking around his middle and dropping down to grip him, stroke his length for him. He could hear the sound of her voice when he spanked her, wished he had been bold enough to stick his hands down her leggings and finger her. How hot would she look if he made her bend over the wing-backed chair in his bedroom, make her pull her panties down just to her knees, and then use his belt to make her cry out his name?

His mouth flew open as he felt the surging in his cock, his balls rising up at just the image of her bent over, ass jutting out, and her pussy open for him...

He watched his cum splash onto the tile, the heavy drops falling were loud to his sensitive ears. He should be inside of her. He wanted to be inside of her...her mind, her heart, and that warrior body.

Refreshed and clean, N'Jobu checked his cell. Califia hadn't responded to his call or message. She and Rolita must be still busy. He checked his kimoyo beads. His sister-in-law was finally free to talk. Bakari was at Shavonne's for the night. He could speak in peace and in private inside the apartment.

Getting comfortable on his couch, he called home. It was time to find out why his sister-in-law was concerned about his brother, T'Chaka.

###
Corners of Your Mind

Chapter Summary

N'Jobu discovers why his family wants him on display back home, and he has his first date with Califia where she makes a demand.

Chapter Notes

Hello Dear Readers,

At last, they have their first date! So we know Erik can't be too far away now.

Thanks for hanging in there!

"What if you wake to find me
In the corners of your mind?
What if I sanctified you
In the corners of your mind?"

Thelonious Martin – "Corners of Your Mind"

"Beloved Brother, we finally have a chance to speak."

The life-size 3D image of Bathwandwa, the future Queen of Wakanda, made N'Jobu's livingroom shimmer with the bright gorgeous view from her sitting room balcony. He could make out the lush tops of the trees that enclosed the Royal Garden.

"My beloved Sister, how were you able to find privacy?"

"I told everyone that I was having morning sickness. The family is visiting the heads of the Mining Tribe today. It is much too far to travel in my condition," she said giving a shy smile about the ruse she gave the family.

They made small talk about the weather in the capital, baby names, and the political climate concerning the upcoming coronation with bordering countries. N'Jobu allowed her to lead the conversation at her own pace. It was nice to be able to speak in his own language for a change and to also hear it.

"N'Jobu, tell me something. I may be glowing because I am with child, but your face is glowing too. It is so bright. What has you shining? Whose sun did you steal?"
N'Jobu laughed at her last sentence. It was so very much like Bathwandwa to borrow phrases that his mother would often say whenever he was excited about something…or someone.

"Are you breaking hearts again?" she teased.

"I am much too busy with my coursework, Sister. This glow you see is a man with a perfect GPA and excellent health."

Bathwandwa moved out of her sitting room and into the privacy of her bedroom. She crawled onto her bed with her back against her headboard. Her face became solemn.

"What troubles you?" he asked.

"T'Chaka…T'Chaka wants to be a good father. I know this. He wants to be so much like your father, but I fear he is putting too much pressure on himself. He…he has been lashing out at people, mainly his personal staff and some of the palace household staff. He has nightmares sometimes too. I am scared for him, N'Jobu. He tries to be brave, but becoming King terrifies him. I think he feels he is too young for the responsibility, even though he wants it. It came sooner than we all expected. He does not have your confidence and he refuses to talk to anyone about it. I have tried to reassure him myself. It is no use. He was so angry with me when I suggested he speak with Baba."

"Has anyone else noticed his behavior?"

"I am sure they do, but no one wants to approach him. He can be very mean, N'Jobu. And Baba has been so busy with preparing the nation that he has not noticed. Umama may suspect, but she leaves him alone because her mind is on the little one coming. There has been talk too, gossip really, that there may be challenges to the throne from some of the royal families who feel T'Chaka is not ready to rule. One of my Ladies in Waiting told me that she heard that the Mining Tribe elders are pushing for change. I think this is what troubles my T'Chaka the most."

"What would you like for me to do?"

"When you come home, can you speak with him? Privately? Please do not disclose that I asked this of you. This troubles me greatly because it puts stress on me and the baby. You know how to lift him up. With you by his side, he is a great mountain."

"Do you think the gossip is true?"

The worried lines on her face told him that she believed the whispers to be true.

Now it was starting to make sense as to why his parents wanted to start his betrothal march now, and probably why they were visiting the Mining Tribe that day. If Zinzi's people were seeking power and a place inside the palace, perhaps a marriage alliance would squash an attempt to challenge T'Chaka for the throne. This was his mother's doing, he was sure, the strategic visit to the Mining Tribe to dangle him as marriage material for Zinzi. He had to smile because it was Zinzi's name that his mother quickly vetted when he gave her his top choice. Umama wouldn't promise his hand outright (just in case he found a more suitable partner in another acceptable bloodline) but she would coyly reveal to Zinzi's Royal Household that she was at the top of N'Jobu's list for a future wife.

All N'Jobu had to do when he returned home was to play his part, razzle-dazzle Zinzi's people and hope that it was enough to keep challenges at bay. The goal was to seat T'Chaka on the throne with a smooth transition of power.

The legacy of Wakanda was to allow any person of Royal birth to have a rightful claim and have the chance to take the throne. For hundreds of years (thousands perhaps), a noble could stand at Warrior
Falls and break a succession of rulers by fighting to the death or yielding if they were beaten within an inch of their life. Partly ceremonial, it was rare that it occurred, but it did happen. Umama was probably incensed that another noble family would dare challenge her child. He could imagine her standing before Zinzi's parents, the power of the sitting King behind her as she would stroke their egos with a velvet coating of words. Once T'Chaka was King, and if N'Jobu decided to marry someone other than Zinzi, his Umama would make that family remember their conceit by shunning them in low-key ways. Her side-eye at his wedding would be epic.

N'Jobu looked at his pregnant sister-in-law and gave her a reassuring smile.

"I will speak to my brother the moment I get home. Do not worry. You get some rest and I will see you next month."

She blew him a kiss and he shut off their communication.

"Dammit," he said, stretching out fully on his couch. He was not happy about stepping back into political bullshit. He wasn't ready to get married. He wasn't ready to leave the States.

His cell vibrated.

Califia.

He snatched up his phone.

"Hello," he said.

"Hey. I got your message."

"Califia…"

He covered his face with his hand.

"N'Jobu?"

"I'm sorry about tonight."

"You don't have to explain—"

"No, I do. I didn't know Bridgette bought those tickets. Had she told me her plans, I would not have gone with her. But I did want to support you on your opening night. I didn't think we'd run into you, it's just… she wanted to meet you and Rolita."

"It's okay…really."

"You didn't seem okay. I saw how your face looked, Califia. I am really sorry."

"I was sitting here thinking about canceling our date tomorrow."

"Because of Bridgette?"

"I don't want to do the same thing you did with her. I'm being 100 with you. Let's just get together some other time, maybe next week or something. Um…did you…did you…"

"Did I what?"

"Did you sleep with her?"
He was quiet on the phone. "You know what? That's really none of my business. Forget I asked, I'm just running my mouth—," she said.

"We went to dinner and then came to the performance. I took her home and dropped her off. I did not sleep with her, Califia. I haven't slept with anyone since that night I first kissed you. I swear."

Now she was quiet. "You still there?"

"Why haven't you slept with anyone?"

"Been busy. No time really."

He felt a headache coming on. Part of his brain was trying to process his conversation with Bathandwa, another part was trying to be upfront with Califia, and another part was just plain tired mentally.

He wasn't ready to discuss what would happen once he finished his degree, nor was he ready to talk about his sex life over the phone. At this rate, fatigue would make him spill his guts, and this was a conversation that needed to happen in person.

"Please go out with me tomorrow. We can talk more, and if you decide I am not worth your time, then you tell me then, yes?" he asked.

With bated breath, he waited for her response. "N'Jobu, I don't—"

"Please. I need to see you."

"Alright."

"Thank you. Go get some rest. I will wait for you in the lobby after your show."

When he hung up, his head still hurt and there was an intense pulse of pain on the left side of his face. He didn't bother to leave the couch, just kept still while feeling the pressure in his head beat him into a troubled sleep.

###

N'Jobu visited a florist prior to arriving at the McKenna Theater. He had the woman behind the counter create two original arrangements using gardenias.

He was grateful that Califia had a ticket waiting for him at the box office because Sunday's performance was sold out. His ticket showed that his seating was closer to the center, almost orchestra seats. When he walked in carrying the flowers, he saw Bakari and Shavonne seated not too far from Soliel and Aunjanue near the back center.

"Look at you bringing flowers," Bakari cracked at him.

"I saw the show yesterday," he told them.

"My girl was good?" Soliel asked.
N'Jobu put a palm to his heart.

"Wait until you see her. We were stunned."

"We?" Bakari asked.

"I came with Bridgette."

Soliel gave him a look that didn't seem unfriendly, but it was clear she was not digging the idea of him being with another woman.

"Wait until you hear Rolita," he quickly uttered, trying to get Soliel on better footing with him at that moment.

"Rolita is the real deal," Soliel said, a smile returning to her face.

"Where are you seated?" Bakari asked.

"Orchestra seat."

N'Jobu bade everyone farewell and sauntered towards his seat with the rest of the crowd. Soon, the house lights went down, and he sat back to watch his girl. It felt natural to think of her that way. No, not his girl. His woman.

###

He didn't think it could happen again, especially since he already knew the routine and song, but the Prince from Wakanda found himself weeping again at the closing number. Rolita's voice was more evocative, and he couldn't prove it, but he was sure that Califia's leaps were higher, grander, even more spectacular than the previous night.

Perhaps it was the word of mouth, or more importantly, the article that appeared in the arts section of the local paper with the large photo of Califia and Rolita in the middle of that dazzling leap where they touched fingers, but somehow the two women seemed to tap into the expectations of the crowd and totally exceeded them.

N'Jobu made sure to buy two copies of the paper so he could have the picture for himself. He had even contacted the photographer and planned to purchase four prints of the original photo.

There was another thundering standing ovation, and when the show was over, N'Jobu didn't even bother to wait for Califia's friends, he just grabbed his flowers and made confident strides toward the lobby. He wanted to be the first face she saw when she exited the dressing room.

Bakari and the crew found him near a drinking fountain facing the dressing room exit. Several dancers filed out, and even Rolita was bounding out of the exit before Califia finally strolled out wearing a skirt and heels combo that had him thanking Bast that she was made a woman. She had taken time to put on a little make-up and the back half of her braided hair was covered in a cute blue hairnet that reminded him of old American movies from the 1940s.

He walked up to her with the flowers in his hand, their eyes locked on each other. She had the same excited energy towards him like she had the previous night. But Soliel ran up and gave her the biggest hug before he could reach her. He had to chuckle a little because now he had to deal with a woman blocking his enthusiastic stride, a reversal of what Califia experienced with Bridgette. But it was all good, and it was just Soliel, so he was not crushed.
He allowed everyone else to hug and kiss her along with Rolita before he approached both women and handed an arrangement to each of them.

"Thank you so much, N'Jobu, wow!" Rolita said, pressing her nose close to her flowers.

When he handed Califia hers, he forgot everyone else was there and lifted her up in his arms and kissed her on her lips. She reciprocated, but then he quickly put her down, worried that he had made another faux pas with her in front of her people. Her hand went to his chest and stroked him there. She didn't seem to care that the others saw their open affection. He plucked one of the gardenias from her bouquet and placed it on the left side of her braided hair.

"Now you look like Billie Holiday," he said. She was beaming because he reminded her of their book discussion and the chapter they talked about that featured Lady Day.

"Thank you, N'Jobu," she said. She must've forgotten the others were there too because she leaned in and kissed him on his lips, and he did his best to keep his eyes open. She didn't slip him any tongue, probably because it now dawned on her that her friends were watching her act this way with him, and not Xavier.

"I'm so happy you all made it," she gushed once she broke focus on him and faced her buddies.

Bakari watched N'Jobu's face with great interest.

"Y'all going out to celebrate?"

N'Jobu took in Bakari's words and checked out his body language. His body looked relaxed holding Shavonne's hand, but his face was a bit pensive.

"We're going out to eat," Califia said, smelling her flowers and throwing Bakari a look of her own that N'Jobu couldn't quite read when he glanced at her face.

"You guys have fun," Soliel said, stepping forward and giving Califia another hug before turning to Rolita and doing the same.

The farewells were completed, and soon enough, N'Jobu was alone with Califia.

"Are you parked nearby?" she asked.

"The theater lot."

"The restaurant is within walking distance. You can stay parked in the lot until midnight."

They walked out of the theater together, and when Califia held her flowers in her right arm, he took that moment to clasp her left hand in his. She quickly entwined their fingers and he was enchanted with the thought that it felt so natural to walk with her like that. He found himself pulling ahead of her, the need to lead her becoming all too apparent to him. He slowed down once he remembered that he didn't know where they were going.

"It's just a few more blocks down and to the right," she said giving him the name of the place.

He continued leading her, stepping in front of people to make a way for her to pass through. A normal walk for him with a date was side by side, with equal footing. But she made him want to clear the way. Keep people from stepping in front of her. It wasn't a chauvinistic thing he was feeling where the man took the lead because of patriarchy and sexism; his desire was to protect her, to make sure that the way ahead was safe for her to travel. He didn't know where this need came from. She
was fully capable of handling herself and whooping ass if she needed too. Something in him just wanted to do it.

When they made it to the small Tapas spot, there was a bit of a waiting crowd outside, but Califia went up to the chestnut-haired restaurant host in front of the reservation podium and gave her name. They were quickly ushered inside.

Once they were seated at a small table near the center of the restaurant, Califia placed her flowers in the middle creating a fancy centerpiece.

"Have you had Tapas before?" she asked.

"I'm ashamed to say I have not."

"Do you have any dietary restrictions?"

"I eat any and all things."

"Good. Do you mind if I order for us? I'll get a variety of things, and if there's something you like in particular, I'll get us more."

He waved a hand at her to take over, and when their server arrived, Califia ordered at least seven items and a pitcher of Sangria.

"I love this place…" Califia's face took on a slight grimace.

"What is it?"

"Jeez. That was really tacky. I should've let you look at the menu and choose what you wanted."

Califia handed a menu to him.

"Don't worry about it. Obviously, you know this place very well, and I'm open to eating what you think is best," he said.

She handed him a wine and spirits menu.

"The sangria here is really good. It kinda has a spicy kick to it, which is unusual. But pick out anything else you want."

He stared at her. She seemed a bit nervous.

"I'll just start with the sangria you ordered and go from there later," he said, putting the menu down.

He watched her trace her finger on the menu sitting in front of her, and from his vantage point, he could see her left leg bouncing rhythmically through the clear glass table. He reached across and took her hand in his.

"Don't be nervous, Califia."

"Can I be honest with you?"

He nodded, leaning in closer to the table while stroking her thumb with his index finger.

"It's been a long time since I've been on an actual date. I am really rusty."
"Relax. It's just you and I enjoying the evening after another spectacular performance."

"Did we make you cry again?" she teased.

"You did."

"Well Rolita and I cried too after we finished, so don't feel embarrassed."

"I would never feel embarrassed about crying."

Her eyes searched his face.

"American men are really hung up about showing emotions. I find it very strange that they consider a man soft for doing it, especially in public. It's unnatural to feel that way."

"I agree."

Their pitcher of sangria arrived and they poured themselves healthy glasses of the drink.

"Salud," Califia said tapping her glass to his.

They both drank deeply, and when they put their glasses on the table, they both could taste the kick of spices hitting their tongues.

"I taste cinnamon and ginger," he said.

"Cloves too," she said.

"It's good."

She was pleased that he liked it. When their small platters arrived with various nibbles, they were already warming up to one another.

After tasting all of the tapas treats she picked out for them, he decided to never doubt her skills at choosing food well. During the meal, he asked her questions about the show, especially greater details on how her solo with Rolita was put together.

She asked him about his Master's Program, and he asked her about her plans after graduation. Her minor was education and she was aiming for a teaching credential, but she also wanted to run a community center one day. The one she volunteered for was an early stepping stone to getting her foot in the door. Their conversation was easy and N'Jobu found himself laughing a lot whenever Califia got indignant about something, especially anything to do with politics or anime.

After another glass of sangria, they had another round of question and answer.

"My name means "second son"," he said, leaving out the full meaning of 'second son of the ruler'.

"How many siblings do you have?"

"I have an older brother named Amir. And I have a sister-in-law, Thandwa. What about you? What does your name mean?"

"My father picked it out. My mother wanted to name me Erica after my maternal great-great-grandmother. She helped build the first free colored school in Georgia after emancipation. We have a long line of teachers in my family. But my dad, he was reading a lot and he came across this book by a Spanish writer that talked about this mythical island of California where all these Black amazons
lived. They had a queen called Calafia and she represented the spirit of California. She raised an army of Black women who fought with griffins alongside Muslims who fought Christians, just all kinds of wild stuff. He just changed the spelling to Califia."

"His very own Black Amazon."

"Mom gave in. I think the name Erica is cute, a play on the male name Eric. It means 'ruler or King'."

"You are most definitely a Black Amazon."

"Well thank you, sir."

Her eyes were shining like bright brown marbles. Her index finger touched the bottom of her glass of sangria.

"Uh oh, that looks like your thinking face," he said.

She gave a quirk of her lips and her eyes broke away from his gaze.

"What will you be doing after you graduate?"

"After this year, I will have one more to finish up my masters. Then I have to go home to do mandatory military service."

"For how long?"

"At least eighteen months, two years max."

"So your country makes you do that?"

"Yes. Every citizen between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five."

Calafia drank a bit of water and made eye contact again.

"Serah told me you were going to become a diplomat like your parents. Does that mean you'll be able to come to the States a lot?"

She was fishing. He sensed that she wanted to know if he was worth pursuing. It was the difficult part of casual dating. There were women who knew the score, clung to him for the shits and giggles until their time had faded and he moved on, or they gave up. And then there were women like Bridgette, Serah, and Calafia. The potential for long-term relationships within his grasp but only him knowing it wouldn't work to their satisfaction.

Bridgette made excuses for their difficult coupling as being a personality conflict, thus no future. But the night they had dinner before Calafia's show, she had confessed to hating the idea of knowing from jump that there was a definite expiration date to their union. However, she was willing to go at it until he was on a plane. But it was too late for her. Calafia had him.

"My future work will have me on the East Coast several times a year."

"So… if you were seeing someone on the regular, you could still keep in touch?"

Her voice sounded hopeful.

"Calafia, I won't lead you on. My family expects me to return to Wakanda and devote my life to it. It was what I was born into and it is what I am trained to do, and there's no changing that. I know
American children are taught to have independence and freedom and leave their family and do what they want as adults. That isn't the way of my people in my position. Even though I will have trips to the States on occasion, I couldn't keep a healthy long-distance relationship. I wouldn't want to. With the time I have left here, I just want to hang out with you. Know you better...as a friend and anything else you will allow me. That's all I can offer."

Califa took a deep inhale, drank more sangria, and leaned back in her seat.

"Okay. Just laying it all out there. I appreciate the candor. I really do. Do all your women know this?"

N'Jobu pressed his lips together, then took another drink from his glass.

"They do."

"Is it hard to juggle so many girlfriends at once?"

"No. Despite occasional snafus, I'm upfront and try my best to be low key about it."

"Is it an ego thing to have so many?"

"It may look that way. But one day I will have to marry a Wakandan woman. As a single man, I want to experience as much pleasure as I can before I become monogamous. I love women, Califia. I own that."

"Do you spank all of them?"

N'Jobu glanced around the room. It was less crowded. He looked back into her eyes and there was a bit of mirth there. And something else he recognized. Desire.

"I think we should talk about that in a more private place."

He waved their server over and requested their check.

###

The walk to his car found them strolling arm in arm. Califia appeared to have a good buzz, but the water N'Jobu drank kept him on point. He wanted so much to take her home and ravish her like a good old-fashioned romance, but he was cognizant of her state of mind and all the physical exertion she had given during the show. She needed to get home and rest. They both had classes the next day, but his started later in the day and she had a morning seminar.

The weight of her hanging on his arm made him feel calm. He didn't know how she really felt about what he disclosed to her. His words didn't appear to repel her interest. Only time would tell. He planned to ask her out again once he dropped her off at her grandmother's.

The theater parking lot was just about empty, and his car was easy to spot near a well-lit structural pillar. He had backed in so that his front end was facing out. He opened the passenger door for her and protected her head as she stepped in. When he buckled into his own seat, they still had forty minutes to spare. He didn't start the car right away, just sat back and looked into Califia's face. She looked comfortable. He was liking her more and more.

She didn't buckle her seatbelt, just crossed her right leg over her left and he could see her smooth brown thighs more as her skirt rode up on her hips.
"So about that spanking…" she drawled, resting her elbow on his car's center armrest and leaning towards him, her face tilted up. Her snug V-neck floral top gave him a nice view of her cleavage. She didn't make life easy for him.

"What about it?" he said, trying to play dumb. She rolled her eyes, her silver nose ring glinting on her face, accentuating her round nose.

"Do you spank all your hoes?" She started giggling, and it made him laugh too.

"I don't have hoes—"

"Lovers…" she said, enunciating the "L" so that her tongue rolled hard in her mouth.

"I don't spank all of them. It takes a certain type of woman to handle that."

"So you know I can handle it then?" Her voice went low and provocative. He started feeling that familiar tingle in his lower half just from the thought of his hand on her backside.

He swallowed hard, staring at her thigh and the curve of her short skirt.

"I think you can handle it, sure," he said.

"Then spank me. I want you to. Take me in the backseat…" She patted her butt.

His eyes felt like they would go blurry. He watched her hand continue to pat herself, then she slipped a few fingers under her skirt and pulled her panties down so that they clung to the top of her thighs where he could see them. She reached up and pulled his face closer to her own and kissed him, her tongue darting in and out of his mouth.

"Spank me, N'Jobu."

"Ooh," was all he could get out of his own mouth, "Califia, do you know what you're doing?"

She lifted up her skirt more.

"See, baby, you can have the real thing instead of just the picture—"

He jumped out of the car and moved around to the passenger side, yanking her out of the BMW by her arm. He didn't mean to do it so rough, but there was a heat seeping down into his body from the top of his head to his thighs, and he could barely focus his eyes when he stuffed her into the backseat slamming the door. He tried to get his shit together when he moved around to the other side of the car and climbed into the back seat to join her.

He reached up for her arm and pulled her forward onto his lap so that her face was down on the back seat. He scooted over more to her side and positioned her mid-section over his crotch. He yanked her panties further down until they were down by her knees. A bright lamplight illuminated his back seat so he could see everything, and he had to pause to control the tremors he felt in his right hand that itched to go off on her. He took a moment to just gaze at her ass.

Califia was quiet, and then she was wiggling her hips, her legs bending back and her heels dangling in the air.

"Be still," he snapped at her. He needed to center himself. She was rushing things faster than he wanted to move and he had to take control. He needed to dominate this situation. She was unraveling his thoughts at breakneck speed.
"N'Jobu…"

"Shut up!" His right hand came down hard on her backside and Califia yelped at the sudden pain, her legs dropping, her heels now pressed against the passenger door. She kept her mouth shut.

"Safeword is still red," he snapped. She nodded vigorously. They didn't have much time. The lot would close soon. He raised up her skirt to her waist, and perfect round globes gifted his eyes.

"Damn girl…damn," he said rubbing all of her thickness.

She began to writhe on his lap again.

"I said don't move," his voice went deep and predatory in tone.

"N'Jobu—"

"Why are you so fucking hard-headed?"

He unleashed vicious slaps that made her raise her head up off the seat, her cries of ecstasy causing his dick to grow.

"You want to be punished?!"

She nodded her head, keeping her mouth closed. He rubbed her backside, his eyes coveting everything that was now his and only his. How the hell did Xavier let all of this walk away from him? Idiot.

"I will punish you. So hard, girl," he ground out with his teeth pressed tight.

"Plea—"

He rained down slap after slap after slap. She liked being a brat. He could see now that it was her thing, to purposely provoke his ire, forcing him to spank, seeking out as much pain as he could give her. He could also see that she was no amateur because he was not holding back, and she was not tapping out.

"Spread your legs a little," he said watching her do it and seeing her cheeks lift and separate. Jesus. Christ.

"Shall I tell you why I like to spank, especially a girl like you?"

She let out a noise like a squeak as she sucked in air between her lips.

"N'Jobu—"

SLAP!

The groan released from her was a long harsh sibilate sound and her hips shot up from his lap. He wrapped his left arm around her waist to hold her down.

"Fucking defiant…" he moaned, his chin dropping to his chest, his eyes shutting as the bulge in his pants distended, trapped under the weight of her body. Her hands were gripping the edge of the BMW backseat.

"I'm going to touch you between your legs. Is that okay?"
She nodded her head, her breathing transformed into irregular pants.

"Use words, Califia. I have to hear you, baby," he said, allowing just a slight edge of gentleness to his voice.

"Yes," she cooed. Her legs parted further and he slipped greedy fingers to her wet center, finding her delicious opening dripping and sticky.

"Damn, Califia, damn…" he uttered under his breath, dragging his fingers up and down her folds. He allowed one finger to slip inside her and her pussy just sucked him in the entrance a couple of inches. He stuck another finger in and pushed in deeper, meeting some resistance. He knew she wasn't a virgin, but her pussy was tight. He curled his fingers, letting his pinky and ring finger brush lightly over her swollen clit. She whimpered.

"Let me in, baby…" he said, trying to relax the tightness, his three fingers seeking to massage her into submission. He wanted to go deeper. Open her up. He was already thinking of how his dick would get past the tight ring of muscles he was feeling now. She shifted her weight forward, raising her hips and ass more, and he felt his fingers slip in further.

"Yes," he whispered, "there we go, girl. Take it."

Her hips were winding in small circles while his fingers took shallow dips in and out. Her pussy made loud gushy sounds in the car. He used his left hand to rub her ass, and when she didn't expect it, he spanked her ass hard while fingering her.

"N'Jobu…N'Jo—"

She lifted her upper body up on her elbows, arching her back, and his fingers went even deeper. He allowed his thumb to ghost the outside of her other opening. He would save that probing for another time but rested his thumb there. He stopped moving his fingers and just watched her rock her hips onto them fucking herself with his hand.

"Do that, Califia," he encouraged her. He could see the profile of her face, her lips twisted between her teeth and her head drooped forward. If he took her from behind one day, this is what she would look like. He was fucked. There was no way he would last; his dick would spurt the moment he bottomed out inside of her. Two or three thrusts and he would probably combust.

He started moving his fingers with her again and spanking her at the same time, sharp alternating slaps on each ass cheek.

"Califia…Califia…Califia…" he uttered.

She threw her head back, eyes snapped shut, her mouth open in a silent scream as he felt her entire body tremble, the muscles around his fingers clenched tight.

"Ah, you cumming? You cumming, Califia?" He knew she was, but he wanted her to say it out loud. The spasms in her core petered out and he was able to remove his coated fingers. She collapsed onto his lap with heavy tremors emanating from her body.

Something primal gripped his spirit. He lifted her up and let her body drop back onto the back seat. He unfastened his pants letting them droop around his waist and pulled out his throbbing erection and tight heavy balls with his right hand. He pressed his left hand into the small of Califia's back and straddled her thighs, his head hanging down to look at her ass as he stroked himself with a desperation that he couldn't contain.
"I'm going to cum on your ass baby, I'm going to cum all over you, girl," his voice was cracked, all control lost as his fist pumped rigid dark flesh. He rubbed the head of his cock on her ass, dragging the wide fat bulb of his tip on her hot skin.

"Cum on me, Jobu..." her soft voice drifted up to his ears.

"Say it again!" He barked, his entire hand wrapped around his erection.

"Cum on me Jobu—"

"Yes..." he gasped, the hitch in his voice making it hard for him to breathe.

"Cum on me..."

He had a hard time keeping his eyes open, he wanted to gaze at her ass, burn the image onto his retinas.

"Cum in me, Jobu—"

His must've misheard her. But it didn't matter he was cumming now, his semen spraying thick, hot and fast all over her ass, her skirt, and the back of her shirt. He continued to pull on his dick, milking every last drop and making sure it landed all over her. When he had no more to give her, he rubbed his cum into her skin. He glanced up out of the back window and saw a theater parking attendant walking and checking for the remaining cars.

"We have to leave, Califia, they're closing up" he whispered, fixing his pants. He tapped her wet ass cheeks and watched them jiggle. She wasn't budging.

"Califia, we have to leave."

N'Jobu started pulling up her panties. He had nothing in the car to clean her up. She finally stirred and finished getting her panties back in place and pulled down her skirt. The damp traces of semen all over her didn't faze her one bit as she sat up. He stepped out of the back seat with her and they both walked around each other to switch positions in the front seat. The parking attendant paid them no mind.

N'Jobu started up his car and drove them out of the lot. Califia fiddled with his satellite radio and found an easy listening station.

"What's your grandmother's address?" he asked, pressing a button on his dashboard. She gave it to him and the car set its own course with his GPS system. They were quiet together the first few minutes on the road. Without looking at him Califia asked,

"I thought you were going to tell me why you liked to spank girls like me."

He glanced over at her, but she was staring out of the window.

"I'll save that story for another day."

"Hmmphh," she responded, turning up the music.

"One day soon I want you to tell me about the first guy who ever touched you like that."

A mischievous smirk painted her lips.

"Oh, that's a very special story," she said, glancing over at him.
He tried to keep his eyes on the road, but he kept glancing down at her legs. They were provoking the hell out of him. He kept thinking of them being in the air, her heels twisting, his fingers jammed deep inside of her while he called out her name as she came on his fingers. Jesus, he wanted to taste his fingers, taste her, wrap those brown legs around his waist and rock into her all night long, just marinate his dick in her juices...

She had him mentally spinning and he had to nip it or else he would do something rash, like reverse directions and take her home to his bed. It was going to be difficult enough just to release her to her grandmother's house and go home to an empty bed. He didn't even want to call anyone else, but he could feel his nature rising again, that familiar tickling of heat coming down on him from above like some mythical Cupid's bow piercing his lust for her. It was lust, it was incredible lust he was feeling, and something more, just beneath the surface, a nagging deep ache that needed to be filled, but only by her. No one else.

He considered going to Andrea's using her as a heroin addict would use methadone to get them through a habit they can't shake. If he couldn't have the real thing, then maybe the next best thing could get him through the night.

He had assumed that at some point during the closing of their date that they would make out and he would see how far she would let him explore her body and more of her mind. But that damn sangria had her flexing, and she jumped from zero to ninety before he could even enjoy a smooth romantic transition. One-night stands were easy. He didn't want that with her. He was open to the journey of getting there slowly, but she just had to fucking pull down her panties and dare him. Challenge him. Letting him play all inside her tightness, her pussy working over his fingers, drawing him into her sacred center.

"It's that house right there," she said.

His mind had caused him to drive all the way to her grandmother's house without him being aware of it. He turned on his hazard lights and put on his emergency breaks. He looked over at her knowing she was all sticky with his essence and smell of him too.

"First date," she said, her eyes unwavering as she watched him.

"I want another," he said "a longer one."

She gingerly reached a hand around her back, touching the back of her skirt.

"You uh...you can put out a lot," she said, her voice gone husky again.

"You bring that out of me."

"I like it."

She looked up at her grandmother's house.

"Kiss me goodnight," she said. He leaned in to kiss her, but she didn't give him a goodnight kiss. She gave him a kiss to mark her territory on him.

Her lips enticed him to give up his tongue, and he did so gladly. She lifted up her top and unfastened her bra with tiny magnetic clasps in the front. She had large reddish areolas and his hands groped for her breasts. He tugged and squeezed her nipples, rolling his fingers all over her softness.

"Let me suck your dick," she breathed into his mouth and he let her release his cock into her capable hands.
"You really know how to end a date well," he teased and lost his breath when her pretty thick lips wrapped around his steady growing erection. Her head bobbed in his lap as he inclined both his hands above his head, lying them against his headrest. He let her go to work, not even bothering to thrust because that could end him and the thin line of control he had left. Califía relaxed her tongue and pulled her lips back from his dick, raising her head up to look him in the eye. She had both of her hands around his member.

"N'Jobu, I don't want you fucking anyone else."

She stroked and squeezed him with both hands, tugging him in all the ways that had his legs tensing up. When her tongue curled around his balls, his right hand cupped her head, then pulled on her hair through her hairnet, that beautiful gardenia framed against her face. Her tongue snaked back up his shaft and hit that sensitive spot on his frenulum, licking the tissue there until his glans was dripping pre-cum down her chin. She kept her eyes open as she licked and nipped at him.

"Didn't you tell me all this dick was mine?" she whispered, twisting her lips into a bratty pout.

"Yes," he answered.

"Is it really all mine?"

She took him far into her mouth, not enough to deep throat him though. Her gag reflex wasn't very good, but given time, he would teach her how to take all his shit. She would learn to gag on him the way he liked it.

"It's all yours...ah...fuck....Califía, this is all your dick. This is all your dick. This is all yours..."

He couldn't stop saying it as he watched her head go up and down, finally watching the girth of his cock stretch her mouth wide open.

"Lift up, quick, I want to cum on your tits!"

He pulled her off of him with her lips still smacking. She smooshed her tits together while leaning over him and he erupted, drenching her chest and neck. His eyes shut tight.

"Open your eyes, N'Jobu."

He felt spent. He wished they were in his bed together so he could lay her out good and proper.

"Baby," she said, a hint of pleading in her tone.

He saw her rubbing the ropes of his cum between her breasts as traces of it dripped onto his lap. She was all his now, he had covered nearly all of her body tonight with his ejaculate. She didn't have to worry. He didn't want to fuck anyone else.

He pulled her closer to him and kissed her long and deep. When he released her, he kept his face close to hers, his right hand resting on the back of her neck with a soft grip.

"I'm all yours," he said.

"I'm serious, N'Jobu. I don't want to share you. I don't want to show up somewhere and some other woman is there with you. Boy, you got me hella twisted."

"I'm yours, girl. You don't have to worry. I already deleted numbers on my phone. I won't fuck anyone else."
He kissed her forehead.

"Put your clothes back together. It's late," he said.

She fastened her bra and pulled down her shirt. He was so turned on by her. His jizz all over her. Next time he wanted to be inside of her. But he would give them time. Tonight, was too intense.

"Ciao," she said grabbing her flowers and small purse hopping out of his car.

He watched her go inside her grandmother's house.

The first thing he would do in the morning was to head out to a clinic and get tested. He needed to show her his clean bill of health because there was no way he could just tell her that he was hers.

He needed to show her.

He felt heat emanating from his Kimoyo beads with a signature he didn't recognize.

"Transfer call to car," he called out and his dashboard glowed in response. "Identity?"

A static picture of Zinzi Chiume floated up onto the top of the dashboard.

What the hell was she doing calling him like this?
Mesmerized

Chapter Summary

A slight hiccup in N'Jobu and Califia's new relationship.

Chapter Notes

Hi faithful readers!

This chapter came out of nowhere, so I had to let it do what it wanted to do.

Now I'm back on my plot outline as we get ready to separate these two on different continents, get Califia in this man's bed so drama can ensue, and stakes can be raised. Klaue is waiting in the wings, and so is Uncle James.

As always, thanks for hanging with me!

"You don't know
What you do to me
Let me tell ya
How ya make me feel
I need yo lovin'
It's so good to me
I can't even sleep (Oh!)
Boy, you got me weak (Yeah!)
My heart is on fire since you put that thang on me, ooh
You put that thang on me, that thang, baby

Ooh baby, baby, baby, baby mesmerized"

Faith Evans—"Mesmerized"

N'Jobu stared at the picture of Zinzi floating above his dashboard. The only way she would have his private and secure contact number is if his mother had given it to her. He drove away from Califia's grandmother's house and contemplated ignoring the call. That idea faded when he thought of Bathandwa and T'Chaka. He hadn't even gotten a chance to step one foot back on the motherland before he had to play his part already. He exhaled a long deep breath. Game time.

"Answer."

The static photo stayed the same, but its color was richer letting him know he was online with Zinzi.

"Zinzi, I am driving, so I will stay in static mode."

"Prince N'Jobu. You must be surprised that I am contacting you."
Her voice sounded like a smooth mellow glass of cognac. He thought of his dream about her when they sat under a tree and she asked him about falling in love. Her recent photo was even more beautiful than he remembered. He needed to tease out information from her, so he opted to act excited about coming home.

"I am glad you did, it's been a long time since we've spoken, Zinzi."

"I met with your parents today."

"Oh?"

"They tell me you will be home in a few weeks. I was hoping we could get together and have a meal to catch up."

"That can be arranged."

He saw his cell lighting up and heard it vibrating. Califia's avatar popped up on his screen. He didn't want to ignore her, but he had to.

"Your Highness, may I be open with you?"

"Always, Zinzi."

"The King and Queen did not make a social visit. You know that, right?"

He didn't respond.

"They want us paired up."

Wow. She cut to the quick.

"What makes you say that?"

"Do not play coy, Prince N'Jobu," she quipped, "I know how these things work."

"How do you feel about that?"

"I am open to it. I mean, you are a Prince after all," she laughed.

He found himself smiling.

"Zinzi, you and I have the misfortune of being born into powerful families where we have no power of our own."

"Then you and I should form an alliance."

That caught his attention.

"How so?"

"I know your family has to vet other potential partners, but while you are home, can you make it so that we are seen together in public often?"

"I will be seen with several people—"

"Without chaperones."
Now he was curious. He would have several private and public parties to attend back home. He also had obligatory royal duties. All these events would have him surrounded by Dora Milaje security.

"I can't guarantee that, Zinzi."

"Try."

"Why should I do that? As a noble you know that we can't be alone for too long."

Assassination attempts were a part of Wakanda's bloody past eons ago, but he felt confident that Zinzi wasn't planning on taking him out. Her family may have their eyes on the prize in the palace, but they would strike in full public view if it came down to that in front of Warrior Falls.

"I have my reasons, but I will explain it to you when you get here."

"Fine. By the way, I like your avatar picture. You look good, Zinzi."

"Ah, so I am no longer that bony chicken you used to tease, eh?"

"That was T'Chaka, not me—"

"No, it was you too, do not deny your transgressions against me."

"Sekmet weep for me, I was not part of that—"

"You lie like an Uncle's old coat..."

N'Jobu cackled in his car at the old-fashioned euphemism.

"You sound good, Prince N'Jobu," she said, her voice gone soft-spoken and treacly.

"You do too, Zinzi."

He saw his cell light up and heard it vibrate again. He was almost back home.

"Can I call you back sometime?" he asked.

"Of course, your Highness."

Zinzi's voice was melodic in the surround sound of his car. Although it was a brief conversation, he was liking her vibe. This pre-arranged partnering may actually work between them. She had a sense of humor, and she made him feel relaxed with her voice alone. He wondered how she would be in person, especially alone when their elders, the nobles, and their friends weren't around. She was hip to what his mother was trying to do and seemed good with it.

"Ulale kahle, Zinzi."

"Sawubona, Prince N'Jobu."

He hung up. He had a lot to think about. He texted Califia to let her know that he made it back safe.

Walking into his apartment he felt his body start to come back down to normal. He took a quick shower and spent some time writing and sketching in his journal. Occasionally his thoughts would drift back to Califia and what they did together in his car.

He fell asleep with a pen in hand, an unfinished sketch of Califia with big wild hair sending him to
She tried to call him four times. Each time his phone went straight to voicemail until the third try when he texted her. The moment she saw the text, she called him again, but the phone just rang several times until the voicemail kicked in once more.

Showered and dressed in a long t-shirt, Califia sat on the makeshift bed she made on her grandmother's couch staring at her phone. Her nerves were kicking in, making her stomach feel jumpy and unsettled. N'Jobu up until then had never ignored her calls or put off calling her back, especially if he just texted and she responded back right away. She kept telling herself that he was probably doing something to get ready for school, but there was a sour ticklish feeling in her gut causing her to feel distressed.

She had sucked his dick, something she would never do on a first date, and she had allowed him to play with her privates inside his car. Was he disinterested now that he had a small taste of her? She did feel a bit tense when he first stuck his fingers inside of her, and she wondered if he felt that she wasn't into it or him. Her fingers stroked her phone screen, but she stopped short of redialing. Maybe it had been a mistake to engage him sexually. She brought all of that out herself. In her experience, most men wouldn't turn down an opportunity to engage with a woman in that way, but maybe N'Jobu was not ready for that yet on a first date.

Shivered in pleasure thinking of the way his voice sounded hoarse and brittle when he straddled the back of her thighs and came on her. The utter lack of control he had when he spilled all over her breasts. His face in the midst of his orgasm had her caught up. The fragrant scent of his manhood was sexually enticing, and she knew she could spend long luxurious hours sucking and licking him into the night. She was able to see fully what he was working with and she was even more aroused when she saw his balls and how they were large and hung away from his body like heavy fruit that she found sexy as hell. Running her tongue along the seam of his sack, she realized that his penis was so, for lack of a better word in her mind, beautifully masculine.

He had a grown man's dick, and coming into contact with it fully made her realize that her previous partners did not measure up. And it had nothing to do with his size (although he was by far the biggest guy she had ever been with). For one thing, his private parts were well-groomed, not the wild jungle nests her previous lovers cultivated. He kept himself trimmed, and to keep that satiny feel of his cock, he most definitely had some type of moisturizing routine for down there. N'Jobu probably never had an ashy dick in his life.

She felt her clit thump with just the memory of it. She wanted to masturbate so bad. She tried to imagine getting all of him inside of her. She wondered if he was into anal because his thumb kept hovering near there while he was spanking her. She had never done that, but she would consider it with him.

Her backside still ached a bit from his handling of her. She was close to calling the safeword towards the end, but she wanted to push herself with him, and when he smacked her ass like his open palm was made of wood, the sting from it radiated through her cheeks and bloomed inside her clit that rubbed up against his finger, and her cumming was enough to steal the breath from her body. She couldn't even make a sound. With just his fingers he had wrecked her shit. Those beautiful strong manicured fingers of his played her like Yo-Yo Ma on cello.

And now he wasn't returning her calls. She just wanted to hear his voice, make sure tonight had been real. She told him she wanted him for herself. She wanted there to be an "us".
In the dark of her grandmother's livingroom, she tried to be discreet and slipped her fingers into her panties. She imagined running her lips and tongue on his length, using her hand to stroke and tug on his erection. Her lips curled. He was so thick...so thick...so thick...

Another silent orgasm rippled through her fast and sharp, air caught in her throat as the vision of his cumload coating her chest and face dazzled her eyes. She balled up in the fetal position as spasms still rippled between her legs.

Out of breath and still sexually wired from his touch, she checked her cell again. Nothing.

###

Califia practically sleepwalked through her morning classes. There were no new messages from N'Jobu on her phone. She was tempted to call Bakari and pretend to discuss something else and try to suss out if N'Jobu was around, but she began to question her rising anxiety.

She debated riding over to their apartment and seeing if he was home. She was so bad at this.

The weather was pleasant and she took a ride around her neighborhood, running into one of her cousins who was now staying with her at their grandmother's house. Thanksgiving was a few days away and her Nana was planning a gathering of relatives that Califia was not close to. But she was allowed to invite friends, so she sent a group message to her inner circle giving the time after she attended the Native Sunrise service on Alcatraz. She added N'Jobu to the chain.

Junie, the one cousin closest in age to her, was walking out of the corner liquor store when she pulled up on her bike to pick up some rolling papers. Her grandmother would be gone all night to do an overnight prayer vigil for a shut-in from her church. Califia was ready to sit on the porch and smoke some trees until she felt woozy.

Junie was fair-skinned and looked a lot like her father. When he saw her, he was quick to run up on her.

"Aye, Cali, I'ma need you to braid my shit."

Junie's thick brown hair was pulled up into a messy afro puff on top of his head. Califia reached up and touched the dry crinkly texture.

"You wash this shit, J?"

"It's clean."

"Twenty."

"What?"

"I'll do it for twenty?"

"We Fam though, cuz—"

"Nigga, I'm broke. I need gas money."

Junie sucked on his teeth.

"I'll give you ten."

"Stop playing, J."
"I'm not playing. All I got is ten right now."

"You got any rolling papers at the house?"

"Yeah."

Califia held out her hand.

"Run me my money."

Junie dug into his front pocket and pulled out a wrinkled bill. Califia palmed it. A loud whistle erupted from across the street and Junie raised a hand to one of his boys driving by.

"I'll be up at the house in a few," Junie said passing her to jaywalk across the street.

"Hurry up. I wanna smoke soon."

Rolling papers secured, there was no need to go into the liquor store. She hopped on her bike and cruised back up to her grandmother's.

###

It was a rare and good thing when Califia had quality weed. She had a storefront "doctor" write her a 'script for her anxiety and was able to secure the services of a local and still legal dispensary. Quality was a bit pricey, but she still had some high-grade buds hidden in her grandmother's house.

She sat on the top step of the porch with Junie between her thighs, sectioning his hair and greasing his scalp. She shared a blunt with him, swirling thick smoke on her tongue and sucking it down into her lungs.

In a few weeks, the semester would be over. Tests completed. Papers finished. Body on rest from dancing. She just needed to get through Thanksgiving. During a normal year, she could just hang with her friends and ignore the celebration. This year, however, it was her grandmother's turn to host a family meal on the rotation schedule. And since Califia was living there, full time now, she couldn't avoid it. She promised her Nana that she wouldn't be a killjoy and spoil the gathering by going off on her usual anti-Thanksgiving rants. She would try her best to subvert the colonial, Anti-Native holiday she believed it to be into a 'Thank God We Are Still Here' family reunion.

"Gimme some zig zags," Junie said, holding the blunt up to her lips so she could toke and work at the same time.

Califia started braiding, her nimble fingers weaving intricate cornrows the way Junie wanted. Someone ran up the steps unexpectedly and Junie's hand reached into the back of his waistband and pulled out a twenty-two-hand gun. It was just their cousin Kenny getting off from work.

"Man, the fuck?" Junie blurted, placing the gun next to his hip on the steps.

Kenny stared at them both.

"Y'all can't tell my big ass from some stranger?" Kenny screeched, reaching for the blunt.

"Muthafuckas is wilding out on old folks, we not slipping over here. Mrs. Granviel got robbed last night," Junie said.

"She alright?" Kenny asked.
"Yeah. She okay," Junie said.

"Dope fiends," Califia said, continuing to braid Junie's hair. Kenny handed the joint to Califia and the irony was not lost on her as she took a long drag. People self-medicated, and opioid use was on the rise. Jobs were scarce, rents were high, and gentrification was re-writing the landscape of working-class enclaves. She could hide behind the shaky legality of a dispensary with her piecemeal jobs and university hustle, but folks who needed stronger mental getaways to help them cope and didn't have the coins? Theft was always a desperate option.

They were lucky that the robberies hadn't resulted in a murder or serious injury. Break-ins were escalating and cops were no help since they were more focused on policing poor and working-class bodies by keeping them contained and away from tourist and upper-income areas as opposed to cracking down on junkies robbing poor people.

She could only imagine the mental health and stress worries her community was under. She was glad her cousins were there when she was not. She knew how to handle a gun, and if needed, she'd use it to injure a thief if they came for her grandmother. She'd do her best to use her hands and feet first, but if there was more than one and they were strapped? God protect them and not her.

It didn't take too long for Califia to finish doing Junie's hair. They sat on the porch awhile longer after she finished, shooting the shit, and watching the street in an informal neighborhood watch. "Is that you?" Junie asked.

"What?"

"Your phone."

Califia reached into her back pocket.

"Why you cheesin' so hard?" Junie inquired, staring hard at her face.

Califia answered her cell.

"N'Jobu."

Whatever fears or doubts she may have had earlier faded the moment she heard his voice.

"I've been thinking about you all day," he said.

She closed her eyes, the grin on her face growing wider by the second.

"Yeah?"

"Are you at your grandmother's?"

"Yeah."

"I want to see you."

"Come through."

"I'm not that far away. Are you hungry?"

She rubbed her stomach. All she had to eat all day was a cheap carne asada burrito and a bag of corn chips.
"Starving."

"I'll bring you something. Be there in soon."

He hung up and she held her phone to her chest. Both of her cousins watched from the steps.

"Xavier?" Junie asked.

"My new man," she quipped, stuffing her phone in her back pocket.

"Uh oh," Kenny said, eyeing her closely.

Califia sat down next to Junie.

"I, lock the gun away, please. I can't have N'Jobu thinking we some thugs over here."

"N'Jobu? Fuck kinda name is that?"

"Wakandan."

"Wack what?"

"Shut up."

Before she knew it, N'Jobu's BMW was idling on the street.

"Damn… that your man's whip?" Kenny said.

Califia ran down the steps and hopped into the passenger seat of N'Jobu's car.

"Just pull around the corner, I'll help you find a spot."

N'Jobu followed her directions and she found him decent parking.

She helped him carry one of the two big bags of food he brought.

"You like Nepalese?" he asked.

"Yep," she answered, "but why did you get so much?"

"Would your grandmother like to join us?"

"She'll be gone all night. But my greedy ass cousins are here."

"There is plenty to go around."

She found him thoughtful for thinking of her Nana. She stopped him before they rounded the corner that would lead them to the house.

"My cousin Kenny is cool and won't engage all that much until he knows you better. But my cousin Junie is a goddamn fool, and he's going to try and clown you just to test you. Please don't be offended. I know I'm talking really fast, but I just smoked out before you came here, and I was really buggin' when I didn't hear from you all day, and last night was—"

Softness. From his free hand holding her chin, and from his lips lining up with hers to stop her from babbling. She dropped the bag she was carrying and wrapped her arms around his neck.
He smelled wonderful, his skin carrying the scent of fresh peppermint soap, his neatly trimmed goatee tickling her chin, and his tongue tasting of licorice root.

When she felt some manner of relief from her worries, she was able to release herself from his lips.

"I'm sorry I didn't get in touch with you. I have some personal things going on back home that I will have to deal with when I leave next month. Time zones and access to my family can be tricky."

"I hope everything is okay."

"It will be when I get home. Sometimes I get hyper-focused and lose track of time. But now that I have you, I'll make sure to never have you bug out."

He clasped her free hand in his and she picked up the bag she dropped.

When they neared the house, Kenny and Junie were still there on the steps.

"That's Kenny, and that's Junie. This is N'Jobu," she squeaked out trying to get past them without Junie saying something stupid.

N'Jobu held out his hand towards Kenny. Kenny shook it and Junie simply nodded at N'Jobu.

"He brought food for all of us," Califia said.

"Cool," Junie said.

Califia pulled N'Jobu up the steps.

"That wasn't so bad," N'Jobu said, following behind her.

"It's still early," she quipped back.

###

Califia and her cousins cleaned out every food container N'Jobu brought. Junie, who was a known picky eater, ate more than his fair share of chicken and lamb momos. His favorite side dish was the well-seasoned potato and pea curry that he piled on top of plain white rice. They all shared a liter of lime soda that burned Califia's tongue when it came into contact with the hot spices from her food. N'Jobu seemed pleased that her family ate everything. She was just thankful that Junie didn't pick on her boyfriend.

Boyfriend.

Califia felt a warm glow surround her as she sat next to N'Jobu. Both Kenny and Junie appeared impressed with him. She caught the way Junie peeped N'Jobu's clothes, and how Kenny was transfixed by the way N'Jobu spoke to them. Kenny was really into soccer, and for a time she and Junie had to endure N'Jobu and Kenny sharing their favorite picks for the upcoming FIFA tournament. N'Jobu's team was Nigeria and Kenny rooted for Brazil, even though he felt Germany had a strong team and would take the finals.

When the soccer convo waned, Junie jumped in.

"How often do you get pulled over in your car?"

N'Jobu looked surprised by the question.
"You haven't been yoked up by cops yet?" Junie's voice was incredulous.

"I follow the rules of the road, so I haven't had any problems."

"With that car?" Junie's voice went up in pitch. Kenny gave Junie a glance, his expression a bit annoyed. He still wanted to talk soccer.

"I mean, you don't exactly have the complexion for the protection out here. Have you had a nigger moment yet?"

"Junie..." Califia said, throwing a stern chill-the-fuck-out look towards her cousin.

"You don't know what a nigger moment is homie? When police or some white folks try to put you in check or fuck with you just because you're black?"

"Where I come from, we haven't had to deal with our skin color in connection with following the law."

"It ain't got nothing to do with following the law around here, man," Kenny said.

"N'Jobu's family are diplomats, so he doesn't have to deal with that," Califia said.

"You have those diplomat plates on your car?" Junie asked.

"No."

Junie sized N'Jobu up while Califia glared at him, trying to use her eyes to force her cousin to shut up.

"Where is Wakanda anyway?"

"Anyone want sorbet?" Califia asked, standing up and gathering N'Jobu's plate and her own.

"I can help you with this," N'Jobu said gathering up her cousin's empty plates.

"Thanks," she said leading him out of the dining room and into the kitchen. He helped her rinse the plates and stack them in the dishwasher.

"He sucks, I'm sorry," she said.

"He's curious about me. I'm some foreign stranger all over his female relative."

She pulled out four small ceramic bowls and filled them with raspberry sorbet.

"If he gets on your nerves, just tap my knee and I will handle him."

"Deal. But I may tap your knee just for my own pleasure and not because of him."

She bumped her hip into his on purpose and he smiled at her, carrying two of the dessert bowls and following her back into the den of one lion.

###

Junie seemed to relax a bit once N'Jobu answered a few of his Wakanda questions. After finishing their sorbet, Kenny suggested a game of dominoes. Califia tried to let N'Jobu opt out by suggesting that it was late, but he wanted to hang with her longer.
He had gotten pretty good at the game from playing Bakari and his friends, but Califia and her cousins were fast at it, slamming down the fake ivory pieces on the dining table, barely giving him time to look at his covered hand to add up his potential points.

They all smoked weed which he declined when he was offered, simply passing the joint around the table as it was put in rotation. Kenny did, in fact, warm up to N’Jobu and eventually, he knew where Kenny worked (an assistant manager at an auto parts store) and that he was currently separated from his wife and children who moved to Atlanta where it was less expensive. There was more family on his wife’s side who were available to help with childcare down South.

Junie held odd jobs, occasionally attended classes at a junior college, but spent most of his time chasing the love of his life who kicked him out from her apartment the previous month.

After a few rounds, Kenny excused himself to go to bed. Junie left the house to run the streets with his friends. Califia guided N’Jobu onto a couch that doubled as her bed and they watched a comedy and snuggled, his arm slung around her shoulder as she leaned against his chest. Every now and then he would dip his head and kiss her on the side of her cheek or nuzzle her temple. She felt so right to him, just sitting beside him.

It was a new experience to see her so vulnerable and apologetic towards him interacting with her relatives. He was probably a lot different when he was with his own family too. She was just too cute when she tried to prep him for Junie, and he noticed how swift she was to relax when he kissed her and reassured her. Her behavior tonight made him want to protect her. Take care of her. She appeared famished when she ate her food, and he wondered how out of wack her eating schedule was since she had to perform and study for finals. She wasn't working as much, and her funds were probably depleted too.

He looked down at her, Califia's head resting on his chest, and her arms curled against his waist and lap. He nuzzled the top of her head again, then kissed her forehead. She glanced up at him and once again, their lips were touching. He gave her a gentle peck, but she pressed her lips to his much harder. He whispered against her lips.

"Califia, can I show you something?"

She nodded and he pulled back from her, reaching into his jacket that sat next to him on the couch. Pulling out his cell phone, he pulled up a file with several photos attached to it. He handed his phone to her. She looked at the photos and swiped the screen a few times.

"I went to get tested this morning. These are my previous test results. I always use protection."

His sexual health was never compromised. He wrapped up extra tight, not just to prevent STDs, but to prevent being caught with an unplanned bastard child. He could imagine the horror he would bestow upon his family if he impregnated a foreign woman.

He observed Califia's reaction to his results. She gazed at them, then looked up at him.

"My latest tests will be available in a week. But as you can see, I am healthy," he said.

"I'm on the pill."

"Did you use protection with Xavier?"

Her eyes looked away from his, and she pulled away from him, tucking her legs under the blanket folded next to her.
"Califia?"

"We used condoms for a long time even though I was on the pill and we both tested clean. The last five months we sometimes used condoms, or he pulled out. Sometimes he didn't."

He didn't know why he wanted to know. It was none of his business, but he had to ask.

"The last time you had sex with him, did he cum inside of you?’

She nodded. He felt his face get tight and heated. She still wouldn't look at him. It was silly to feel what he felt, but he was honestly pissed. He had never allowed himself to cum inside a woman raw. He couldn't take that chance with his status, not even in Wakanda. He already knew there were women back home anticipating his return, actively plotting to convince him to ride bareback just for the opportunity to bloom with his seed and reach the palace.

Seated next to him was a woman he ached to fill up without any barriers. But he couldn't. He would have to get over any desires to cum deep inside her and put away his resentment that some nobody had the chance to climax freely within her.

"How soon can you be tested?” he asked.

"I can go in on Wednesday. My last test five months ago was good."

Five months. But the last few months she had been having problems with Xavier. The one thing N’Jobu knew about men the world over was that they would try to be slick when given any opportunity. He decided not to ask if she thought Xavier had been faithful. He would just wait for her test results to come back.

Right now, he just wanted her pressed against him.

"Come sit on me, baby," he said, reaching out for her.

Califia took his hand and straddled his lap, her arms automatically clinging to his shoulders. He placed gentle kisses on her face, smooched on her lips, her neck and on her clavicle.

"I can't wait to be inside of you," he whispered in her ear, licking her earlobe, his hands rubbing up and down her back. She started rocking her hips on his lap, her worn out loose fitting jeans hanging low on her hips. He grabbed her waist, lifted her, and brought her back down on his crotch like she was riding a see-saw. He did this several times.

"See what you do to me?"

His dick jumped at her weight coming down on him. He had a condom in his wallet. It could be so simple. Unzip, sheath his cock, slip off her pants and underwear and then pull her down slow and easy until his balls were resting against her ass. He didn't even care that her cousin was asleep in the back of the house.

The couch was starting to squeak from his lifting and dropping her down on his full-blown erection. He stopped to adjust himself, making sure his dick was resting against his stomach. He pulled her back down onto his bulge. She started bouncing on him without his help.

"Your pussy was so tight on my fingers, Califia."

"Oh…N’Jobu," she whispered, slamming herself hard on his covered length.
"Look what you're doing to me, you nasty little bitch…"

Her eyes flew open, staring at him. A hint of anger at being called a bitch? She bounced harder. She liked it. He pushed it.

"Let me fuck you on this couch," he said.

She groaned letting her head slump forward so that her face was close to his, her cheek pressed against his cheek.

"Your grandmother isn't here, and Kenny is way in the back of the house. Ride this dick, Califia."

She started grinding on him.
"I don't care if he hears us, girl. Hop on this dick. I have protection."

"You want to fuck this bitch?" she asked.

"Yessss…"

"You want to cum in my pussy?"

"Whew, shit, yes! Let your man fuck you good, baby. Let me get inside that fat pussy."

Her hands went to the waistband of her jeans while N'Jobu reached for his wallet. He placed the wrapped condom between his teeth and held it there as he unfastened his pants.

They both heard Junie's feet bound up the steps outside, his keys loud as they jangled to open the front door.

Califia leaped away from N'Jobu and unfurled the blanket on the couch so that it covered them both, but mainly N'Jobu's straining bulge.

"Fuck," they both said and started laughing at the awful timing.

"You still here?" Junie said.

"Mind your business, Junie," Califia said, clearly irritated.

Junie went to his room, slamming the door and turning on a radio.

"Sorry," Califia said.

N'Jobu handed her the gold metallic wrapped condom.

"Hold on to this. It's my raincheck," he said.

She pocketed the condom.

"It's just as well," she said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Didn't you tell me that when you took me all the way, I would be in your bed?"

"I did."

"Then let's wait until then."
He leaned against her.

"Okay."

"I'll be that nasty little bitch for you."

"I know you will. There's so much I want to do to you," he said.

Her eyelids were drooping in that lust-filled way of hers. They could only satisfy themselves fully when they were at his place. He kissed her again and pressed his lips near her ear.

"I can't wait to eat your pussy," he said. The whimper that spilled from her lips made his skin burn with need, "I will spank you and lick you, then fuck you all night. Nice and slow…all night, Califia."

He cupped her breast in his hand and she released a mewling sound as her fingers clawed their way down to the stiff cock that had her name on it.

"Hmmm. You want to play with that Daddy dick?"

Her eyes gazed at him, her pupils dark and glossy. She liked him being verbal and responded well to his tone. This pleased him.

His cell buzzed. It was propped against her hip. She picked it up to move it out of the way and they both saw the avatar at the same time. The lust that had been in her eyes dissipated. An arctic chill permeated the room.

"You said you deleted all your other bitch's numbers."

"I thought I got them all."

She handed his phone to him and left the couch.

Fuck.

###
Drama

Chapter Summary

N'Jobi grows closer to Califia on Thanksgiving, a.k.a. Indigenous People's Day. But then he finds out about Califia's job.

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone,

Sorry it's taken so long to update. Was gone all last week & weekend to World Con.

Apologies also because I was expecting smut/consumation this chapter, but these two wanted a breather chapter before, so I obliged. But now it's really time (I swear!) in the next chapter, so please indulge these two, while I get to the nitty-gritty for the next round.

As always, thank you for reading.

Off to write the sexy times now....

"The world is so dramatic
I can't believe
That we're still livin'
Oh in this crazy crazy world
That I'm still livin'

With all the problems of the day
How can we go on
So tired of hearing people say how can we go on

Fantasy people
Make believe people
How can you go on
But you're still livin'"

Erykah Badu—"Drama"

N'Jobu scurried along the sidewalk trying to keep up with Califia. When she reached his car, she stood in silence and waited for him to leave.

"Califia, I told you the truth. I deleted the numbers. I just missed hers."

She ignored him. Waited for him to get in his car and go.

"You don't even want to discuss it?"
"I saw you with her twice. I saw how you were around her at the bookstore. She's not just one of your regular jump offs. I can tell. You might think it was an accident that you forgot to delete her, but I don't. I believe in subconscious behavior."

"What does that even mean? I am here with you. I want to be with you. You saw me delete her number in front of you."

He turned her body to face him. She felt stiff and standoffish.

"I don't understand why you are so upset over an accident."

He handed his phone to her.

"Go ahead, go through my phone. Ask me about anyone there. I don't even keep my phone locked."

N'Jobi wondered if Bridgette's avatar photo had been different, would it even matter to Califia so much. As it stood, the moment Bridgette's photo popped on his phone, they both saw her suggestive pose, an index finger held between her teeth, breasts propped up with her other hand, inside a tight-fitting deep cleavage pink t-shirt.

She ignored his phone.

"Thanks for the food, N'Jobu."

Her voice sounded cool. Indifferent. Minutes before he could've been pounding her on her grandmother's couch, making her forget her own name, and now she was acting like she didn't want to know him.

"Califia, come on…"

"N'Jobu, it's cool. It was just a slip-up. Let's just say goodnight."

"I can't just say goodnight. I have to make sure we're good. Are we good?"

She nodded. He put his arms around her and she held him with a cautious energy that he didn't like.

"I don't want to leave with you acting like this."

"She caught me off guard, okay?"

"You believe me, right?"

She still wouldn't look at his face. He wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her close, moving his face close to hers.

"I'm sorry. I feel like I'm apologizing to you a lot. I don't want you to feel insecure about us. And I know that's what you're probably thinking right now. That you can't trust me. I'm not like these other men who run around lying just to get with someone and still have their side chick. If I wanted Bridgette, I would be with her or any of the others right now. I would have my phone locked. I could be in her bed in a few minutes if I really wanted that. But I don't. I want you…"

He kissed her forehead and tried to kiss her lips, but she turned her head away.

"Don't be like this, Califia."

"You just have so many of them."
"But I'm done with that now."

"I want to believe you."

"I would never lie to you. I have nothing to gain by it except losing you. I already told you before, my time now is just finishing school and being with you."

He kissed her lips again, and she didn't pull away.

"You are my woman, okay? The only one."

He slipped his tongue in her mouth and she accepted it, his slow deep kisses relaxing her arms so that she placed them around his waist. He could feel her body going loose, her lips bending to his will. She was his, and he wasn't going to let her fears of other women cripple their fragile beginning as a couple. He pulled away from her.

"I'll do whatever it takes to make you feel comfortable," he said.

She nodded her head and pushed back away from him.

"Call me tomorrow," she said.

"Get in, I'll take you back up to the house."

"I can walk."

"For my peace of mind, please?"

He opened the passenger door and she got in. They were quiet for the short drive around the corner. She gave him a slight peck on his cheek as she stepped out of his car. She didn't look back or wave to him.

###

Califia went to the clinic where she got her regular contraceptives. She was due for a re-supply and a check-up. Sitting in the waiting room and waiting for her name to be called, she thought about Bridgette popping up on N'Jobu's phone. He was so quick to apologize and tried his best to reassure her. She didn't know him long enough to know his tells if he was a liar, but she felt that his vibe was honest. She didn't think of him as promiscuous in the negative sense. He was selective with his women, at least the ones he met. And he was very adamant that they were now a couple, and this began to worry her because now that she had him, she wondered if she would measure up sexually to his previous conquests.

She liked sex, considered herself a sensual person, but their physical connection was so extreme in feeling, and they hadn't even had intercourse yet, so she wondered if their build-up would turn into a bust. She'd had sexual incompatibility before, a boyfriend early in her college life who came too fast, and got frustrated because it took her forever to orgasm. Prior to intercourse they had been hot and heavy, and after a couple of hook-ups, it was clear their sex life was more work than it was worth, and she broke it off rather than fake orgasms for a guy who couldn't share pleasure and patience. She and Xavier had a better go at it because he had stamina, but there were still times when she felt rushed, or he was growing tired of the long bouts of foreplay that she needed to become truly ready.

The worst part was Xavier's fixation with just the parts of her body and not her whole being during sex. Sometimes he wouldn't even look at her, so busy trying to screw her like he was making some porn video in his own mind. The thing she disliked most was how he was so quiet when he came.
Sometimes he would be vocal, talk dirty to her (if she pestered him during the act about it), but most times he was only grunting a few times and then seizing up when he ejaculated. His love language in bed was to act like he was in a library and had to keep it down, por favor.

N’Jobu was not shy about letting her know what he was feeling and how he was feeling it. That excited her the most. He talked, demanded responses, and whatever his body was feeling he let her know about it. And the spanking….holy moly. He was the perfect storm for what she needed, but now she was having doubts about consummating it. If they were a mismatch, would he go back to his other women? Would he break up with her? Give her the old, let's-just-be-friends routine? Or worse, just ghost her?

After her clinic visit with her new re-supply of birth control pills, Califia went home to her grandmother's house and sat on the couch watching tv and snacking on leftover pizza her cousin bought. She got a text from her job requesting her to work on Thanksgiving and she accepted the hours. She needed them. Her trip to Brazil would be arriving before she knew it, and she wanted to buy souvenirs and new clothes for the trip.

She saw a text from N’Jobu light up her phone screen. He told her he was finishing the book "Beloved" and asked what he should bring for Thanksgiving dinner. She suggested a dessert. He texted that he would make a special pie. She sent him a thumbs up emoji.

Back at her grandmother's her thoughts relaxed enough so that she had convinced herself not to trip out about sex with N’Jobu. New sex was always awkward and not always great for most people. It took time to know each other physically just as it took time to know someone mentally. The plus side was that he had made her cum already, and it didn't take all night, and she didn't think about it when she was with him. He just pulled it out of her because she was so turned on by him. All she needed to do was slow down all the physical contact they had and focus on the mental. They were a couple. The mind was the sexiest thing on a man to her. N’Jobu had a sexy mind, she could tell by their book conversations.

Even though she had fine dudes sliding into her direct messages on social media (even some who were Xavier's friends), she only had eyes for N’Jobu. He said he wanted her and only her. She would embrace that.

###

The crack of dawn's ass. That's what Bakari said. N’Jobu drove them in the dark to Pier thirty-three where he parked his car and waited for the ferry boat to take them to Alcatraz. Large groups of people began boarding the boat that would spirit them away to the island in ten minutes, and N’Jobu found himself looking around for Califia. He was relieved when he saw her walking with Rolita and Soliel down the boarding ramp.

He gave her a tight hug and he was happy when she kissed him on the lips. Not quite a peck, but not a deep lunging of tongues. The perfect amount of pressure to let him know they were okay. For now. He held onto her hand as they all found seats on the boat. It was dark, chilly, and the crowd appeared somber…no not somber. Expectant? Cautious? Reverential maybe?

It was Thanksgiving. And also, Indigenous People's Day.

Their boat headed out for Alcatraz Island and N’Jobu wrapped his arms around Califia's shoulder and pulled her in close. She kept her eyes closed, cat-napping and occasionally adjusting the angle of her head on his chest. She wore two French braids in her hair and an oversized black sweatshirt with an old photo of fierce Lakota Natives on it with the caption "Boarding School Drop Outs".
Seated next to him was Rolita who wore her own red politicized t-shirt that said, "Natives Discovered Columbus". Rolita had her eyes open, watching the dark water they glided across. A young Native woman sat across from them all gently rolling a long leather covered shaker in her hand and softly singing in her own language. She was accompanied by a young man no older than eighteen who beat a small hand drum with a drumstick. The sound was relaxing and very soothing as N'Jobu held Califia.

Once they reached Alcatraz, they all followed the throng of people as they made their way to an open space where a large bonfire was already burning and a group of Native women with flowing skirts were walking around it, burning sage. The crowd was quiet as they stood gathered around it in a wide circle that gave the Native women a respectful distance.

Glancing around, N'Jobu saw various people he assumed were from various Native groups based on their traditional clothing and jewelry. Some people wore face paints, others wore their culture in their hair, or on their ears and wrists. Grandmothers, grandfathers, children, and babies were held in high esteem. Rolita went to stand with some people from her tribe for a moment. There were whites, Blacks, some Asians among a smattering of Latinos with and without Indigenous roots. People sat on the ground or stood a good distance away to watch the ceremony.

Looking up, N'Jobu could still see the moon in the sky. He placed Califia in front of himself and wrapped his arms around her as the crowd grew larger.

"Look at the moon," he said.

Her eyes followed the guide of his finger towards the blue-black sky and the silvery-white of a waxing moon.

"Inyanga," he said in his language.

"Luna, Lua. Spanish and Portuguese. Wonewsleg, in Yurok."

"How many languages can you speak?"

"I'm fluent in Spanish and can do very well in Portuguese too. I'm learning a little Yurok from Rolita. She is fluent in Spanish too. What about you?"

"Wakandan, Xhosa, English, Korean, and passable French."

"Impressive," she said.

"You too."

"I would like to learn more. My Dad said it was important to be able to speak to people outside of America. My mother was a fluent Spanish speaker, and living out here makes it easy to learn. Most people don't even try."

"I will teach you my language then."

"Cool. When I have kids one day, I will make sure they are polyglots."

"My parents made sure I mastered at least three before I was eighteen," he said.

"Being a diplomat, language mastery is a given," she said.

She had opened a door to his curiosity.
"How many children would you like to have one day?" he asked.

She leaned her head back into his chest a bit.

"I'm not trying to have children anytime soon, not until I'm in my late thirties at least. When I have them, I think two would be my limit. A girl and a boy would be nice. A good balance. What about you?"

"However many my wife wants to carry. I am open."

He felt his stomach clench at the word wife. He should've said something simple like two or three, but already he was programmed to think of a spouse, and he had probably hurt her feelings by reminding her that they would not have that type of future together.

"You have any preferences?" she asked, her voice a bit smaller.

"No, not really, although I could imagine a small tribe of girls with your personality."

She laughed, and he mentally cursed himself for mentioning children that would be like her, when he knew he shouldn't project her in anything tied to him. It was time to change the subject.

"How long have you been coming to this with Rolita?"

"Since I was little. My parents were really big on giving Native people their due, and my Dad was… is… tight with Rolita's father. Rolita's mom is half Mexican, so we were always around different people from Central America and South America, that's how I know Soliel. When I first started doing capoeira, her parents used to come here as guest teachers. I would see Soliel maybe once every two years, and then she ended up going to the same University as me… on purpose…and we built this community of women who are all about making progressive change. We can't depend on men anymore."

"That sounded a little…rough?"

"It's true. Men ruin every good movement that tries to uplift people. It's historical fact," she said turning to look at him. She had a smile on her face, but she was dead serious.

"Me and my girls are working to empower women on a global scale. Men can participate, but they will not run things anymore if I can help it."

"You sound like a—"

"Misandrist?"

"Yes."

"History is on my side, mister man."

Her face had a playful smirk, but she wasn't playing with her words.

"Luckily, in my country, we believe in equality for our women—"

"Our women?"

"You know what I mean, Califia."

"Just checking."
"Look," he said.

She turned her head and they could see the faint light of the sun announcing its presence. A group of Aztec dancers with long elaborate feathers in their headdresses began circling around the fire. An elder blew a large conch shell trumpet heralding the arrival of the sun.

N'Jobu and Califia, along with all the other spectators, watched in awe as the sun rose above the city. The gradual lightening of the sky, the tinkling sounds of the beads and shells on the Aztec dancer's feet and the steady thump of a drum ushered in the sunrise. N'Jobu had his cheek next to Califia's temple and he kissed it when the warm rays of the sun struck their faces.

"Thank you for letting me be here with you," he said.

"Rolita was really happy you came. I am too."

He rocked her in his arms as they listened to prayers, political speeches, and songs sung by different Native groups that were present. He learned the history of Alcatraz's first sunrise service back in 1969 when some young Native people illegally occupied the island. He listened with rapt attention to the pain the people present still felt. It was a tangible hurt that undercut the celebration in N'Jobu's mind, made him feel the bloody footprints of Manifest Destiny.

When it was time to leave, Rolita and Soliel rejoined them along with Bakari, and for the first time, N'Jobu realized his entire time there was wrapped up with Califia and what was happening in front of him. Being with her dropped blinders around him. All he could see was her and whatever she directed his attention to, and he found this to be quite pleasant, a state of being he wanted more of.

"What time should we roll over to Nana J's?" Bakari asked.

"Noon. They start early so folks can make their rounds and get ready for the games later," Califia said. N'Jobu still had her wrapped up in his arms while standing behind her.

"Cool, cuz N'Jobu still has to bake his pies, and I need to make my salad," Bakari said.

"We're going to have breakfast then head to the house," Califia said.

They all walked together with the crowd heading to the boats that would take them back to the pier.

The ride back to the mainland was more jovial, and N'Jobu was happy that the boat was crowded enough so that Califia had to sit on his lap. She kissed him a couple of times and his heart was at ease.

They all went their separate ways, but once he was in the car with Bakari, he found his friend watching him like a hawk.

"What?" N'Jobu asked.

"Nothing, man. I'm just looking at you."

"For a reason."

"Chill, it's just…I mean…you look really happy, dude."

N'Jobu nodded.

"I am."
N'Jobu could hear Aretha Franklin's "Rock Steady" thumping inside as he and Bakari walked up the stairs of Califia's house.

A few children of elementary age were scattered about the steps with toys and cell phones playing games. N'Jobu carefully made his way up carrying the two pies he baked. Bakari carried a large plastic bowl filled with an avocado salad.

Kenny opened the front door.

"Hey man, w'sup!" Kenny called, taking one of the pies from N'Jobu's hand.

"Kenny, good to see you again," N'Jobu said.

"Come inside and meet my grandmother," Kenny said.

Inside, the house was loud, filled with family members laughing, the savory aroma of food floating out from the kitchen, and Junie fighting to open up a folding table. Califia was trying to help him.

"I said I got it,' Junie said, blocking Califia's hands. Junie saw N'Jobu.

"Oh, snap, Wakanda's in the house!" Junie said, finally getting the folding table open.

Califia gave N'Jobu a hug and took the pie he held from his hands.

"Nana, Califia's boyfriend is here," Kenny said walking into the kitchen.

N'Jobu followed after Kenny with Califia on his heels.

Nana Jean was standing over the kitchen stove pouring hot brown gravy over a giant Turkey that took up half the stove top. A middle-aged woman with Califia's coloring stood next to Nana Jean drinking a wine cooler. The woman's eyes dragged up and down N'Jobu's visage.

"Wait, what happened to that other one?" the woman asked, looking at Califia.

"Nana, this is N'Jobu," Califia said, her voice a bit circumspect.

Nana Jean stopped pouring gravy over the meat and wiped her hands on a kitchen towel hanging from the oven handle. N'Jobu could see where Califia got her eyes from. Nana Jean had a striking sloe-eyed gaze that she scanned N'Jobu with. Thick untamed eyebrows rested on a round face that held a graceful vigor despite the advanced age. N'Jobu thought to himself, if Califia retained this much youthful beauty when she got older, heaven help her future husband if he couldn't keep up. Nana Jean was a looker for the ages. A world-class face.

"Mrs. Stevens, thank you for allowing me into your home. I brought some pies that I made myself. An old recipe from my family back home."

Califia showed Nana Jean the pie she held.

"That looks wonderful, young man. Is that sweet potato?"

"Yes, but with potatoes from my homeland. It's a little sweeter than the ones from here."

"He made two," Kenny said, putting the other pie on a table filled with covered dishes and two cakes.
"Thank you, N'Jobu," Nana Jean said, "we'll be eating soon, I hope you brought a strong appetite,"
"I did, yes ma'am—"

"How old are you?" the other woman standing next to Nana Jean asked.

"Aunt Tracey," Califia hissed, rolling her eyes.

"Twenty-five," N'Jobu said, his eyes not flinching from Tracey's astute gaze.

"Hmmm, you seem older. I mean you look young, but you sound older," Tracey said putting the wine cooler to her lips and drinking.

"Come meet everyone else," Califia said, grabbing N'Jobu's hand.

Bakari walked in with his salad.

"Ooh! Bakari, be my partner for bid whist later!" Tracey yelled when she saw him. Bakari gave Nana Jean a kiss on the cheek and placed his salad in the fridge.

"Naw, you be wanting to fight when you lose," Bakari said leaving the kitchen.

"Make yourself welcome," Nana Jean said starting to fuss with a pot of greens simmering on the stove.

As they left the kitchen, N'Jobu heard Tracey tell Nana Jean, "Lil mama brought a man home this time. Guess she's done with them raggedy boys she's used to." It made N'Jobu smile to himself.

Califia made swift work of presenting him to different relatives scattered throughout the house. He was happy to see Rolita and Soliel chilling in the small family room, already caught up in a game of spades with two of Califia's female cousins who were in their thirties.

The impression he was getting from her family's reaction to him was that Califia had dated some less than stellar guys. A few mentioned Xavier, but when Califia wrenched her gaze away from them at the mention of her ex, the name disappeared for the rest of the day.

Two dinner tables were set up for the adults and a smaller children's table was set up in the family room. All the grown folks sat in the diningroom and livingroom. Because he was a special guest, N'Jobu and Califia sat in the diningroom next to Nana Jean.

Kenny said the prayer for the meal, and N'Jobu fell into the Stevens family groove, enjoying the feel of being around a family who loved one another. He sensed some small friction with some family members toward Califia, but not enough to spoil the day.

The food was delicious and Nana Jean kept filling up N'Jobu's plate. She asked him questions about his family, where he was from, and what he was hoping to accomplish with a master's. Between bites of food, he snuck peeks at Califia. She appeared luminous in a yellow off the shoulder sweater. Her two French braids that dipped to her shoulder blades made her look like a sweet innocent seventeen-year-old instead of a twenty-three-year-old almost college graduate.

Watching her interact with her grandmother made him miss sitting and talking with his own mother. Califia laughed a lot around Nana Jean, and there were moments when N'Jobu caught Nana Jean giving Califia loving gazes when her granddaughter was speaking to someone else.

Every now and then N'Jobu and Califia would glance up from their plates and lock eyes by accident,
and N'Jobu would feel a stirring in his chest, a desire to reach across the table and clasp her hand in his, and then it was happening again, those blinders would fall over him and all he could focus on was her. All he could see was the way her lips curled when she was being snarky to Junie, how her feline eyes would look sardonic when her Aunt Tracey tried to throw shade at her, or how her cheekbones looked like round plums inside her equally round face.

His eyes raked across her bare shoulders and he marveled at the elegance of her neck, remembering the last time he planted salacious kisses there when he had a wrapped condom gripped between his teeth as Califia was sliding her jeans down on her grandmother's couch…

N'Jobu reached for a glass of water near his plate.

"You okay?"

Califia watched him from across the table.

"I am great. Full to the brim," he said, trying to ignore her neckline.

"We'll have some of that pie a little later," Nana Jean said.

People began to push away from the table, so N'Jobu helped Califia clear up their plates and Nana Jean's leftovers. Junie already had a football game on with Kenny right next to him. Rolita and Soliel had to go plates made for them as they were on their way out to visit other houses and relatives.

N'Jobu took the shifting of activities as an opportunity to look around the family room. There was an unused fireplace with a mantle above that held pictures, and a certain set caught N'Jobu's eye. It was a series of four photos in one long frame. He moved closer to look at it. The first was just a photo taken from inside a dark room of some kind, with the lens focused on the light coming from outside a doorway that faced an ocean. The second photo was of a small boy, around nine or ten with glasses and a serious face standing in front of the doorway looking straight at the camera. The third picture was…

"That's me and Bakari," Califia said.

She stood next to N'Jobu, and picked up the long frame and held it close for N'Jobu to inspect.

In the third picture, Califia looked to be about seven years old, pigtails all over her head with baubles and barrettes. She was snaggle-toothed and smiling as her hands pressed against the doorway as she stuck one leg inside bent at the knee in short pants as if the photographer caught her in mid-stride running into the dark room.

"Goree Island. Senegal," she said.

"Ah, the Doorway of No Return," N'Jobu said.

"We were part of a tour group with our parents. My mother took the pictures. The tour guide had just given this chilling and heartbreaking story about the enslaved and what they went through being there and having to walk out of that door for the last time. Can you imagine? Your last time seeing your homeland? Your people? Family? Chained up and stuffed into a boat that might not even make it across the Atlantic."

Califia took a small breath to calm the tremble in her voice.

"Bakari put on this serious face, but I gave this big giant smile. When my parents asked me why I was smiling when we had just heard the history, I mean some horrible fucked up history… I just… I"
just wanted my ancestors to know that we made it, y'know? I wanted to show them that we were strong and brave and that they could rest easy. They didn't need to be sad anymore. The simple thinking of children, huh?"

Her words sunk into his soul. The last photo was of Bakari and Califia standing outside the doorway staring at the water.

"I know Black Americans always talk about what happened to us here. But sometimes I wonder if our people over there ever think about what happened to us. I mean, I imagine some mother or father, someone's husband or wife, or grandparent having these moments like maybe a few years after the fact...just imagining what happened to us. Do you think there are people over there who think about us today like that?"

"The lost ones," N'Jobu said, feeling his throat trying to close up. He pushed back on it, clearing his vocals. She looked at him, her eyes searching his face.

"Yes. Lost forever. Do you think they do, N'Jobu? Think about us?"

He put the photo back down on the mantle. He held her hand in his as he gazed at the photos again, especially her cherubic face, her missing bottom teeth, and her scrappy triumphant smile.

"My people never experienced enslavement. Nor colonization. Where we are located geographically blessed us from being reached. But I imagine if my people experienced that, they would think of you all for the end of their days."

Califia's eyes brimmed with tears, and N'Jobu pulled her in for a hug. Her breath was heavy and warm against his neck.

He thought about the Native sunrise service on Alcatraz Island and Rolita standing with her people. His feeling the wet tears from Califia staining his skin. He thought about the Toni Morrison book he just finished that dealt with the end of slavery in this troubled country. These indigenous people, these African Americans, these lost ones, they were both a haunted people. Their pain rooted in a past so foreign to him, that N'Jobu could only experience it through her. This past shrouded everything these people did. It strangled their progeny. It was just too much. His people lived deep in the bosom of a wildly tech-heavy and prosperous hidden nation. Their eyes blazed with the future. Califia and her people? Their past strangled them, rendering them stuck and unable to move forward. How many more people thought the way Califia did? How many Black people in this country carried that burden so heavy like this? He could not live there like that. It would kill his spirit.

"Baby," he said, lifting her head up. Her eyes were slightly red and still a bit watery, "I'm so thankful for you, and that your ancestors made it. You are going to do so much to change the world. Hold onto that."

She nodded and he kissed her forehead. He needed this girl to win. He needed to make her life easier. Take her burdens away from her.

"Aye, they're eating your pie, man," Kenny said, passing by the family room.

N'Jobu led Califia into the diningroom. Nana Jean was digging into a huge bite of pie.

"N'Jobu," she said, "this is so wonderful. It just melts in your mouth."

Califia looked around the table where all the desserts had been placed out for everyone to choose from. Both of N'Jobu's tin plates were empty.
"All the pie is gone?!" Califia lifted up a pie tin and crumbs fell around her fingers. Junie was stuffing the last vestiges of pie down his throat with his fingers. "It was good as hell too," he said. 

N'Jobu felt that Califia was about to pitch a fit. "I have another in the car," he said taking his keys out of his pocket. "I was saving it for you."

"Smart man, especially with these bottom-less stomachs," Califia said, hugging him. He walked her outside to his car that was parked blocks away. "You know what. Just leave it in the car, for now, I'll take it to work with me and share it with my co-workers."

"You have to work tonight?"

"Yeah. Later this evening. I'm catching some extra hours. Tips are really good on holidays."

His eyes shifted to the ground in disappointment. "I wanted to hang with you tonight."

"We can do that all day tomorrow. I promise. I need the money. I'll be in Brazil this summer, so I have to get my money straight."

He nodded in understanding. She hugged him tightly. "I'm so happy you're here. You made it easier for me to be around my family."

"They're very nice people."

"Most of them. Some of them get on my nerves, which I won't get into. You already saw that my Aunt Tracey is one of my least favorite people. I saw her checking for you."

N'Jobu's face grimaced, "She was not."

"Keep thinking that. Don't let her get you alone. She's in the market for a new husband."

They walked back to the house just in time to get swept into a game of spades against Bakari and Nana Jean.

###

By the time ten o'clock rolled around, N'Jobu had won three games of spades, two hands of dominoes, and the chance to have dinner with Aunt Tracey at her place. Califia had showered and changed clothes to go to work, but she invited N'Jobu to stay longer if he wanted. She had tossed her backpack on her shoulders, kissed Nana Jean, and bid farewell to the rest of her family as he watched her hop on her bike.

He wanted her to spend the night with him. He had so much of the day that he wanted to process with her, but she promised that they would have the entire next day together.

"My family really likes you," she said, sitting on her bike and adjusting her helmet.
"You be careful on the road. You sure you don't want me to drive you?"

"Baby, I'm good. Go hang with Kenny. I know he's dying to talk soccer with you."

She kissed him and took off.

He joined the rest of the family, mainly to be polite, but he did feel that her family had embraced him totally. Nana Jean had said goodnight to him before Califia left, and most of the family had bid farewell in small groups. All that was left was Kenny, Junie, Bakari, and two other male uncles who were still eating and watching tv.

He got into another spades game with Bakari and the cousins when he remembered Califia wanted to take her pie to work. He was ready to go home so he decided to drop it off to her. Bakari was on his way out too, a plate in his hand as usual.

"Bakari, what's the name of the restaurant Califia works at again? The Blue something," he asked, pulling out his phone to get directions.

"The Blue Rose. But um…listen, that ain't no restaurant. It's a strip club," Bakari said.

N'Jobu pried his eyes away from his phone and his now dark penetrating gaze was fixed on Bakari.

"Where is it located?" he asked.

###
Chapter Summary

N'Jobu shows up at the strip club where Califia works. Shenanigans ensue.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay folks.

It took a minute to finish this chapter because I didn't want to split it in two because I promised consummation at last. Hope it was worth the wait. Of course, there will be more, but they finally got round one out of the way.

And of course, complications are around the corner because you know new love can't ever stay happy for long.

Up next, holiday parties, fights, angry sex, and N'Jobu's engagement to another woman back home as we fly to Wakanda. Thanks for hanging with me!

"Ain't see this side of me
Fluent in the sheets
Can you read in between me?
I ain't a stranger to the foreplay
So we can skip the wordplay

Leave the lights on
Leave the, leave the lights on
Leave 'em lights on…"

H.E.R. – "Lights On"

The Blue Rose was a nondescript tan industrial building set inside a cul de sac. The only signage outside were the numbers of the address lit in neon blue colors. N'Jobu sat in his car to gather himself. What did he really plan to do? Drag her outside and berate her for working in a place like that? Stand in front of a stripper pole and yell at her for shaming herself in public? The blood in his veins surged through his hands as he gripped his steering wheel. How did he not know she worked in a place like this? He had assumed it was an all-night diner.

He saw several boisterous men walking in, and when he saw the dark mahogany double doors open, he could hear the loud thump of bass music, and various catcalls and whistles. When the doors closed again, he heard nothing. He closed his eyes. She was a grown woman. This was just a job. She was just earning money to support herself—

The thought of her naked and writhing on a stage propelled him out of his car, his hands balled into agitated fists. He entered the building and found a young fair-skinned Black woman behind an
elaborate register. She was wearing a baseball top that was entirely too small for her large bosomed frame and the shortest shorts that displayed all her assets. She was re-supplying paper to her credit card machine. When she glanced back up, she took a long hard look at his clothes and his face before releasing a seductive grin.

"Hello there," she said.

N’Jobu handed her a black credit card and she swiped it. A separate set of doors led to the main room, and when he walked through, the smell of desperate horny men assailed his nostrils. Flashing laser lights, deafening music, and monetary notes were thrown on three separate stages. The two stages on the side were small and flanked by a larger one with a shining silver pole that ran through the ceiling. N’Jobu posted himself up at one of the three bars in the establishment, his eyes watching the stage as three women pranced out into position and began a new set.

Big tits, big asses, and thick thighs were the preference of this space, and the multi-ethnic male audience was appreciative and generous with their cash. The women were good-looking, athletic and limber. Also, completely nude. Glancing around N’Jobu already noticed a tent city with some of the men having intimate lap dances. He already felt a tension in his neck. Bast forbid he should see his woman grinding on some undeserving cock. He needed a drink.

Ordering a scotch on the rocks, N’Jobu leaned in towards the shapely rainbow-haired bartender to pay for his drink. She took one look at N’Jobu, then his credit card, and saw dollar signs.

"You look like a man who needs his own V.I.P. space," Rainbow girl said.

"Is that right?"

She nodded her head towards a space behind him. He looked in the direction she wanted him to see.

"Up there are private sections. I can set you up with bottle service. Exclusive. Private server…very private."

He caught her drift. He didn't even bother to ask her how much, just waved at his card.

"Set me up, I'll run a tab," he said.

Her eyes traced the outline of his expensive designer shirt. She saw his watch and the tasteful white gold chain around his neck. Rainbow grabbed another woman walking behind her with a tray of empty shot glasses.

"Misty, take this customer to booth twenty and set him up."

Misty, a Black and Vietnamese beauty, scanned N’Jobu with her dark eyes and her face lit up. Rainbow handed N’Jobu his scotch and Misty took him by his hand and led him to the steps that propped him up above the rest of the patrons. A man dressed in a decent suit and worked security for the V.I.P. section bent down to hear Misty talk. The suit unlinked a blue velvet rope allowing N’Jobu to walk up to his private perch.

The set up was decent; some Moroccan style couches and two black velvet chairs that sat close to a glass railing to see the action below. N’Jobu stood looking down at the main stage, his eyes darting to and fro for any sign of Califia among the women giving lap dances in the audience. The Blue Rose was huge and a bit chaotic.

"I'll be your personal server Mr., …?"
He didn't give her his name, just walked over to her and looked down at her face.

"Just bring me a bottle of champagne. Top shelf."

"Would you like any food, we have an excellent—"

N'Jobu shook his head. His mind was speeding ahead to what he would say when he saw Califia, or even what he would do. He needed privacy.

"Just bring me the champagne, for now, Misty," he said, enunciating her name so that his accent had the desired effect. She was swooning.

"Be right back," she said, adding extra swerves to her walk going down the steps.

He went back to standing near the railing. The dancer on the stage was being switched out again, the voice of an MC introduced the next performer. N'Jobu held his breath until he saw a slender Latina with ginormous knockers shimmy her way onstage to a fast trap beat.

"Shit," N'Jobu whispered to himself.

Scanning the room, he saw female servers catering to male customers and a few scattered handfuls of women patrons. The main dancer on stage held the pole with her hands and shook her naked ass so hard he thought it would snap off and fall to the ground. Laser lights and theatrical smoke, reeking of the dry ice that created it, wafted throughout the space, and a certain server caught his eye from afar. It was the two braids in her hair. He watched the server hand out drinks, take a few orders and then move past the main stage towards a bar in the back that was out of his field of vision.

Califia.

He felt his body relax. She only presented food and drinks. She wasn't on the pole. A part of him, the lascivious part of himself was a bit disappointed. Did he really think he was going to stand there in an elevated private section and watch her gyrate while sliding up and down a pole with her legs open with an audience? Did he really want to see that?

Sitting in his car earlier he envisioned all kinds of scenarios, men running up to the stage and throwing money on her, dudebros making filthy monetary notes full of damp sweat rain down on her breasts and ass. Drunk guys trying to press their faces into her chest to be motorboated, their dirty hands rubbing their sad crotches and then rubbing some part of her.

Misty returned with a fancy bottle inside a bucket of ice, and a single champagne flute held out to him. She placed the bucket on a table and pulled open the cork that had been popped before she came up the stairs. She poured his glass to the top. He drank until the flute was half empty.

"Will you need anything else?" Misty licked her lips and ran her fingertips across her nipples. Her hustle was not subtle. She may just be a server, but she was willing to give N'Jobu whatever he desired. A lap dance or even more. Had this been weeks in the past, N'Jobu may just as well sat on one of the couches, spread his legs and let this beauty climb on him, but he had something more valuable downstairs. And he wanted her in his presence. Immediately.

He reached into his pants pocket and pulled out his wallet and lifted out a fifty-dollar bill.

"There's a server downstairs with two braids and freckles near the stage. Send her up here to me, please."

Misty's face didn't fail to hide her disappointment.
"The girls downstairs have their sections that they are assigned…"

"I want her. Now."

Misty took the fifty and shuffled downstairs.

N'Jobu went to lord over the crowd and watch for his woman. She was making her rounds with a large tray of drinks that she balanced in one hand while fending off overzealous hands with the other.

The high heels she wore made her legs look longer and even sexier, and her uniform, the same as all the women servers and bartenders in the spot, was a tighter baseball top and short shorts that allowed lesser men to see nearly all of her curvy behind. He watched her bend over near the stage to listen to a man, and even from that distance, he could tell the other men watching her were salivating at the view she displayed. How many of them in that moment were fantasizing about getting up behind her, holding her waist and thrusting forward into that round piece of heaven?

He saw Misty approach her. He waited.

###

Califia was making bank tonight. Her push up bra was stuffed with fives, tens and a few twenties. She was going to have to run to the staff room soon to place her collected tips into her backpack located inside her personal locker so she could make room for more. She guestimated that she already had around two-hundred dollars, and her shift was still early. She would be working until six in the morning.

Making her way towards a few tables close to the stage, Califia saw Misty, a club favorite, come bounding up to her.

"Li Li, there's a guy up in twenty who wants you to be the server."

Califia glanced at Misty's pouting lips.

"I'm cleaning up here. Get someone else," Califia said, writing down two separate orders for two different tables.

She purposely had her hip thrust out, trying to finesse hard-up men with eye candy. The men she was taking orders from were definitely into big legs, so she wanted to make sure they could see her extra cocoa-buttered thighs. The club DJ was playing a hard banger of a classic Big Freedia bounce re-mix, so Califia added a few subtle body rolls as she took drink and food orders much to the delight of the men and two women in her section.

Misty rolled her eyes at Califia, but she seemed a little happy with the response she received.

"I'll let him know," Misty said flouncing away.

Califia looked up towards V.I.P., but the distance, bright lights, and smoky atmosphere made it impossible to see the person above them. Clearly, they had the paper to be up there, but Califia just wanted to take orders and serve drinks. V.I.P. work got a little handsy and often illicit. God bless the working girls that went that route, but she was good for the evening.

Califia made sure to give special attention to the two women patrons in her section. She checked in with them often, making sure they had plenty of water and the free salted snacks on each table.

"Let me know if you need anything," was her refrain for them. She did it not because she wanted
tips from them, but to make them comfortable in the den of snakes men could turn into in a spot like that. Califia could handle herself with disrespectful clientele, but she had witnessed too many times the sharp turn a night could take with drunk touchy-feely males who could quickly forget a woman sitting in the audience wasn't a worker for the club.

"Come give me a dance, Ma," a guy called to her when she swept past with her empty tray on her way back to the bar.

Califia smiled sweetly, blew him a kiss, but kept it moving.

###

When Misty sauntered back up the stairs, she had a mischievous smile on her face.

"She doesn't want to come up here. Like I told you, all of our ladies have sections they are assigned to. And right now, Li Li is very content where she is."

N'Jobu glanced back down towards the main floor. He saw a man reach out and slap Califia's ass while she was carrying a full tray of beer bottles. He swallowed hard and turned his eyes back towards Misty.

"I can take care of you," Misty said.

N'Jobu took slow deliberate strides over to Misty. He towered over her but brought his lips to her ear.

"Go back down there and tell her this, …inyanga."

"Inyanga?" Misty asked, her face scrunched up in confusion.

"Tell her to come up here again, but if she refuses, get close to her and whisper in her ear, inyanga."

N'Jobu held up another fifty.

Misty stared at him.

"Inyanga?" she said again.

"Perfect," he said. He handed her the fifty and returned to the glass railing. His patience was waning. He didn't want to go down there and cause a scene, but if Califia didn't get her ass up there within the next ten minutes he was liable to go ballistic and bellow her name from the balcony.

###

"What?" Califia asked when Misty crowded her space again.

"That guy in twenty still wants you up there."

"Forget it," Califia said, tucking a wad of bills down into her bra.

Misty stepped closer to her, put her hands onto Califia's arms, and whispered in her ear.

"He told me if you refused to come up again, he wanted me to tell you this…inyanga."

"What? Speak louder, I can't hear you."
"He said if you refused to come to him that I was to tell you this word…inyanga."

Califa eased back from Misty and took a step forward towards the balcony. She still couldn't see the shadowy figure perched up there because of the bright lights and the smoke.

"I'll take your spot," Misty said pulling the empty serving tray from Califia’s hand.

Already on autopilot, Califia's legs carried her to the rear of the club, but her eyes were focused up, and eventually, she was able to make out his form and features. She stopped below him. Standing there, eyes raised up to him, the cacophony of action around her became white noise.

Staring down at her, his hands caressing the balcony railing, N'Jobu looked like some ancient haughty Cesar watching a riotous colosseum of bawdy women and lecherous men. How long had he been up there, watching her work? She tried to temper her breathing, but his face in the red glow of the V.I.P. lights had her guessing what he was thinking and feeling. From where she stood, she could clearly see the arch in his eyebrow, the tension in his eyes, and the way his lips poked forward, he was giving her the same stare he had right before he dragged her out of his car and spanked her in the back seat of his BMW. He was giving off molten lava levels of heat. And it was directed at her. She felt her legs quake like she was sinking into quicksand. She waited there like a very bad girl deserving of punishment. The thought made her mouth water.

"N'Jobu," she whispered to herself. His name felt hot and heavy in her mouth, a solid restless thing that needed a release. The moment he saw her lips move with his name, he beckoned with one hand for her to come up.

###

He was drinking champagne when she reached him. Standing near the top of the stairs, Califia watched N’Jobu turn to look at her as he leaned against the balcony.

"Li Li," he said, a smirk dancing on his lips.

She held out her hands.

"What are you doing here?"

"Why are you so far away from me?"

She sauntered in, self-conscious of what she was wearing as his eyes swept across her work uniform.

"Why are you here?" she asked.

"You forgot to take the pie I made for you from my car. I was heading home and thought I'd drop it off. Bakari gave me the name of where you were. So here I am."

She glanced around the V.I.P. room.

"So, where's the pie?"

"Come here."

Califa hesitated then took some tentative steps until she was four feet from him.

"You want a drink? It's their best," he said handing his glass to her. She took it, the only time she ever had the opportunity to taste the best bottle her job had to offer. The champagne went down extra bubbly and extra dry. It was quite excellent. She held the glass out for more and N'Jobu walked over
to a table and pulled the bottle out of the ice. He replenished the glass and watched her drink her fill. She offered the rest to him and he finished it, placing the glass on the table.

"Does it upset you that I work here in a place like this?"

"A little. If we weren't together, I probably wouldn't care, but it does irk me a bit if there are people here who touch you or look at you. It is your body, but…"

"But what?"

He shrugged.

"No, I want to hear what you have to say. It's my body, but…?"

"All I see in front of me is mine. Just mine. I don't want these cretins touching my treasure. That's all. And you look so damn hot right now, girl."

She pivoted around nice and slow for him then sashayed close to him so that her chest touched his. She played with the collar of his shirt.

"I've been working here for two years. I know how to handle myself. You don't have to worry, and you don't have to check up on me."

"I wasn't checking up, I just wanted to make sure you had your pie. I'm just surprised that this isn't a restaurant."

"Did you think I was dancing on the pole?"

N'Jobu's eyes looked away from her and he pressed his lips together tight searching for an answer.

"You thought you would see me down there on stage doing the do, huh? Admit it!"

N'Jobu tried to play it off, but she pushed her hand into his chest to make him confess the truth.

"Are you disappointed that you didn't catch me in the act?" she asked staring into his face as he tried to avoid direct eye contact. He was embarrassed. She thought he was so adorable when he was embarrassed. He couldn't even look at her when he was in that state.

"Do you want me to go down there and climb on the stage to fulfill your fantasy, sir?" she joked with him, pretending to walk towards the stairs, "I could get Misty up here because God knows she loves to give lap dances."

N'Jobu walked over to her and pulled her hand into his.

"How about you give me a lap dance, Li Li?"

Califia held his gaze, and then she heard the intro beat to a neo-soul jam, heralding the coming of Califia's favorite performer, Medusa.

"Come watch Medusa with me first," she said, pulling N'Jobu back over to the railing, pushing the velvet chairs together.

A woman with long thick honey-brown braids and dark olive skin took the stage, leaping onto the pole by her legs and spinning, her hair spiraling out of control as gravity whipped it around her turns.

Califia watched N'Jobu watch Medusa do her thing as men in the audience began tossing money and
catcalling their appreciation for the level of skill Medusa brought.

The woman climbed her way to the ceiling, flipped upside down, released her hands and just allowed herself to slide down all the way to the bottom without hitting the floor with just her thighs. N'Jobu's eyes squinted hard.

"Wow," he said.

"I know," Califia answered.

Medusa pranced around the stage, her movement accentuating and punctuating the lyrics to the song she danced to.

"Not that I would want it, but you would probably be badass down there," N'Jobu said.

"Nah, that's a whole different skill set, baby," Califia said, patting his thigh.

The music switched up and Medusa elevated her game, causing Califia to jump up and clap.

"Get it, Medusa!" Califia yelled.

Medusa grabbed her own braids and swung her body around, dropping into the splits where they could all admire her abundant ass cheeks as they jiggled in time to the beat.

"I see you all still do that twerking thing," N'Jobu said.

"You think she's hot?" Califia asked.

"Yes. She's beautiful," he said looking up at Califia. He stayed seated and watched her gyrate in her shorts, her decadent thighs having the same effect on him as the patrons that sat downstairs. She raised her arms above her head and shook them with the music, and she felt his intense focus on her face without looking at him. When she did allow herself to look at him again, his eyes drifted to her neck and the cleavage she displayed that had money spilling from it.

"Califia," he said, his voice going low, constrained by what she guessed was his need to touch her.

Califia kept winding her body, her butt flexing and bouncing a bit as she moved in her heels. He tapped her arm.

"Califia," he said again.

She turned to look at him and noticed a change in his demeanor. That heat was back in his eyes.

"I want you to give me a lap dance," he said, patting his thigh.

Her head tilted.

"Well sir, we have rules," she said, running her fingers over her two braids and straightening them on her shoulders.

"I will abide by all of them," he said.

She gave him a long contemplative look then became all business.

"Give me a minute," she said and rushed downstairs.
Califia met Misty at the entrance bar.

"So," Misty said, looking Califia up and down, "how is that guy in twenty treating you? He's fucking hot."

Califia reached for four shots of the most expensive tequila the club had and placed them on a tray.

"That guy happens to be my boyfriend."

"No shit?"

"Yep."

"The guy with the black American Express card, Rolex, Hugo Boss fits and come-hither eyes?"

"That's my man."

Misty looked her up and down again.

"He seems a little refined for what I'd expect you to catch."

Califia knew Misty could get a little greasy when she was jealous, which was rare. It made Califia wonder how hard she tried to persuade N'Jobu to keep her as his server.

"How long have you two been together?"

"A year," Califia lied.

"Okay, girl. Still waters run deep, I guess. Wouldn't think you could pull someone like that."

Califia picked up her drinks.

"Darla knows this already, but he doesn't want anyone else coming up there. So pass the word along, would you?" Califia said, walking away with the tray and swiveling her hips. When she faced the security guard she nudged him with her elbow.

"The gentleman upstairs doesn't want to be bothered. Please make sure no one comes up unless he requests them personally. Especially Misty."

Califia and N'Jobu tossed back both shots of the tequila she brought up. She made him sit on one of the couches furthest away from the railing where they couldn't be seen. Above the couch were adjustable lights in various colors to set any type of mood. Califia chose a soft white light that allowed him to see, but not harsh enough to kill the mood.

Standing before him she held her hands on her hips.

"Rule number one. No touching."

"Got it," he said.

"Rule number two. No means no. Rule number three, I can stop at any time I choose, and if you make me feel uncomfortable, I will call Rusty, the security guard at the bottom of the stairs."
"Anything else?"

"Have fun."

Calafia felt the tequila coursing through her as it chased the champagne she had earlier. She could feel the spreading warmth move from her throat and ease down into her chest. N'Jobu watched her face, his legs slightly parted with his hands resting on the sides of his hips.

The boom bap of the music down below was piped into their V.I.P. area with small but powerful JBL speakers above them. She didn't like the song that was playing, and once Medusa left the stage, the DJ returned to bargain basement beats.

"Is something wrong?" he asked, trying to read her facial expression.

"This song sucks…," she said, wishing she could have an on/off switch to shut down the music.

"I don't care about the music," he said.

She was ready to answer him when a slower seductive instrumental piped in.

"That'll work," she said as the tequila-infused her with liquid courage.

She bent down and kissed him softly on his lips then eased back.

Lord, please don't let this come off corny, she thought as she slid her hands down her waist and onto her knees. She spread her legs and dropped down to the floor. She kept her eyes on him until she spun around in her heels so that she was facing opposite him and eased herself back up so that her ass was near his face. She dropped down onto his lap and heard a slight groan escape him as his hands reached out to hold her waist. She already knew he wanted to lift her up and down.

"I said no touching."

She slapped his hands away as she did slow gyrations on his thighs then lowered her hands to grab her ankles, her legs in an upside-down V formation. She flexed the muscles in her ass causing small spasms of movement in each cheek.

N'Jobu said something in his own language as her fingers did a slow glide back up her legs. She angled her torso so that she could look back at him. She dropped back onto his thighs and inched her way further back on his lap until she could feel herself sitting on his dick.

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She rested her hands on his knees, leaned forward and bounced, feeling his semi-errection grow under her. He thrust his hips a bit and she gripped his knees tighter to keep herself steady. The silky thin material of her short shorts was really a poor barrier, and she could feel him stiffening more beneath her wiggling. The tiny black G-string she wore tugged on her labia, the friction causing a pleasurable tingling sensation. She found herself exhaling through her mouth. She wanted to see his face.

Turning her body around, she rolled her hips on his lap, feeling her clit rub against his bulge. She exhaled harder, finding herself losing a bit of focus on the task at hand as she made small circles with her hips. She reached up and pushed her breasts together, her tight shirt forcing her tits to spill from her push up bra. Her nipples perked up, and she tweaked them through the shirt and bra with her fingers. N'Jobu's eyes darted between her face, chest, and waist. Her shorts were sticking to the shape of her vulva and she saw his eyes narrow as he noticed the evidence of her arousal.

"Calafia," he whispered, still thrusting his constricted erection between her thighs, "let me see your
pussy.

Her eyes closed involuntarily at the sound of his request. She was supposed to be running this lap dance. Not him. When she re-opened her eyes, she saw him staring at her mound, his lips parted, and his face constricted in a way that could be read as both pleasure and pain. He stopped thrusting into her, eyes still on her lower half.

"Ahhh, please…let me see your pussy."

She took her right hand and patted her vulva.

"You want to see it, baby?"

"Yesssss, please," he murmured.

She took her time reaching down between them to slide the material of her shorts to the side with one hand. Her other hand plucked at the G-string and they both saw a shiny thread of her arousal sticking to the panties. She tugged on it so that the thin black material spread open the right side of her inner lips and he could see her opening.

"Califia, shit," he groaned, his index and middle finger reaching over and scissoring her clit. He stared at the small trimmed thatch of her reddish pubic hairs on her mound and the freshly waxed smoothness of her vulva. She felt the flow of blood causing her to engorge, making her pussy a succulent oasis for the perfect dick.

"There are rules. No touching," she said brushing away his fingers, but patting her clit herself. N'Jobu's lips were pressed together in a tight line, his eyes steady on her hand slapping her own skin.

"Look at your fat pussy, baby," he said, his fingers on both hands twitching, trying to hold back from fingering her. His eyes raised to gaze at her again. His face looked twisted in anguish, and it turned her on. She unfastened his pants and he helped her slide his slacks and silk boxers down. She slid her fingers around his fat cock and placed it between her legs so that her slickened labia spread right below the head. She shifted her weight and began rubbing her pussy on his dick. They both could hear the sound of it slipping and sliding on him. N'Jobu's hands made another pitiful attempt to touch her, this time groping for her ass, but she slapped them away again and reached for his white gold neck chain necklace, twisting it in her hand so that she was actually choking him with it.

"I said no touching! Can't you follow the rules, sir?"

His eyes widened a bit with surprise, but she felt his cock pulse underneath her. She held onto the twisted chain and kept grinding on him, a slow tickling building up in her clit. She looked down at her labia pressed onto him. A thin drizzle of pre-cum spilled from his tip and she watched it roll down and coat her lower lips. She gasped and released his chain.

"Bay-bee…," she moaned out to him.

"Go ahead, girl. Give me that pussy."

"Uh, huh, uh, huh,…hmmmm…," was all she got out.

"That's your dick…that's your dick…that's all yours," he uttered, encouraging her to keep grinding on him.

"Huh, Jobu…," she said. She felt her voice straining, the wet evidence of her desire flowing out, making his dick shiny.
"Open up your pussy, let me see it," he said.

Calafia reached down, lifted up from his dick and spread open her labia, her slippery fingers barely able to keep her folds spread apart. She saw his mouth drop open again while a deeply felt groan tumbled from his lips.

"You're coming home with me tonight," he said, still staring at her pussy.

"Bay-bee…," she whimpered.

"Look at me…I said look at me, Califia."

She kept her pussy spread open for him but allowed her eyes to rest on his face. The intensity she saw there brought her anxious desire for him to the surface. She closed her eyes seeking a little shelter from his gorgeous face, just enough of a break to let her gather her wits and keep from being overwhelmed by his forceful energy.

"Tell me you want me inside you tonight," he said.

She needed to rub herself against him, needed that fat dick to be buried in her balls deep. She couldn't take any more waiting.

"I want you inside me," she blurted out, "I need to be in your bed. I need you to be in my pussy, Jobu."

She spread her thighs so that her pussy splayed open wider.

"Shit," he said, his eyes wrenched back to her opening, "I'm going to be in there deep, baby."

Calafia yelped and dropped back on him with her clit on his dick, rocking him with a frantic energy.

"You want me in there deep?" he asked.

"Yes!" she snapped, her body lurched forward as she held onto his shoulders. He enclosed his fingers around her waist to balance her.

"You'll take all this dick?"

"Yes, baby."

"All of it?"

"Bay-bee—"

"All this dick. Right?!"

"Yes—"

"Say it then! All of it!"

"I'll take all of it! All your dick…all your dick…all of it…Oh…God…Jobu…Jobu…Jobu…"

Calafia's head fell forward onto his shoulder and she was cumming…hard…all over his dick. She trembled in his lap as the spasms in her core rocked her into a state of bliss, her skin thrumming with the feverish release of her orgasm. She felt her toes bunch up as her thighs squeezed his hips.
She felt N'Jobu pull her close to him and she felt the warm breath of his mouth blowing in her ear. He was talking to her in his language again, the soft dulcet tones bringing her back to her senses. She felt his fingers pulling her G-string and shorts back into place despite the stickiness she felt still dripping out of her.

“Go get your things. We're leaving,” he said.

“But I have to finish my shift—”

“Fuck that shift,” he said, pulling her off of him and fixing his own clothes, "Go. Hurry up. I'll meet you down by the bar near the exit. I need to close out my tab."

She stared at him. They were finally going to do this.

"Call your grandmother and tell her you're not coming home," he said.

Califia saw the heat growing in his eyes again. She was still giddy from her orgasm.

"Don't even bother changing, just get your stuff," he said.

She ran down the stairs. All she could think about was his bed and him on top of her. At last.

###

N'Jobu paid for his time and drinks in V.I.P. Rainbow girl and Misty watched him as he waited for Califia. Misty, in particular, was giving him stares that made him feel like she was upset about something. Their manager, Darla, was not happy when N'Jobu announced in a brisk tone that they needed to find someone else to replace Califia for good.

When Califia walked back from getting her backpack and helmet, N'Jobu interlaced his fingers with hers and guided her out of the club.

"My bike is in the employee parking—"

"We'll come back for it tomorrow," he said shoving open the front double doors of the club.

Outside, the staccato click-clack of her heels echoed in his ears. When they reached his car, he opened the passenger side for her and couldn't keep his eyes off her backside when she climbed in.

He wanted to spank her.

The compulsion rose up in him so fast he had to catch his breath. But he had to get her home first, get her naked, make her understand that he wasn't playing about getting deep inside of her. His dick was a solid mass of neediness. She had him wound up tight, and now that he saw her pussy, and what awaited his cock, he had to fight an inner battle not to fuck her in the backseat right there in the parking lot. He prayed that the fresh box of ultra-thin condoms he had waiting at home could withstand the intense thrusts he had planned for her. He had to close his eyes for a moment when he opened his driver's side door. He hadn't felt this type of anticipation in a long ass time. It was making him feel punch drunk.

Watching her face when she orgasmed gave him such a rush. Even though he loved to hear his women talk back to him when he shared pleasure with them, Califia made his dick even harder with just the sounds and facial expressions she made. Those soft but desperate pants...the way her voice went "Oh!" when his dick rubbed her delicate folds just right, spreading his wetness all over her juicy clit. When he was on the edge, his lips parting as he watched her chase her orgasm, she seemed
to pick up on his heightened pleasure, creating a feedback loop that spun him into his tortuous goal of not cumming until they were between his sheets. His balls had become so heavy that he thought he was going to lose it when thankfully, she let go first. He felt that Califia-induced tunnel vision closing in on him.

He started up the car and led them out of the cul-de-sac and away from the club. The first red light he came to, he looked over at her and knew he was in trouble. She had taken off her push up bra, and he could see her hard nipples poking through her top. And those fucking thighs of hers. He reached over and tugged on her shorts.

"Pull those down. To your ankles," he said.

Her eyes drifted across his face. The hard-line look in his eyes let her know he wanted it done right away. She pulled them down, letting her shorts and G-string sit atop her heels. He reached over with his right hand giving her mound a gentle tap.

"Open your legs," he said.

"Hmphh,…baby," she sighed, spreading her thighs a little bit. He tapped her there again a little harder with two fingers. She let her head fall back onto the headrest, but she kept her fervent eyes on him while twisting her lips.

"Show me your pussy again," he demanded, "use both of your hands."

Califia gently peeled back her inner lips and opened her center up to him. He checked the traffic light again. It was still red. He wet his ring and index finger with his mouth, then reached over and teased her opening. When her strained whimpering got the best of him, he inserted his fingers inside of her, just to the first knuckle.

"Jobu," she gasped. He pressed in more, all the way in, curling his fingers a bit. He started to tap along her wall.

The light turned green and he kept his fingers inside of her, giving slow rhythmic thrusts as he drove.

"I'm getting this pussy ready," he said, "don't move."

Driving closer to his apartment, he made his digits work a little faster. She dropped her fingers from her opening when they reached another red light.

"No, …put them back. Keep your pussy open for me, just like that…yes…wider…you're so wet for me…open it wider…yesssss… look at that pretty pussy…"

Her whimpering devolved into raw tremulous pants. Her eyes were still on him but at half-mast. He pulled his fingers out and yanked her top up so he could see her breasts.

"Fuck…," he said, squeezing her left breast and fussing with her nipple, "keep that pussy open."

She did. He played with her tits, then stuck three fingers inside of her. She kept her eyes on him.

"I like how you hold that pussy open for me," he said stroking her insides. She squirmed in the seat. They came to another red light and he pulled his fingers out.

"Play with your tits for me."

Califia cradled and kneaded her breasts with such sensual touches that he found himself mumbling
curse words in Wakandan. He told her how nice and ripe her breasts were, how he couldn't wait to suck on them after he fucked the shit out of her. She had no idea what he was saying, but he sensed the tone in which he spoke to her was getting his message across. Crude thoughts consumed his mind and he couldn't help it. He felt intoxicated watching her while also watching for the light to change.

Her thumbs and index fingers massaged her nipples, plucking them at intervals that made him forget to check the light. His escalating desire was making him impatient. He slipped his fingers back inside of her, hooking them so that he could tease her clit with the rest of his hand. He drove on while still giving her thrusts with his fingers. His dick jumping in his pants was almost unbearable.

"Jobu," she whined, and he couldn't look at her, his eyes fixed on the road, trying to make it safely to his apartment without crashing because of her distracting wet pussy. He spoke to her again in Wakandan, his tongue hitting the roof of his mouth brushing near his incisors as his words now incorporated the traditional clicks of his language. It was when he was telling her how she was making him feel and his tongue made a loud "clop" sound that she lost it.

He felt a tightening on his fingers and heard a long drawn out moan stagger from her mouth in waves.

"Yes, baby," he shouted at her as he felt her thighs slam shut around his fingers, "cum on my hand!"

He pulled up to the security gate of his apartment and put his car in park awkwardly with his left hand. Turning his head, he stared down at his fingers between her legs and then dragged his eyes up to her face. Her eyes were squeezed shut and she had her hands cupping her breasts like a divine offering. He wanted to reach into his pants and pull out his erection so he could decorate her tits with his semen, but his bed was mere seconds away in his mind.

He gently removed his fingers from inside of her, and her eyes parted open slightly, barely registering his face. He stuck his fingers in his mouth to taste her.

"Fuck," he said, licking his fingers with deliberate care as she watched him with sated eyes.

He found his parking spot and watched her slowly pull up her G-string and shorts. Hopping out of the driver's side, he wasted no time grabbing her backpack from the backseat and helping her out on wobbly legs. He clasped her hand and walked her up the stairs and into his home.

###

She felt like she was floating.

The minute they were inside the apartment, N'Jobu tossed her backpack on the couch and began kissing her without turning any lights on. She matched his intensity as he backed her towards his bedroom. When he had her in front of his open bedroom door he released her lips but kept his face near hers. She could feel heat radiating from his body. Draping her hands around his neck, she waited for him to say something.

"Is everything okay?" she finally asked when a minute seemed to pass and he didn't move or say anything. Was he changing his mind? His enthusiasm seemed to taper off.

"N'Jobu?"

She touched his face, unable to see him well in the dark hallway. He reached behind her and turned on his bedroom lights. His face illuminated, she realized she was mistaken about his excitement tapering off. She could see a yearning in his eyes, and his lips made her ache to kiss him again.
"I want to take my time with you," he finally said, touching one of her braids.

"Okay," she answered, giving him a shy smile.

He stared at her a bit longer, like he was trying to figure out the words he wanted to say. In the car, his voice rumbled foreign words that coaxed her into a state of uninhibited physical abandon. Sitting in a car with her legs spread open, the old torments of worrying that she would take forever to relax and climax was gone. She tumbled so fast into her orgasm that she almost forgot where she was when he helped her out of his car.

Trusting her instincts, Califia stepped into his bedroom backward, slowly unbuttoning her top. The track lights in his bedroom were ultra-bright. N'Jobu reached over and tried to lower the intensity of the lighting.

"Keep them all the way up. I want to see all of you," she said, kicking off her heels and sliding her shorts and panties off.

She stepped away from her clothes and kept easing back until her calves hit the bed. It was a lot lower than she expected. Glancing around she saw that all his furniture was dark chestnut, and he had a wing-backed chair propped near his mirrored sliding closet doors.

Looking back at him, she watched him unbutton his shirt, taking it off along with a black t-shirt and tossing them onto the chair. As he slipped off his shoes and socks, Califia crawled onto his bed, resting on her knees with her thighs spread wide. She skimmed her fingers around her breasts, cupping them in her hands and holding them up for him. His eyes were glued to her nipples as he slipped out of his pants and underwear.

Her eyes drifted down to look at his cock.

Jesus.

He was still semi-erect, but if he had more to fill out…

She felt a fiery electric spark race up her spine. He was the most beautiful naked man she had ever seen. Every ratio on his body was in proportion for complete perfection, and she couldn't get over the even rich color of skin. His white-gold necklace glowed against his ebony skin. Her eyes raked up and down his body and she was especially intrigued by the deep V lines that ran from his waist to his groin.

Plucking her nipples again, she rested her thighs back on her haunches. His eyes never left her breasts and she saw his dick grow to full hardness without him touching it, the weight of it making it bob up and down. A small gasp left her mouth and her fingers found their way between her legs as she played with her prominent slick folds. His eyes caught that movement as she teased her opening. She was learning all the things that got him off, and opening up her pussy lips and displaying them was a big turn on for him, so she tormented him a bit by opening and closing her folds while bouncing a bit on his bed, letting her pussy touch the expensive duvet. It worked. He grabbed his dick in one hand and slapped the weight of it in the other.

"Ooh..shit…" she whispered and fell all the way back on the bed, stunned by the loud thwack sound his dick made as he struck his palm several times with it. She bent her knees and spread her legs, working her fingers in small circles around her clit as she watched him approach her.

N'Jobu stroked his dick and kept his eyes fixed on her eyes. Califia sunk her fingers back inside herself, already super-charged by the sight of his cock and that fat sack of his. Her nose was crinkled
and she felt her eyes squeeze shut as she smooshed her lips together. She craved another orgasm. She felt her thighs being hooked and dragged to the edge of the bed. Eyes snapping open, she found N'Jobu down on his knees by the side of the bed with his face between her legs. Her thighs were hanging over his muscular arms.

"Lay back," he said in a soft voice.

"But I want to watch you," she whispered back.

He stared in her eyes for a few seconds.

"Then watch," he said, placing his entire mouth over her pussy.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhh." N'Jobu sucked pussy liked he sucked on her tits; Gentle. Probing. And oh, so slow.

The hair on his goatee gave a delicious tickle to her private parts, and he flattened his wide tongue to roll over her folds. His tongue explored each side of her labia, and when he feasted on her clit with delicate licks and circular sucking motions, she felt like she wanted to cry because he was gazing at her with such adoration as he did it. Every now and then his eyes would close and he would use his mouth to hum and vibrate her pussy. Lapping up her juices, he dipped his tongue in and out, still holding her thighs apart.

"Hunhhhhhhh," came out of her mouth, and he slowed down to an even more excruciating snail-like pace. All she could think was, This nigga is tryna kill me before I even get the dick.

His fingers slid up her waist and ribcage, gripping her breasts in each hand, squeezing, shaking, and claiming their fullness. Once he toyed with her nipples, an inner connection was made and a strong sexual current shot down to her clit. She began to moan and he lifted his head to stare at her pussy. "Damn…Califia…girl….look at your pussy twitching….

She lifted herself higher on her elbows and looked down at his glistening lips, goatee, and cheeks as his eyes were riveted to her clit. She could see herself jumping down there. He was mesmerized, allowing his tongue to dip and lick inside her juicy wet opening, then watch the reaction of her clit as it continued to quiver on its own. He took his thumb and pressed down on her clit with light pressure, then gave a slow delicate swirl to it with his tongue.

"Bay-bee," she said, wanting to cum all in his mouth at that point.

"Califia, I need to cum, real quick. I just…I have to… I can't…ah…shit…" N'Jobu released her thighs and she saw his right hand grab his dick and stroke it.


Was he about to bust one while he hadn't finished her off?

Legs splayed open, and her pussy on the verge of imploding from his mouth, she watched him stare at her pussy while he long stroked himself. He placed his fingers under the fat head and tugged hard.

"Your pussy is still twitching, girl. Goddammit….goddammit…your pussy—" He gritted his teeth as he aimed his dick towards the hem of the duvet and released a stream of semen
along with a painful groan that excited her even more. After draining his dick, N'Jobu looked at the puddle of cum he left on the bottom of the bed cover.

"Fuck," he said, his breathing unsteady, his fingers releasing his cock.

Before she could bitch to him, he was back on her pussy with a vengeance, and this time she fell all the way on her back, letting him have his way. Staring at the ceiling all she could hear was the smacking of his lush lips, the sublime gushy sounds escaping between her thighs with each lap of his tongue. She reached down and stroked his head with her fingers. He nipped, sucked, and swallowed everything that she gave him, and when he started humming and making her skin vibrate at her core once more, she gratefully came undone, her hips and legs bucking with unrestrained ardor. He had to hold her thighs apart to keep her from smothering him.

Looking down at him, he had a smile on his face as he studied her reaction.

"Oh my God…Jobu…baby…what the fuck?!

Her body jerked a bit, and she closed her eyes, drawing in deep breaths to control her trembling. N'Jobu crawled up alongside her and kissed her. She sucked her own taste from his mouth and loved every moment of it as he fingered her right breast.

Drawing her in closer, he draped his arm over her stomach and kissed her cheek.

"You taste so fucking good," he said.

She beamed as she felt her body sink into a languorous state. She was so happy that she didn't have to leave his bed right away. She had texted Soliel at the club that she wouldn't be coming to spend the night with her, so there was no need to tell her grandmother anything. She wasn't expected anywhere until Saturday evening.

She stretched her body like a well-fed cat and threw her arm across N'Jobu's, looking him in his eyes.

"You made me feel so good. Three orgasms…"

She stretched again, a small yawn escaping her lips.

"Tired?" he asked.

"It's been a long day."

"It has," he said, kissing her cheek again, "you want to take a shower?"

The fingers on his left hand were still stroking and plying her breasts with light caresses, and she felt hypnotized by the motion. He would circle a nipple, then squeeze her breasts so that her large areolas would peek out from his hand. He bent his head to suck and bite at them as he was talking to her.

"I can give you a long clean t-shirt, and I have a lot of different body washes you can choose from…"

She tried to concentrate on his words but his handling of her breasts had her revving up again.

"Damn, you suck titties so good, boy…” she said, arching her back as his nipple play had her opening her legs again.

She reached up and pulled his hand back down between her legs, then reached for his dick. It had
gone slightly soft. Slightly.

"So, a shower?" he said.

"I want you in me," she said showing no restraint as she worked his cock.

His eyes bulged when she squeezed his balls.

"Didn't you promise me you would go deep inside me?"

She massaged his cock until it was standing at attention. He grabbed it away from her and dragged it up and down and around her opening. When he pressed it against her center, she looked down at it nervously. It was so big. She watched him tease circles in her folds. He didn't think he wasn't going to use a condom, did he? She tensed a bit when she thought he was going to shove himself inside her unprotected and placed her hand on his hand to stop him from trying.

He kissed her again and rolled over towards a pillow. He reached under and pulled out a condom. She felt her body go slack with relief. He tore open the packet and rolled the condom onto himself. It was clear and fit his huge dick like a thin layer of skin. It was a brand she was unfamiliar with. Of course, he had a dick size that was new to her too.

N'Jobu pulled her closer and kissed her, and she eased into his full lips. In all honesty, they could kiss all night and she would be enthralled with him, but his dick was jutting out and striking her belly. He brushed a finger over her breasts again then whispered in her ear.

"Are you ready for me?"

"Yes."

He stroked her clit again, then dipped his fingers lower.

"So wet," he muttered.

He positioned himself between her legs, and she rested her thighs in her own hands, lifting them up a bit, presenting herself to him. She saw his face quake when she did that. There was something about serving herself up to him that just sent him over the edge. He reached over and grabbed a pillow for her lifting her up a bit and placing it under her back for comfort.

He looked down into her eyes, and she felt a swelling in her heart. He kept his eyes on her, then looked down for a second as he lined up his cock. She felt him press the head of his dick inside her, and then his eyes were back on her.

He pushed in slowly, watching the expression on her face. She shifted her hips as he eased in more. He was a third of the way in when the sensation of being too full too fast overtook her and she tensed.

"Am I hurting you?" The concern in his voice made her more comfortable.

"Give me a second to get used to it," she gritted through her teeth. He pulled back a little.

"No, don't pull out…just…take it slow…I'll be okay," she said.

The sensation felt so good, and so overwhelming at the same time. There was no dick like new dick, and N'Jobu was packing the good stuff. She wiggled on him a bit, and he exhaled hard, still gazing at her face.
"You're so juicy… pussy gripping me tight…," he said. She watched a sheen of perspiration accumulate on his brow.

He gave her small shallow thrusts and she got used to the shocking fullness. She spread her legs wider, removing her hands from her thighs and resting them on the planes of his chest. He looked down at his dick going inside of her.

"You okay?" he asked, staring into her eyes again.

"Go deeper," she said.

His eyes reacted to her words and he shifted his hips and thrust in further, making her lips press together then open suddenly.

"Oh…shit…," she said wrapping her arms around his neck, gently scraping her nails on his nape.

They both could hear his dick going inside of her. He pulled out a few inches, then slid back in a little further than he was before. He was stretching her out and it felt incredible. She laid back to watch him. His eyes fixed on hers, but they took on an intimate unguarded look. She could tell he was turned on by her and probably wanted to do more but also wanted to make her comfortable with his restraint.

She couldn't take it anymore.

"Fuck me."

N'Jobu lifted up his knees throwing her legs over his arms and plunged his cock as deep as he could get. She tried to watch his dick going in and out of her, but at that point, she needed to be fucked well by him, and just clung to his neck. His hips slamming into her were unwavering as he stroked deep inside her tight walls. She could feel her juices spilling against his thighs thanks to all those orgasms he gave her earlier. She couldn't hold onto him any longer and just fell back on the bed. He shifted again and pressed himself on top of her, his mouth searing the side of her neck as he sucked on it while slamming his cock into her. She felt his mouth angle up her face until he was rasping into her ear, "I'm balls deep, girl…shit…you're taking all this dick…fuck."

She wrapped her legs around his waist and held tight to his back.

He was hers.

She laid back and pondered every sensation he gave her, his lips right at her ear as he whispered things to her and only her.

"Jobu, you feel so good in my pussy."

"This pussy is all mine, right?"

"Yes," she moaned, "you're in so deep baby…so deep…"

"I should've been fucking you a long time ago," he said, pulling out slowly. He swiveled his hips and slid back in even slower. She wanted him fast and hard and began bucking her hips.

"Harder, baby…," she said, wanting his balls to slap against her ass.

"Harder?"

"Yes…harder…and faster… I want you to cum."
He stopped moving and lifted up to stare down at her.

"Is that what you want?" He said pulling his dick all the way out and slamming it back into her fast. Her eyes snapped shut. She took a deep shaky breath and opened them again.

"Fuck me," she whimpered, her eyes watery, her legs becoming tired and heavy. He lifted her legs up and threw them over his shoulder and drove his cock in until he bottomed out.

"You asked for this…is this what you wanted?"

His thighs were so strong pressed into her and she was so deliriously happy that they could be loud, nasty, and alone.

"I want it, baby. Give it," she answered.

N'Jobu's face was like a man possessed. He fucked her with abandon and precise dickmanship. She thought of the time when Serah told her about the way he fucked, and that bitch wasn't lying at all. She just let him go, and he was hitting angles and spots in her pussy that she didn't know she had. She was going to be sore later, that was a given because his dick was relentless. And she was taking it. His bed rattled and she allowed her fingers to graze across his taut nipples. His deep penetration worked her back out, and she relished every pull on her muscles that he dragged out of her.

"Damn this pussy is so good," he said.

"It's all yours," she said, reaching up and twisting his gold chain.

"Say that again," he urged, his voice straining.

She pulled and twisted his chain, choking him a bit.

"This pussy is all yours. Take it. Take it all baby," she said, squeezing her thighs tight.

"Ah fuck…." His lips parted and he was exhaling through his mouth now. She wiggled her ass and internally, she squeezed her walls now that she was fully comfortable with his dick.

"I feel you," he said, closing his eyes above her. She still pulled on his chain.

"You want to cum?" she asked him, her own voice sounded like it was going to crack. She released his necklace.

"Fuck my dick," he said, spreading her legs out further and pressing them down into the mattress. He reached up and squeezed her tits, then reached down to grip her waist. He was losing it. She wiggled on him, matching his thrusts and tightening her pussy on his dick, the friction between them a molten wet mess. He looked down at where they were joined.

"Damn, you're creaming everywhere!"

Lifting her head, she looked down and saw that it was true.

"You made me do that," she said.

"That's my fault?"

"Yes."

He gave her the biggest smile and then his face contorted when she gyrated and clenched his dick at
the same time.

"This… good…pussy…fuck...I'm cumming!"

They both looked down at his surging cock and watched as it pumped semen into the condom.

"That's it, baby, give it to me," she said, taking her fingers and widening her labia for him.

"You're so good, girl…I'm filling this shit up-"

His voice broke and then he was speaking Wakandan to her until his hips jerked.

He squeezed her left breast hard, then collapsed in a satisfied heap on top of her. She held him tight and kissed his forehead. When his breathing returned to normal she heard him say, "You better call whoever you need to. You aren't leaving here for the next two days."

###
The Sweetest Thing

Chapter Summary

N'Jobu and Califia's relationship grows a bit. An old flame of N'Jobu's reveals a secret to Califia right before N'Jobu's Christmas party.

Chapter Notes

Hello faithful readers!
Sheesh, I didn't realize It's been over ten days since I posted something. My schedule is off. I'm trying to get something out every week.

This is a transitional chapter to get me through to the Christmas party and get N'Jobu over to the Wakanda shenanigans.

Starting on the next chapter now, and will do my best to get something up again by Friday!

Thanks for reading!

"I get mad when you walk away (don't walk away)
So I tell you leave, when I mean stay
Warm as the sun dipped in black
Fingertips on the small of my back
More valuable than all I own
Like your precious, precious, precious, precious dark skin tone

It was the sweet sweet sweetest thing I know
It was the sweet sweet sweetest thing I know"

Refugee Camp All-Stars – "The Sweetest Thing"

While Califia slept in his bed, N'Jobu slipped into the kitchen to set the timer on his Keurig machine to make her a caramel cappuccino in a few hours. After setting the timer, he quietly crept out to his car to retrieve the pie he had made for her and tip-toed back into the apartment and placed it into the fridge.

When he returned to the bedroom, she was still asleep. It was nine-thirty in the morning, and even though he had the light-colored shades in his bedroom drawn, he could see Califia's curled form clearly. Kicking off his house slippers and removing his sweatpants, N'Jobu slid back into his bed and settled behind her, spooning her warm body and slipping an arm around her waist. Her breathing shifted when he touched her; became deeper, more even and relaxed.

She hadn't moved an inch after she took her shower and slipped on one of his t-shirts after they had sex. He nuzzled his face into the back of her neck content to smell his favorite peppermint body
wash on her, as well as the scent of watermelon oil in her hair. He gave her soft kisses on her nape and snuck a few on her cheek. He did his best to keep his lips cordial on her skin, but holding her soft frame, his body pressed up against her, the soft pecks of his lips morphed into longer durations on her skin. He wanted to let her rest, wanted to lie there with her for a few more hours doing nothing but listening to the sound of her breathing in his bed, but her scent, the feel of her skin under his lips, and the prideful satisfaction that she was all his in every way now made him restless.

He considered going for a jog to burn off the fidgety energy he was grappling with. Normally he would be sound asleep himself, lying on his stomach and more often than not facing away from his usual bed buddies. Good sex did that to him. But what he did with Califia was more than good. For a first encounter, it was pretty great in his book, although he took points off for his performance when he was seized with the urge to jerk-off while eating her out. He had hoped to cum in her mouth or inside of her before he spent the rest of his time pleasing her. But once he got a taste of what she had between her thighs, the urge to stroke himself came over him. And when he saw her pussy reacting to his lips and tongue with all that twitching…she was lucky he was on the floor and couldn't jump up fast enough.

He rested his nose and lips on the back of her neck, then lifted his hand to gently caress her cute chipmunk cheek. She had the most endearing face when she slept. The charming cuteness she displayed in her sleep was such a delightful ruse to her spitfire personality. Touching her speckled skin, he found himself inadvertently rubbing his groin into her backside, morning wood making its inevitable appearance. He kissed her cheek one more time and her right arm reached back and caressed his head. Dammit, he had disturbed her, and now she was awake. She turned her head and body slightly to look at him.

"Morning," she said, stretching her body into his.

"I didn't mean to wake you. I can't seem to stop kissing you."

She smiled and puckered her lips, but then held her hand in front of her mouth, checking her breath.

"Man, that licorice toothpaste lasts forever," she said.

"All-natural products from home," he said.

He bent down to kiss her and she reciprocated. He pulled away first and rested his head back on his pillow.

"What time is it?"

He leaned back to look at his clock on the nightstand.

"Nine-fifty," he responded, shifting back.

She looked back at him then down at her butt.

"Oh, hey now, someone's up," she said.

"I'm keeping it under control," he said, stroking her hair, "go back to sleep if you want to. I'm just going to hold you."

He still felt keyed-up, but if she fell back asleep, he could slip away again and do some work on a few class papers and send emails to friends back home. She rested her head on his pillow and pulled his arm around her again, pressing it to her bosom and snuggling. All was well until she started arching her back, causing her butt to press into him. Which meant his dick was now sandwiched
between her ass cheeks. He ignored it as best he could, and kept his face in her sweet-smelling hair.

She rubbed the fingers on his hand held to her chest, and he opened his palm to trail his fingers alongside her covered breast. She moved his digits to her nipple and he toyed with it until it was a pebbled tender thing. His breathing matched her escalated breath and he pulled her t-shirt over her head and tossed it on the end of the bed.

She turned her head to look at him while he played with her tits, welcoming his gentle pelvic thrusts. He leaned down to kiss her, and her tongue was already ready for his mouth. Her lips soothed him, and the combination of deep slow kissing and brushing his hand and fingers on her breasts kept him sane until he felt sticky wetness seeping from his tip. He stopped kissing her to get his bearings, but he kept fingering her breasts while looking at her. He saw desire in her eyes.

"Lay on your stomach," he whispered.

She did as he asked, her face comfortably side-ways on a pillow.

N'Jobu began kissing her softly on her neck again, his legs straddled around her thighs. His kisses moved to her shoulders then traced a delicate trail down her spine until he reached her waist. His lips made a new trail as he licked the small dimpled indentations on both sides of her lower back. Back home they called them the kisses of Sekhmet.

N'Jobu trailed his lips down each side of Califia's butt, then licked her thighs all the way down to her ankles. He made his way back up the way he came, but this time he made his kisses faint. He sensed a change in Califia's breathing by the time he made it back up to her neck after the third time. His fourth trip back down he barely allowed his lips to touch her skin, a faint hovering above her flesh that let his warm breath caress her instead. He heard her sigh heavily by then. He was in the middle of her spine snaking the tip of his tongue on her skin when she arched her back.

"Jobu," she said staring over her shoulder.

He watched her body quiver, the nerves in her skin fired up, and then he continued moving his lips and tongue across her shoulders and down the sides of her back. Her fingers began to grip the pillow her head was on. He eased his mouth carefully back down to her left butt cheek, and when his tongue licked it, she hissed as if he had burned her. Her legs tensed.

"Huhhhhhhhnnn," she moaned, her hands now fisting the top of his sheets and twisting them. He licked her right butt cheek and her ass raised up. He pushed her thighs apart and waited for her to relax again.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

"Huhhhh…yes…it tickles really bad…but in a good way…not tickles…more like…like…you're making my skin come alive—"

He stuck his tongue at the top cleft of her ass and dragged it down until he reached her vulva. By then, Califia was panting and her thighs were trembling.

"Get on your hands and knees," he said.

She took a moment to gather herself and then he watched her push back with her hands lifting herself up. He pulled her legs apart more, then pushed his face back between her legs and licked her opening, rolling his tongue in a lazy circle on her folds before putting his whole mouth on her and tongue kissing her pussy. His hands spread her labia and he stared at all her wet pink inside surrounded by all her pretty brown outside. He slid his tongue inside of her.
"Ooh...Jobu...just like that...just like...damn—"

He wiggled his tongue, then made it stiff to fuck her, plunging in up to his nose and pulling back out in an easy rhythm. He pleasured her this way until he had the urge to look at her center once more.

He spread her folds and stared at her opening, his eyes mesmerized by the sight of it. She must've been squeezing her walls because he watched that sweet pink throb and gap open. He groaned at the juicy entrance to his new heaven on earth.

"Ahhh,...damn this pretty pussy," he choked out, feeling his dick hang heavy between his legs.

"Baby," she gurgled out between her panting. He plunged his tongue back into her.

"Jobu...hunnnhhhh—"

The humming he started to do cut her breath off as she jerked forward and hit her forehead against his headboard. She started laughing and his lips released her core.

"Are you okay? That was pretty loud," he said crawling around her to check her head. She rubbed it and fell back on the bed still giggling. His fingers reached out to touch where she was rubbing, but she pushed his hand away and reached out to pull him towards her. Her hungry lips sought his and soon they were kissing again.

He couldn't get enough of her lips or her tongue and felt his mouth watering as she sucked and nibbled and moaned under him. His hands found her breasts again and they spent nearly a half hour just kissing and humming into each other's mouth. The skin on his lips felt itchy and alive when he released from her just to catch a breath.

"Get a condom," she whispered.

Her words jolted him into action. He reached into his nightstand and pulled out a condom. Once he had himself sheathed, she turned to her side and lifted her leg. He held it for her as he pushed himself into her opening. He saw her close her eyes and tense from being a little tender. He pulled out and reached back into his nightstand grabbing a small bottle of lubricant.

"Are you allergic to silicone-based lubricants?"

"No, I can do silicone or water," she answered.

He lathered his fingers with the lube and leaned back down to kiss her. Their tongues danced around and he slowed down their kissing until she was moaning a bit into his mouth again. He slipped his fingers down between her legs, first coating her folds, then inserting his fingers. She gasped and pulled her mouth away.

"Jobu," she whispered.

He kept his touch feather-light, mindful that he had beat the breaks off of her pussy a few hours before. Removing his fingers, he slid his cock in slowly from behind, hissing as he did so. He pulled out after only going in a couple of inches. Her eyes looked back and questioned his movement.

"I like it when I first put the head in you. It feels fucking fantastic," he said while pushing right back in. His girth had her pussy stretched around the wide tip bulb. He pulled out again.

"Shit, I wish you could know how this feels...ooh... especially getting in from behind...ooohm," he said.
He cupped her breast in his hand and squeezed it, and then pushed his dick all the way in.

He rocked into her with a languid rhythm while murmuring her name in her ear and holding her leg up. She reached back and stroked the hair on his scalp.

"You don't even have to move, baby," he whispered to her, "just relax and let me take care of you." He let go of her leg and shifted his hips.

"Huh, yeah...yeah...," she panted.

He touched her breast and then trailed his fingers down past her navel and rested them on the sensitive bundle of nerves that he would control. Her torso was turned towards him so he could see her face. He had to see her face. Watching her cum was everything. He continued his leisurely pace of rocking his hips into her, his hardness exquisitely squeezed by her tight slit.

Her eyes were losing focus, and he picked up the pace, delving into her a little deeper, feeling sweat pour from her back and onto him. His dick, bathed in her slickening heat, grew harder in the condom, and he continued teasing her clit.

He went back to shallow thrusts, and then made a concerted effort to see how long he could last just inserting and pulling out the head.

"You really like that, don't you," Califia asked, her voice tinged with a seductive growl, "your dick is pulling on my clit when you do that."

"Do you know how good your pussy is, girl?"

Califia groaned.

"I can't even go deeper because I know you'll make me cum, and I'm not ready to cum yet," he said. Her lips twisted at his words.

"Califia...shit is amazing like this...ah, damn...ohhh, damn...baby, you have to let me fuck you like this every morning."

He pivoted his hips while still poking the large head of his cock in and out of her slick opening. All he could think about was all that lush pink he was teasing with his dick. He thrust a little deeper while still rolling his hips and flicking his fingertips across her clit.

The thrusting sounds made Califia giggle.

"It sounds like you're stirring up mac n' cheese in here," she said.

N'Jobu stopped moving and began laughing.

"What?!"

"You got my pussy sounding like mac 'n cheese being stirred in a pot."

N'Jobu laughed so hard that his whole body shook.

"That just sounds so wrong at this moment," he said. Califia laughed with him as she looked back at his face.

"That means you got this pussy open," she said.
"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah, baby. Keep going. Get that pussy."

Her words made him claim her body again, and his strokes went deep as he reached down and lifted her leg back up.

Her tongue slipped out of her mouth and licked her top lip, and that tiny motion made him snap his hips, slamming his balls hard into her ass.

She felt so damn good. He twisted her torso a bit so he could pound his balls harder against her fat ass cheeks, creating that loud sound he loved when bodies slapped together. She was whimpering by that point, and it just made him pound into her as hard as he could…

Until the condom broke.

"Shit," he said, pulling out suddenly. Well, damn. She had him busting condoms. Unusual for him.

"Give me a second. I'll put on a new one," he said tossing the broken one in the trash can near the bed. Grabbing another condom from the nightstand, he fixed himself back up. When he looked back at Califia, she was staring at him with relaxed eyes.

"Do you break condoms often?"

"No, not really."

They were both quiet for a moment. He thought he would tell her that he did have Plan B available if she was worried. But then, she might think it weird that a dude would have Plan B. He had to have extra backup protection, but perhaps she didn't need to know that right then. It might imply in her mind that he broke condoms a lot.

He leaned over and kissed her. She gave him a soft and loving smile, then turned her back against him again. She lifted her leg back up and he slipped back between her folds.

"You want to have me every morning?" she whispered.

"Yes," he said rocking long steady strokes into her.

He played a gentle rhythm on her clit and her body began to writhe on his dick. Yes, Bast. To have her in his bed and on his dick every morning. They could make that happen—

"Jobu!" she gasped, and he felt her insides grip him and he held onto her as her orgasm radiated out from her center and spasmed inside her back and shook her legs.

"Califia," he whispered into her neck. He kissed her nape and held her still for a moment. He pulled out of her and scooted back until he was pressed against his headboard.

"Get on top of me," he said reaching for her arm and helping her slide down on his dick. He kissed her deeply as she wrapped her arms around his neck. She knew what was coming.

"Just hang on, baby. That's all you have to do," he said.

He lifted her by her waist and felt her pussy slide up his dick and then he brought her back down, savoring the ripples inside her pussy as she plopped down smacking his balls. She barely had to do anything straddled on his lap. His strong arms did all the work, lifting her up. Dropping her back down. He found his own voice stammering pants as the loud slapping sounds of her ass pounding
him took over.

He thrust his hips to hit angles inside her walls that made her yelp with pleasure. She reached behind him to balance her hands on his headboard, and allowed him to continue. He stared at her tits bouncing to his rhythm and the Wakandan words just flowed from him, the clicks of his language mixing in with his moaning. He was compelled to talk to her as he fucked her. Not just the usual dirty talk he did, but more poetic language. It made him feel loopy, strange…this speaking Wakandan while fucking a foreigner was not the norm.

He did try to actively say things to her in English, but the way she felt on top of him made the English words go far away from his tongue. Feeling her pussy going up and down on his dick made him fixate on how many more times and how many more places he could fuck her before Bakari returned. Her body was fitting him in every way possible like she was built just for him. Only him.

He started thinking of her back at the club, swerving her hips as she served drinks, her ass cheeks bouncing as she walked. The English came back to him with heated words.

"Later today I'm going to spank this ass. I'm going to use a belt. You think I forgot how those dudes were touching you at the club last night? You thought I would let that slide?"

She whimpered out loud. He was slamming his cock hard into her making his balls bounce up with the force he was using.

"That wasn't my fault," she whined as he dropped her back onto his sack.

"I saw you! You were bending over…your ass was all in their faces. You can't deny that."

"That's not fair," she grunted. He hit a sweet spot inside her and she bit down on the wailing sound she was trying to control. He could barely keep his own voice together.

"You have to pay for that disrespect. I had to stand up there in V.I.P. and watch this ass sit all out for trash men to see. My ass. My tits. So disrespectful."

He slapped both her ass cheeks hard several times. He didn't bother to soothe her after the hard slaps. He meant business. He was going to tear that ass up.

"Yes, I can see it's time for you to get the belt today. You thought you were being sneaky walking around that place and showing people all that is mine. When I'm done, I'll make you suck my dick and then sit on my face—"

Something snapped in her and she threw her head back. She was cumming again? Already?

"Jobu!" His name flew out from her mouth, her face twisted, and he just watched the ecstasy flow through her as her walls squeezed him.

"Are you trying to make me bust another condom, girl?" he teased, but then his teasing stopped when he felt his balls tense. Her pussy was still throbbing on him.

"Whooo, baby…I'm cumming….ah…goddamit, Califia….I'm cumming, you're making me cum….FUCK," he yelled gripping her back and pulling her into him as he spasmed inside her. She shifted her hips on him.

"SHIT…I'm still…cum—"

Califia's arms held him tight as he lost his voice and buried his face in her breasts, his dick shooting semen into the condom longer than expected.
"You sure you can handle this every morning?" she teased.

He pulled his head back so he could look at her, sweat pouring from both of them.

"I can take anything you give me," he said, huffing and puffing as he said it. Her smile was broad and he chuckled a bit before gripping the base of his penis. Califia eased off of him carefully and they both checked the status of the condom. It was intact and very full.

N'Jobu got off the bed before slipping off the condom. He walked into the bathroom and disposed of it.

Looking in the bathroom mirror, his face was sweaty, but he looked satisfied. More than satisfied. Shit, his face was glowing. He could feel the strong pull of wanting to spank her right then, but the reality was, he wanted to have sex with her after he spanked her, and at that moment, she had him sated and drained. He needed to build up his energy.

"Do you need to use the restroom? I want to take a quick shower-"

She was running into the bathroom and shoving him out before he finished his thought. When the door slammed on him and he heard her peeing, he decided to fire off a text to Bakari. He needed to let his friend know that coming home would not be a good idea. He and Califia had a lot more exploring to do and they needed privacy to do it.

###

N'Jobu cooked Califia a large breakfast egg white omelet with toast, two caramel cappuccinos and a big slice of pie before he drove her over to pick up her bike. By the time they returned back to the apartment, they were both exhausted and took a long nap that extended into the late afternoon.

After their nap, they sat in bed together and talked about another book, watched a movie on his computer, and slept again until after five in the evening. He let Califia binge a comedy show in his bed while he cooked a seasoned green curry soup of potatoes and cauliflower and a side of fried plantains. There was leftover pepper steak that he cut up and mixed with brown rice. They ate their dinner in the living room watching the news on the tv. She was in her jeans and wearing another one of his t-shirts.

As they watched the news, he became aware that for the last few hours she seemed to anticipate him needing to spank her. But he decided to wait and drag it out. A slight agitation built up in her.

"What's the matter?" he asked when she seemed to be staring at him as he ordered food to be catered for his Christmas party on his laptop. They were still sitting on his couch watching TV.

"I thought you were going to spank me."

"I will."

"When?"

"When I'm ready."

She gave a pout and stared at the TV again. He worked on his computer, checked emails and class assignments. He could feel her stewing on her side of the couch, but he ignored it. She would build up tension, a little anger maybe, and this was exciting for him. Truth be told, they were still recuperating from Thanksgiving Day and the sex they had that morning. He liked how they fed off of one another sexually. He kept replaying how her orgasms would drag him to completion so fast.
He was going to have to re-learn how to pace himself with her.

His cell rang and he answered before looking at the caller ID.

"Hey," he said.

"I'm coming to the party still."

N'Jobu stood up and moved into the kitchen.


"Listen, I know you are with someone now and that's cool. Nance had a plus one, so is it cool if I'm his plus one?"

"Um…. I don't think that's a good idea."

Califia heard the name Bridgette, but she didn't react. N'Jobu took the rest of the call in his kitchen and she sat on the couch trying to process the day. Her body and mind felt relaxed and very comfortable in his space.

Their sex together was more than she thought it would be especially since they were still so new to each other's bodies. His licking and kissing her all over her back had been a new experience. It felt like he was turning on a machine inside her body, activating a part of her that had been in sleep mode for a lifetime of sexual encounters. She had back rubs and massages before, but this experience with N'Jobu was different. For one thing, he didn't rush, and because he didn't rush, she felt that they were really in the moment. She didn't think about trying to achieve an orgasm, she just focused in on him. He responded to her in ways that titillated her, like continually spinning a top, never letting it topple over, perpetual fluid motion. And his kisses. She sat back further on his couch. His kisses connected her to him in ways that she didn't expect. He had a curious tongue, and instead of the pushy dominating mouths she had made out with in the past (even Xavier), N'Jobu's mouth was welcoming. Inviting. It roamed and explored. And only when she was ready did it plunder and become merciless with need and want and greed. It was a honeyed mouth dripping with the power to make her reckless.

She wanted more.

She wanted to feel the sting of his hand on her ass, wanted to feel him taking her from behind while she was on her knees. She wanted to ride him, make him lose his voice again like he did when his orgasm took him by surprise that morning. Her eyes had bugged a little when she saw the amount of semen that filled the condom. Her mind was already taking her to thoughts of letting him cum inside of her without a condom. What would that feel like, letting him fill up her insides? That fat cock of his pumping everything into her. How raspy would his voice get as he called out her name? She felt her lower parts get stimulated by the visions in her head.

Keys jangled.

The front door opened and Bakari walked in.

"Hey," she said looking at him, hoping he couldn't read anything on her face.

Bakari's eyes swept over her then saw N'Jobu in the kitchen still on his cell.
"W'sup."

Bakari had an overnight bag slung over his shoulder.

"Smoke?" he asked.

"Sure," she said following him to his bedroom.

They sat on his bed and shared a fresh joint.

"You stayed over?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"Everything cool?"

She couldn't hide the smile brightening up her face.

"Ah, damn," Bakari said, chuckling under his breath.

"Ah damn what?" she said punching his shoulder and taking a long toke on the joint.

"He done put it on ya. I can tell. You got that look they all get."

"Shut up!" she said smacking him again.

Bakari took the joint and stared at her.

"Was it worth it?" he asked, his voice taking on a melancholy tinge.

She fell back on his bed and stroked her stomach.

"God yes," she huffed out, unable to hide the giddiness in her voice.

She sat up suddenly.

"He's on the phone with Bridgette right now," she said.

Bakari took a drag on the joint.

"Yeah, about that," he said.

Califia stared at Bakari. He rolled his eyes.

"What?" she implored.

"Don't be pissed, but I ran into my boy Nance when I was with Shavonne, and he's coming to the party. But Nance knows Bridgette and asked if it was cool if she could be his plus one and I said yeah, she was invited anyway. But then I forgot about you and N'Jobu."

"So that's why she's calling him," Califia said.

"My bad. It's going to take me a minute to get used to y'all being together."

"How do you really feel about it?"

"Look, I already told him if he hurts you I'm beating his ass. Not one tear better come out of your
"eyes over him."

"It's not going to weird out your friendship with him, is it?"

"I mean... I'm not trying to hear y'all fucking when I'm home. That would be hella uncomfortable. Like I seriously don't want to see you kissing or rubbing on each other—"

"Okay, dang, I get it."

"It's like incest to me—"

"Oh my God, shut up!"

"Are you happy?"

Her eyes turned shy and Califia looked away from Bakari.

"It's all new and shit... but he excites me... and the sex... oh my God—"

"TMI! TMI! Too much information on that end. Stop. Please," Bakari said handing her back the joint.

A knock at the door stopped their banter.

"Come in, man," Bakari called.

N'Jobu walked in looking sheepish.

"Can I talk to you Califia?" he said, his eyes glancing at Bakari.

"Yeah," Califia said taking one last puff and giving the joint back to Bakari.

###

Back inside his bedroom, Califia sat in the wing-back chair and watched N'Jobu pace a moment before he sat on his bed staring at her.

"Bridgette called me and she still wants to come to the party. She knows I'm with someone now, but she wanted to come with another friend. We know a lot of the same people who I invited and she still wanted to come to see them."

"It's cool, N'Jobu. I don't care if she comes. I don't want you to feel awkward if you wanted to disinvite her. Bakari told me you guys have mutual friends. It's all good."

She saw N'Jobu's shoulders ease.

"I'm glad," he said.

She got up from the chair and sauntered over to him.

"So now that Bakari is here, I guess our little spanking party will have to be put on hold then?"

She sat down on his lap and he held her waist.

"I don't think that you and I together can be quiet enough anywhere," he said.

"True," she said.
He looked up into her eyes. His lips moved like he wanted to say something, but he kissed her instead, his lips supplying her mouth with all his honeyed goodness. She held her arm around his neck and gave into his softness.

"Y'all better not be fucking in there! That's gross!" Bakari called out.

"Shut up Bakari!" She yelled back and N'Jobu burst out laughing and hugged her tight.

###

Califia sat on her grandmother's steps between Serah's legs as the Cameroonian beauty added extra auburn hair extensions to the Senegalese twists she was putting into Califia’s hair. Five bags of long auburn hair bundles, a pair of scissors, a small container filled with hair clips laid near Serah's legs. Califia held a jar of mango edge control and a wide-tooth comb in her hands.

Music played from Serah's phone and the two women caught up. Califia was thrilled when four days before N'Jobu's party Serah showed up to surprise her. Ever since Serah left for Florida, she and Califia stayed in touch, did occasional Google chats, and genuinely developed a good friendship.

Califia thought it might feel strange to stay friends with a woman who had a previous sexual relationship with her boyfriend, but Serah was unconventional and completely open about her past with N'Jobu.

She learned from Serah that N'Jobu was a very private person who often had to fly out of state for family reasons he never disclosed in detail. He was a loyal friend and a generous one, actually paying for her flight and that of her new British-Ghanian boyfriend so that they could spend the weekend in San Francisco and come to the party.

Califia didn't want to get into the sexual aspect of Serah's past with N'Jobu, but the subject came up from Serah as they sat on the porch.

"Don't feel weird about talking to me about it," Serah said, reaching for new hair from Califia's lap. She twisted the synthetic hair with Califia's own strands.

"I know shit is great with you two," she said.

"How do you know?"

"I see it in your face. You have the face of a woman who gets it often and gets it done well. Trust. He's beating that thang up good and proper, sis!"

They cackled together.

"Girl, I'm so glad I found Addae. Good dick is so hard to find out there, my God."

Califia loved the sound of Serah's accent when she said "God." It sounded like "Godtt"

"I was starving in Florida. I am not the celibate type. And dildos don't help me at all."

"How did you meet Addae?"

"At the museum. He was checking out the space to hold a political fundraising party for a friend, and I gave him the tour. Love at first sight, eh!"

"Really?"
"Yes. I admit, once you've been around N'Jobu, it's hard for other men to measure up. I'm not talking sex, but the entire aura. The confidence. How to treat a woman. How people respond to him. N'Jobu has these aristocratic tendencies, that while annoying at times, can be a turn on. You know what I mean. He comes off like he's better than everyone, not overtly, but just how he carries himself."

"Yeah, I know."

"That shadow of his follows when you leave him, so you can't help but compare new men to him. I tried my best to not let that hinder my dating choices, but your man spoiled me for others."

Calafia felt her ears get warm from hearing the brazen talk about the man she was sleeping with. She felt a sense of pride and actual sexual excitement listening to Serah talk about him in that way. Perhaps Bridgette, Andrea, and Ren (and countless others) felt the same way once he left them. Somewhere they could be pining for him while she was the one getting all of his attention, getting all of his dick, getting all of his...love? The perverse pleasure of hoping all those women thought of him while they had sex with others rippled through her stomach. It felt petty and catty and all the things she normally despised, but N'Jobu brought it out of her. He was like the sun dipped in all that gorgeous melanin and they were all flowers moving to catch his rays. She felt her body react to thoughts of him and tried to concentrate on Serah's words.

"But then Addae walked in. Six foot three inches of West African fineness. God Bless Ghana. I took one look at him and my ovaries exploded on sight!"

They both laughed.

"That's lust, girl, not love!" Califia said.

"No, no...lust was there, but underneath it...I felt this pull...this tugging at my heart. I knew. This man was for me. I didn't know him at all, but I knew he was the one. And it turned out to be true."

Serah continued working on Califia's hair.

"Do you think N'Jobu has ever been in love with the women he used to be with?" Califia's voice was cautious. Serah kept working the hair.

"He did not love me if that's what you want to know. We had fun and we liked each other very much. But we were not meant for each other. I never loved him in that way either."

Serah nudged her fingers under Califia's chin and turned it towards her so that they were eye to eye.

"Are you worried about something?" she asked.

"Bridgette is coming to the party."

"Ah, Bridgette."

Serah released Califia's chin and resumed twisting and gathering strands of Califia's hair.

"I doubt that he had any deep feelings for the random ones I know of. But Bridgette...I have to say, she was different. He spent more time with her, and I knew she was crazy about him. I thought he might actually be feeling something for her because he called me and told me about getting back with her—"

"Wait...what? When was this?"
“This was before you, right before your dance shows. He said she wanted to get back together and he thought it was a good idea and then…nothing. Next thing I see on social media was a status change and him texting me about you.”

“Me? He texted you?”


Cali's face was twisted up in confusion. Serah stopped laughing.

“Cali! You don't know? Oh, girl. Really?”

“Really what?”

“N'Jobu is head over heels in love with you. You didn't know? He didn't say anything to you?”

The expression on Cali's face made Serah grin. She patted Cali's shoulder.

“Clearly I have revealed something that he hasn't yet. I didn't know he hadn't said anything to you or expressed that to you yet. Sorry—”

“No, I just…I didn't know he was talking to you about me like that. I mean, it's cool and it's his business. I just…he told you he loved me?”

“I'm not going to say anything more. Let me finish these twists. My God, now I feel bad for telling you all that.”

“I'm glad you did. I was worried about Bridgette coming through. I was trying to be all cool and adult, tryna be like you and now…”

“Now you have nothing to worry about…oh love, why are you crying?”

Serah reached down and wiped tears from Cali's eyes.

“Do you love him too?” Serah asked.

Cali closed her eyes and nodded her head.

“Oh, honey…love is a good thing. A precious thing. You two are so lucky to have it. You can relax when he goes home knowing when he comes back everything will be straight fire between you two. The sex will be off the chain…Cali…Cali? What's wrong?”

“We won't get to be together. You know he has to go home eventually for good.”

Serah took a deep breath. She leaned forward and embraced Cali in a tight hug.

“I wasn't thinking,” Serah said, "now I know why he kept quiet. Now I know.”

Cali clung to Serah and wept. She had kept all of that fear inside of her. She said nothing to her other friends because she knew they would convince her to break up with him, to get it over with now before they went to far. But it was too late. She could admit it to herself that she had fallen down for him the moment he whispered in her ear at the Wakanda museum exhibit. When he told her one day he would take her to his home country. She fell for him willingly, throwing her heart in front of her, aiming straight for his chest.
The past three weeks they had been at each other non-stop. She was staying the night with him at his place three nights a week. Sometimes with the stress of school, they’d just hold each other all night to decompress. And every morning that she was naked in his bed, right before the sun had risen to full glory, N’Jobu would nuzzle her neck and she would lift and open up her legs for him. If Bakari was home, the morning sex would become even more intense as they tried to be as quiet as possible, Califia often biting into N’Jobu's shoulder to stifle her cries.

Their fucking had changed after four or five sessions to straight up lovemaking, even in the midst of the wildness they brought to his bedroom. Things had shifted. She found herself crying every time they finished making love. That good and satisfied type of crying. And neither one of them could admit to the other that the change was serious. N’Jobu had to text and secretly talk to his former lover, the one person who could probably understand his predicament more than anyone else. And Califia didn't want to tell her people because they would just want to protect her, even if they liked N’Jobu a lot.

They both went into a relationship that was circling a drain from the start. How stupid, she thought. How stupid. Walked into the madness on purpose. Like walking onto a busy highway knowing one would get hit. That old moth and flame bullshit. She was angry at herself for putting herself in this situation. She was always popping off and doing things without thinking them through. Like an idiot, she hitched her wagon to the guy who clearly stated, "I am really not the one you should mess with," and she ridiculously said, "Bitch, yes you are because I'm stupid."

"Califia. This is what I want you to do. Don't think about the future right now, okay? Let's focus on making this hair fierce, finding a sexy outfit to wear to your man's Christmas party tomorrow so that he spends the whole night fantasizing about blowing your back out and pulling on this hair. Then when we all leave, you two make the sweetest, nastiest, raunchiest love ever. You let him give you all that good-good tomorrow night and he'll fly to Wakanda the next day a happy man ready to get back to you fast. Just focus on that."

Califia smiled and let Serah wipe away her tears. But her eyes and mind were already a year and a half ahead, dreading the day N’Jobu would step on a plane and leave her. Forever.

She pulled herself together.

"Okay. Thinking about the party. Whip this hair up, Serah!"

"That's more like it!"

###
This Could Be Love

Chapter Summary

N'Jobu's Christmas party. Exes everywhere. And all skinfolk ain't kinfolk.

Chapter Notes

I actually had to split this chapter in two because it was so long. Chp 18 should be up tomorrow late afternoon, as we get N'Jobu on the plane.

Thanks for keeping up with me!
Also, feel free to steer me to some other Black Panther fanfics.

"Sounds just like it, looks just like it, feels just like it
Like this could be love
Hurts just like it, feels just like it, real just like it
Like this could be love
Speechless he's just
If I can only put it in words
But I know that it feels good
He's my weakness
I can't explain how it works
But to me it's real
(And I hope I'm not wrong)
And I got you dead on
And everything's still good
But I'm losin control…"

Lalah Hathaway— "This Could Be Love"

Serah and her boyfriend/fiancé Addae picked up Califia at her grandmother's house in a rental SUV. Swinging her new twists in a high ponytail, Califia sported tight white shorts and a soft thin mint green cowl neck sweater with a giant reindeer on it as she clip-clopped down the steps in a pair of black lace-up open-toed high heels.

"Bitch!" Serah screamed, staring at Califia's heels and snapping her fingers from the passenger side of the car.

Califia fake modeled her way down the steps while posing in her heels. When she jumped into the backseat, she introduced herself to Addae who smiled at her from the driver's seat.

"Califia, that sweater is too cute for the ugly Christmas sweater contest," Serah whined.

"Girl, I sewed this thing on, I wasn't buying no ugly ass sweater for real."
On the ride over to N'Jobu and Bakari's, Califia learned about Serah's day sight-seeing with Addae, and running into Andrea over at the Berkley campus. Califia was all ears.

"So, I'm just trying to warn you, this bird may show up tonight," Serah said.

"Oh, Jeez…"

"Addae, babe, you may have to play bouncer tonight. Califia's boyfriend could have a dozen ex-girlfriends at this party," Serah said giggling while checking her cell.

"Wasn't he your boyfriend at one time?" Addae asked.

"Okay, a dozen and one then, damn…this could get ugly real fast," Serah said and Califia just giggled from the back.

"I can't wait to meet this Wakandan Don Juan."

"Oh, he's no Don Juan anymore. Califia has him locked up tight."

"Now you have me being paranoid back here," Califia said.

"Girl, don't even trip. Those women know better than to act a fool in front of N'Jobu. Plus, I'll be there, so those clucks won't try anything. Trust me."

Califia didn't know how much backstory Serah had given Addae, but the fact that he was quite chill with going to the party, and didn't ask any questions about the complications was interesting.

"Do you think Andrea will come?"

"She told me she was. I saw her at the campus Starbucks. I tried to ignore her, but I guess she felt less threatened when she saw me with Addae. Apparently, she's now dating one of Bakari's friends who drums with him."

"Who?!" Califia said leaning forward from the backseat.

"Babe, what name did she say? Corey? Chris-?"

"Corliss?!" Califia practically yelled from the backseat.

"Yes, that's it, Corliss. You know him?"

"Yes, I dance for the drum group they belong to. Oh my God. She's going out with him? I can't believe it. He's such a snob."

"She is one too," Serah said.

"Really?"

"Oh yes, her entire squad of friends is very elitist. I've run into them at campus events before."

Califia saw Addae giving Serah a little side-eye.

"Okay, yes, Addae, I'm elitist myself, but I'm one of the nice ones. Aren't I Califia?" Serah said looking back at her.

"I don't really think of you as elitist, Serah. You're very cool, and I've never seen you talk down to
"See, Addae?" Serah said, slapping her man's shoulder.

"Hand around her long enough, Califia, and you will see her upper echelon snobbery. Serah comes from very old money."

"Stop it, Addae. Don't tell my friend lies about me. It's the new money folks that act foolish. Anyway, she was trying to sniff out info about N'Jobu."

"What did you tell her?"

"That he had this fine ass new girlfriend who would be at the party making everyone look like peasants. And bitch, you came through! Yes, hair! Yes, titty-sitting sweater! Yes, legs! Yes, ass! Yes, shoes!"

Califia finger snapped with Serah.

When they reached the complex, they had to find street parking and walk to the gated entrance. A young white teenaged boy dressed in a Charlie Brown Christmas sweater and wearing a Santa hat greeted them at the closed gate carrying a touchpad screen.

"Are you here for Mr. N'Jobu's Christmas party?" he asked.

"Yes, we are," Califia said giving Serah a quizzical look.

"Names?"

They gave their names and the young man looked for them on his invite list.

"You're all set," he said.

The young teen waved a pass card in front of the walk-in gate and they were able to stroll in.

"Thank you," Califia said.

"The party is located to the back and left. You'll see directions posted," the teen said.

The trio made their way towards the back of the complex and could already hear music thumping and lots of voices. When they reached their destination, Califia's eyes grew wide. The entire pool and jacuzzi area were filled with people. They could see that the all-purpose room that housed the bulk of the party was jumping too.

"Well damn," Califia said.

Some people were swimming in the heated pool, some were dipping in and out of the good-sized jacuzzi, while others stood around heated lamps talking and drinking from fancy plastic cups.

Standing at the entrance of the all-purpose room, Califia couldn't believe how the space had been transformed. Decorated with Christmas lights, balloons, a giant Christmas tree, and a live D.J., they stood there a bit stunned trying to take it all in.

"Did you know he was doing all this?" Serah asked.

"No," Califia said as she saw a wait staff person from the catering team approach them with a tray of champagne. Another tray went by with gourmet sliders. Califia scarfed down a slider and chugged a
plastic glass of champagne to chase it.

"Cali!"

She heard Bakari's voice boom over the music as he walked over to them and gave her a hug. He was dressed in a cherry red Wu-Tang Forever Christmas Sweater and crisp brand-new jeans.

"What. The. Hell.," Califia said, her face breaking out into a huge grin.

"Wild as fuck, right? Your boy went all out. Caterers, bar staff, set-up, and clean-up crew. Get this, he even hired a professional lifeguard and extra security to appease management for letting us keep the pool and jacuzzi open until midnight."

Before she could ask another question, Rolita, Soliel, and Aunjanue ran over holding mixed drinks inside plastic cups and hugged her. Everyone was dressed up and wearing some sort of Christmas-themed outfit.

"Where's N'Jobu?" she asked Bakari.

Bakari pointed to the mini-bar in the back.

N'Jobu stood center stage near the bar with his back to the entrance. Draped in a white tight-fitting tunic with light-colored linen pants, N'Jobu was surrounded by a group of impressive-looking Black men who were laughing with him and thoroughly engaged with whatever story he was telling them. As Califia made her way towards him, a few of the men noticed her and stopped looking at N'Jobu. She was very perceptive as to what they were thinking as she sauntered up in her shorts and heels.

No longer holding sway over his male audience, N'Jobu turned around to see what had captivated his crew.

The look from his eyes when he saw her was a familiar one.

She remembered the time when she had finished speaking at Bakari's BSU meeting and just wanted to get a plate of Ethiopian food, how she had made her way to sustenance and found N'Jobu staring at her for the first time in that way. It felt like he was seeing her brand new, fresh out the box. His eyes sought out hers, then they dropped down to her legs and she could swear that she could feel his eyeballs touching her skin as they raked up her body. She saw his lip poke out a bit like he wanted to sop her up with some biscuits and gravy. The only thought that ran through her head after that was that he loved her. And he was afraid to tell her. She felt nervous warmth blooming in her face.

He held out his left hand for her. She took it when she reached him.

"Califia," he said in a long drawl. He swung her around so the other men could see his hand drop down to her ass as he bent down and kissed the living daylights out of her in front of them. Tongue and everything.

She was winded when he released her. At that moment she ached to have his lips on other parts of her body. Her skin felt jumpy from the intensity. She had to pat her mouth afterward to make sure she still had lips.

"Gentlemen, this is my lady, Califia Stevens."

Califia felt the slight tension among the men as N'Jobu non-verbally laid down the pecking order and rules of her presence at his party: she was not to be touched or approached by anyone who had a notion to flex. It was that visceral to her.
The kiss had her feeling a bit woozy, and he kept his arm around her and pulled her in tight so that her thighs and mid-section were pressed into him. When she was confident that she wouldn't start dry humping her man's thigh, Califia turned to look at his friends.

There were smiles from the various attractive faces, and there were also a few predatory looks. He introduced them all by name, which she quickly forgot because his hand was caressing the small of her back and distracting her.

She rested a hand on his chest, wanting to touch his face and kiss him again.

"Oh, wait, you're the dancer who did that show at the McKenna Theater, right?" asked a tall slender guy named Moises with a Nigerian accent.

"Yes. We just finished our run," she said. Moises ran his eyes down and then up her frame. She felt N'Jobu's body tense.

"Don't," N'Jobu said. They all heard the added bass in his voice directed towards Moises. Moises turned away from looking at Califia.

"You all continue your fun. I'm going to mingle a little bit with my woman."

The other men nodded and smiled respectfully towards her. N'Jobu clasped her hand and escorted her throughout the room.

She smiled at people she didn't know and greeted them warmly. She hugged and sister-girl rocked the people she did know. One thing was clear, N'Jobu was the cock of the walk. People made space for him when he made the rounds inside and outside. Not just because it was his party, but because he commanded that type of deference. His people were most definitely checking her out hard, while hers (and Bakari's, the ones who had never met N'Jobu) were looking a bit awestruck by him. It was the Xavier 180 effect. N'Jobu was so different from what she usually attached herself to.

By the time they made it around the entire circuit, it was clear that N'Jobu had crowned her Belle of the Ball. She caught some snide looks from some women she didn't know, and automatically wondered if they were exes or wanted-to-be-but-never-weres. All she knew was that her hair was hella cute, her lip gloss was bumping (what was left of it), and her legs and thighs were bringing it, despite the razor cuts she gave her ankle trying to shave that morning. She even used leftover glitter lotion from the dance show to make her legs shimmer.

The party was an eclectic mix of undergrads, grad students, professors, visiting scholars, artists, musicians, and activists. Multicultural and very multi-ethnic, it was an interesting potpourri of elites and street culture.

Califia excused herself at one point to hang with Bakari and Soliel as Aunjanue pontificated on the need for Americans to become multilingual and less dogmatic about painting themselves as the liberators of the world. Some of N'Jobu's classmates were listening in, and Califia found one white woman staring at her so intently that it made her uncomfortable.

"Do I know you from somewhere?" Califia asked the lanky brunette.

"No," the woman said, sipping a mixed drink and playing with her loose curls.

"How do you know N'Jobu?" Califia asked.

"We share a few graduate classes together and hang out sometimes."

"Do I know you from somewhere?" Califia asked the lanky brunette.

"No," the woman said, sipping a mixed drink and playing with her loose curls.

"How do you know N'Jobu?" Califia asked.

"We share a few graduate classes together and hang out sometimes."
The woman didn't offer any other information, and her body language was laid back. But there was something smug in her eyes that Califia didn't like.

"I thought maybe you knew me or something."

"Pardon?"

"You were looking at me kinda hard, so I thought maybe you knew me."

"I was just checking out the scene. Your sweater is cute."

"Thanks," Califia said turning away and walking to another group of people she knew. Something about the woman was irking her. When she turned back to look at her again, the woman had moved over to a cluster of people talking near the entrance of the all-purpose room. Califia immediately recognized a lavender wrap-around dress and a razor-sharp symmetrical haircut. Bridgette. She watched the brunette whisper something to Bridgette and Califia quickly faced the other way and focused on finding one of the catering staff to grab a drink.

She found respite on a lounge chair by herself on the far side of the pool.

Rolita and Serah came strolling over carrying small snack plates. Serah grabbed her by her hand and pulled her over by a fake potted plant.

"So, word on the street. Are you ready?" Serah asked.

"Sure," Califia said.

"Bridgette and Ren are here,…in fact, that's Ren in the pool right now… and Andrea just arrived five minutes ago…no! Don't be obvious and look around. My God, you amateur. This is the strategy… fuck 'em."

Rolita started snort laughing. Califia rolled her eyes.

"That's the strategy?"

"Bitch, that's all I have. Plus, I'm already drunk on this Christmas punch. Have you all tried the Christmas punch? Strong as hell."

"Addae needs to watch you," Califia said.

"Addae is busy talking to the Pan African squad inside. Did you meet N'Jobu's crew?"

"Yes."

"I had to leave them fast. Some of the thirstiest and most arrogant dudes. This one guy was staring at me so hard, I thought he could see right through my dress. Addae wasn't even paying attention. He was happy to run into a fellow Ghanaian."

"N'Jobu gave them a firm warning for me."

"Of course, he did. Look at you. And whatever hold you have on him has him switching up his game."

"What do you mean?"

"Normally he's very open with women touching him, but I saw him set some pretty hard boundaries
with several women. Ren went up to him and tried to hug up on him, but he shot that down real quick. Oh, she mad. Believe me. Uh oh, possible drama at three o'clock."

Rolita and Califia turned in the direction Serah indicated and saw Andrea following Corliss. N'Jobu was walking in their direction. Califia felt her heart jitter in her chest. Andrea's demeanor seemed to perk up when she saw N'Jobu. He stopped and chatted with her briefly after giving her a slight hug, but his eyes were looking around the pool as he spoke. When he saw Califia, he ended the chat and came straight for her.

"See? He's not even thinking about anyone else," Serah said.

A white male professor from N'Jobu's economics class stopped him to chat. N'Jobu held up a finger for Califia, indicating that he would be there to get her in a moment. Califia smiled and felt her feet rocking in her heels.

"They're bringing out more food, I'll see you two later," Rolita said.

"Wait for me, I need more wine," Serah said, linking her arm with Rolita.

Califia watched her friends walk away. She felt her cell vibrate in her small purse. She pulled it out.

A missed call from Xavier followed by a voicemail from him. Califia checked her voice to text function, but he didn't leave a message. Why was he calling? She hadn't heard from him since their phone break up.

Her stomach did a slight tumble. She shouldn't even care about a call from him. But she was curious. N'Jobu was still talking with the professor. She turned away from the party and dialed Xavier's number.

He picked up on the third ring.

"Hey," she said.

"Cali," he said.

"So, what's going on? Why are you calling?"

"I'm leaving for New Orleans tonight. I just wanted to wish you a Merry Christmas. You were on my mind the last couple of days, so I decided to reach out…"

Califia closed her eyes and exhaled a held breath.

"I'm sorry about how shit went down with us," he said.

"Me too," she said walking out of the pool area and heading to one of the apartment complex benches situated near a carport.

"How've you been? School term end okay for you?"

"Yeah. Still made the Dean's list despite all the hectic schedules I was under."

"Glad to hear that."

They were quiet together. She could hear party noise filtering behind her.

"I was able to catch your show on the last day," he said.
"Oh, yeah?"

"You were on point. Like always. I don't know if you needed to be showing all that ass at the end, but hey…"

They laughed together. She felt a weight lifting from her chest; a lightening of spirit.

"Well, I'm not going to hold you up. Just wanted to hear your voice. I really miss you, Califia. I know niggas don't miss their water until the well runs dry and shit, but…real talk…you'll always be special to me. I wanted you to know that…hey, my flight is boarding. Let me let you go…"

"Xavier—"

He had hung up.

Califia cradled her phone to her chest. A sadness crept into her heart. He had been gentle. That's what she missed the most from their relationship. The ending had been brittle and coarse, but on the phone just now, she remembered how he could be gentle.

"Hey."

N'Jobu handed her a cup of white wine.

"Important?" he asked looking at her phone. She dropped the cell into her purse.

"Xavier," she said and waited to see what his reaction would be to the name.

N'Jobu sat next to her. Waited. She rubbed her hand on her thigh.

"He just left for New Orleans. He wanted to wish me a Merry Christmas and…tell me he was sorry how things went down for us."

"You good?"

"Yeah. He caught me by surprise. We haven't been in contact at all since we broke up. I was going to ignore his call actually."

"Why didn't you?"

N'Jobu's voice was calm. Measured. Califia crossed her legs and leaned in towards him.

"I was curious. It feels like real closure now."

"So, until this phone call, you didn't feel like you had closure with him?"

Califia sensed some stressors in N'Jobu's tone.

"Not really. I figured I'd have to talk to him eventually. Every one of my exes I've ever had dealt with some backsliding…wait, that's not what I meant. I mean, every break up I've had usually had some later contact to smooth things over. Closure."

"Closure was you leaving him. There's no need to contact each other after that."

N'Jobu's tone was abrupt. A bit callous to Califia's ears.

"Your having a bunch of exes walking around your party in front of me is your way of having..."
closure? I gotta have those bitches all in my face, but my ex can't make a simple phone call to tell me he's sorry?"

Califia felt her neck cock to the side and her left hand reflexively clenched like she was ready to fight.

"They were never my girlfriends."

"I'd say Bridgette was pretty much your girlfriend… you were ready to get back with her from what I hear."

Califia stood up fast, spilling a little wine on the grass. She chugged the entire contents down and headed back to the party. N'Jobu followed close behind.

"Califia, hold on—"

"I'm good. I see how this works. I'll let you be a hypocrite. I won't spoil your shindig."

N'Jobu grabbed her shoulder, then threw his arms around her chest, stopping her. She kept her body stiff, even though she could feel the muscles in his arms surrounding her with his warmth. She let her arms go slack. He moved his lips to her ear.

"Don't be like this. Not now. I only have about twenty-four hours left before I'm on a plane. I won't see you for a month. Let's be cool."

"You be cool then," she said.

"I can do that."

"I didn't have to tell you who was on the phone—"

"I know-"

"You let Bridgette call you and I didn't say shit to you, did I?"

"No."

"Then don't be a dick."

N'Jobu squeezed her and gave her a kiss on her neck. She closed her eyes and continued to remain stiff in his arms.

"Califia," he said, running his lips to the other side of her neck. His hands dropped to her waist and he rubbed her stomach.

His lips opened wider and he began to suck on her neck, hitting her spot. She pulled away, but he pulled her back and ran his tongue up to her ear.

"Califia," he said again, and she felt the soft and warm flicks of his tongue in and out of her ear.

"I mean it, N'Jobu. Don't play with me."

"I won't."

His hands ran up under her sweater and cupped her breasts inside her push up bra. She felt his tongue sink deeper into the shell of her ear. His fingers slipped inside her bra and tweaked her
nipples and she felt her knees quake.

His mouth went back to her neck and she arched into him, her breath control slipping.

"After this party is all over, I want you," he said.

"Yeah?" she answered pushing her backside into him. He pinched her nipples harder and her lips pressed into a tight line. She could see people by the pool, and some were watching them.

"How do you want me?" She asked, circling her hips, feeling a slight poke coming from his pants.

"On all fours, so I can hit it from the back."

"Ooohhh," she uttered.

"Shhhhh," he said.

"People are watching us," she said.

"Don't change the subject. I need to get four weeks' worth of pussy from you before I go."

"You so stupid," she said, pulling his hands away from her breasts. She turned to face him.

"I'm just trying to warn you. I plan on being in you all night. I might be busting a whole box of condoms. Get ready."

"Maybe we don't need to use condoms at all then," she said, backing away from him.

The look in his eyes made her feel shivery all over. The burning intensity she saw there let her know she struck a nerve. She ran her fingers of her right hand between her legs and patted herself.

"As many times as you want, all inside of me, baby."

She walked away from him swaying her hips extra hard, letting him know she was dead serious. As that old Aretha song said, she was going to give him something he could feel all the way over in Wakanda. She was going to make him remember why he stopped playing around with all those other women. Even the ones in his own country.

###

N'Jobu kept his eye on Califia the rest of the night. She had him pretty shook up telling him he could cum inside her without any protection.

Bast, be a rock.

He knew she was clean, knew she wasn't out to trap him with any baby and took her birth control like clockwork, but he felt nervous. He had never cum inside anyone before. Mouths, yes. Occasional unprotected anal intercourse with safe women, yes. But vaginally? Never. The anticipation had heightened his senses. Every time she walked past him, he was reaching out trying to touch her in some way. A couple of times he cornered her near the all-purpose room restroom, shoving her against the wall and tonguing her down. He followed her when she went to share a quick smoke session with Bakari and Rolita behind his apartment near some bushes. When Bakari and Rolita went to re-join the party, N'Jobu hemmed Califia up, making her unbutton her shorts so he could finger her, sliding her panties to the side, playing in her folds until his fingers pruned up from her wetness. He denied her an orgasm, so he knew she was just as aroused as he was.
If he wasn't sneaking squeezes to her breasts, he was trying to make her sit on his lap on a lounge chair near the far end of the pool, so he could get her to bounce a little on his dick when no one was watching.

During the ugly sweater contest, N’Jobi could barely keep track of his judging duties because he was whispering in Califia's ear about how far his dick would go down her throat and in her pussy. She was damn near torturing him when she would whisper back, "Please fuck me good, Daddy, I want that deep dick."

At one point he let her go dance with her friends when the D.J. started playing hip-hop re-mixes. He grabbed another drink and stood by his squad as they watched the party-goers dance inside the all-purpose room. The D.J., who was a buddy of Bakari's, seemed to keep everyone happy with his choice of music. Moises sidled up to him.

"This Califia…you seem to really be into her, bruv." Moises said, his eyes laser-focused on Califia's ass.

"She's choice," N'Jobu said.

"She must be, but you should know, Bridgette is a little salty about it."

N'Jobu looked Moises in the eye. The rest of his squad were listening and watching closely. Moises gave N'Jobu a smile that was a bit cocky as he stroked his beard and turned his head to look back at Califia.

"I can understand why you would get with that one there…the body is ridiculous, bruv. I know you hitting like a monster with it. But watch out. Little bees have been buzzing in Bridgette's ear all night —"

"Watch your mouth—" N'Jobu warned.

Moises chuckled.

"I'm keeping it level, bruv," Moises said.

Their Ghanaian friend Danso chimed in.

"N'Jobu, Bridgette has been overheard saying some disparaging things about you…and Califia to some other guests."

"Like what?"

Danso's eyes glanced around to see who was listening. Most people were focused on dancing and drinking. They were cloistered near the back.

"Like what, Danso?" N'Jobu said turning to face the man.

"That you cheated on her with Califia. That you made Califia break-up with her boyfriend so you could get with her."

N'Jobu's eyes became laser-focused.

"So, it's true?" Danso asked, his face registering surprise.

"I've never cheated on anyone," N'Jobu said.
"Well, you need to put your other woman in check then, because some people here are not looking on too kindly towards Califia. You know how women can get. A woman scorned, does that ring a bell?" Moises said.

Danso interjected.

"Things seem to be fine right now, but maybe you should talk to Bridgette, or keep Califia away from her," he said.

N'Jobu was getting irritated.

"Speak of the devil," Moises said looking behind them.

Bridgette came into their midst, a red plastic cup in her hand and her eyes a bit glassy and slightly red.

"Lookie here, the gang's all here," she said, holding up her cup in a toast.

"Come with me," N'Jobu said, clasping her elbow and guiding her out of the room. Califia watched him leave with her but kept dancing.

They walked outside, past the jacuzzi, and past the pool. He took her far away from prying eyes and ears.

"When I agreed to let you come here with Nance, you said you wouldn't trip about me being with someone new."

Bridgette drank from her cup and smoothed her hair from her eyes.

"You seem to be bad-mouthing other people, but you have nothing to say to me now?"

"Bad-mouthing? Speaking truth, you mean?" she said.

"Bridgette, I never cheated on you. You knew what this was…"

"I thought maybe we could be different this time around. After we talked and got together that time for dinner, I was under the impression that we were making something—"

"Things happen—"

"You had me believing…"

Her voice dropped and she just stared at him.

N'Jobu crossed his arms and shifted into a wide leg stance.

"I thought I could handle being here. I'm glad I got to see my friends…and you. But…I started hearing things, and you cut me off so abrupt. Then to see how you are with her…it hurt me. I hurt, N'Jobu."

Bridgette's eyes grew watery, but she didn't spill any tears.

"You play with women. You use them. I know you like to think you're all sophisticated by being open and up front like it makes you some kind of special enlightened male. But, underneath, it's the same old fuckery. You use honesty to be dishonest—"
"Just stop. I haven't done anything wrong. We had a thing. I thought maybe it could work again, but I met someone and I changed my mind—"

"You didn't just meet her."

"What does it matter?!"

N'Jobu sounded loud and harsh.

"What do you want me to say?" he asked, modulating his tone.

"Nothing, I guess," she rubbed her arms.

"I am sorry it didn't happen again for us. I really am."

N'Jobu stepped forward and placed his arms around her. He felt her warm breath on his chest as she spoke.

"I really thought there could be a future for us, N'Jobu. I really did. Despite all your protests and our fights, I thought I could will it to happen. You take and take, but you never really give."

Her eyes looked up into his. Whatever she saw there made her eyes somber and she pulled away from him.

"I wish you the best," she said, walking away from him.

He watched her make her way back to the pool, then turned around and headed for his apartment. The temperature was cooler and it helped clear his head as he climbed the steps to his place.

He used the restroom, wiped down his face with cool water to ease the tension in his forehead. It was a mistake. A mistake to let Bridgette and Andrea come. It was a mistake that made Califia upset. He knew his boys would rub it in once he interacted with them again, so he needed some time away from the party to re-charge his game face.

Bridgette had filled him with guilt and made him question his past with her. He did have great affection for her when they were together. But it didn't match the intensity he felt when he was with Califia. He had known Bridgette longer, but in the brief amount of time he had been around Califia, she felt more like a lifetime and he was in love. A first for him. The roiling emotions she brought out of him, the constant thoughts of making sure she was safe, or without want consumed him. His first clue was the intensity of their lovemaking. His second clue was the intensity of needing to be around her even if they were just reading poetry to each other, or chopping up vegetables in his kitchen, listening to music and not even talking to each other. He couldn't even get a good night's sleep if she wasn't in his bed. Most nights she would cradle his head on her chest, rubbing his scalp in gentle concentric circles and tell him about her capoeira class with children at the community center or fussing with her cousins, or visits to see her father in prison. She could paint a whole world with just her words, and the sound of her voice was a siren's call to peace in his heart.

When he made her quit working at the Blue Rose and she fusses with him about having an income, he sent money to a cash app that was the equivalent of what she would make in six months. On his desk at that moment was an envelope filled with two thousand dollars cash for her to use quickly in case of an emergency while he was gone. She was leery about taking it, questioning his use of it to control her, making her dependent on him. He convinced her to house sit in exchange for it. Bakari was leaving for D.C. and would be gone for two weeks. No one would be at the apartment. She could watch their space, care for their plants, and have a quiet place for herself. She agreed to do it.
He was already thinking of the ridiculous notion of getting a separate apartment just for him and her. Bakari was already dropping hints about moving in with Shavonne the following July when their lease was up. Setting up a house with Califia was something he thought of more and more.

The difficult part of imagining outlandish plans with the woman he loved was not telling her about that love. The main reason was he didn't want to scare her off. Falling in love was not on his to-do list. Extreme like was acceptable. But love…if this was truly what he believed it to be…?

He hoped that her feelings ran as deep as his. She never told him anything outright, but the way she expressed herself to him in other ways—the way her body took him in, the way she looked at him slyly when she thought he didn't see—it told him she was feeling something profound too. At least he hoped so. He could just be projecting because he was so caught up in his love for her. Love that was shaky and fresh and wobbly like a newborn foal.

He found himself in uncharted territory with her, and thus far the trip was going well in his eyes.

He was starting to feel the dread of time as it was slowly creeping closer to him going home for the break. Perhaps the party had been a mistake. He should've spent all of this time with Califia. Talking to her. Holding her. Feeding her. Memorizing every detail of her to help sustain him with his absence for the next month. He was already dreading not having her in his bed at the end of the day, or waking up with her in the morning, her body wrapped around his.

How was he going to function normally without her?

His body had new requirements now, and she was his everything in that respect. The withdrawal was going to kill him. He could feel it. He had begged her to let him videotape a few of their lovemaking sessions, just a few short clips, mainly back shots of him doing her doggy style and one where she was riding him so he could get clips of her tits bouncing. She wouldn't let him tape her face. He did everything in his power to prepare himself for their short separation. He knew he'd probably be jerking off several times a day, and he was happy when she allowed him to tape what he could. He was going to loop all the clips once he got home.

A knock at the front door broke him away from the bathroom.

Opening the front door, he was relieved to see Califia instead of Bridgette.

"Hey. Everything okay?" she asked.

He pulled her in and shut the door, his lips seeking hers. His fingers were in her hair and he pulled her head back and buried his face in her neck,

"I don't know if I can last until this party is over," he whispered into her neck.

She laughed and ran her hand over his hair.

He lifted his face from her neck, his hand still pulling on her hair.

"Come ride my face. I need you in my mouth right now," he rushed out.

Her eyes were searching his face, sensing he needed a stress release. She grabbed his hand and pulled him into his bedroom, turning on the lights and shutting the door behind them.

She pushed him down on the bed.

"Keep those heels on," he commanded.
She pulled off her sweater, leaving her black bra on. She shimmied out of her shorts and panties and crawled up N'Jobu's body. She patted her mound, then spread herself open for him.

"Is this what you want?" she asked.

"Get up here," he said.

She crawled up further on him and when she sat on his face, the world was right again.

###

Califia waited a few minutes to allow N'Jobu to return to the party before her.

When she saw him take Bridgette away from the party earlier, her first instinct was to follow them, but then she thought too many eyes were watching. She continued to dance with Bakari, but she did notice that N'Jobu's squad peeped her heavily afterward. Moises had a smirk on his face.

When N'Jobu didn't return right away, Califia pulled Serah aside.

"This is probably their final fall out. Don't worry. It's why he took her away from everyone. Let him have this moment," Serah said.

Califia felt anxiety rising inside her. She didn't want them to get loud, or messy in public, not when so many important people were at his party. She stood quietly by the bar as Bakari began talking to N'Jobu's squad. When it felt like time was stretching, Califia made a break for the pool gate. She didn't see them at first, but then she caught sight in the distance near a lamp post. She pulled out her cell and pretended to be checking texts.

She felt her heart leap in her throat when she saw N'Jobu hug Bridgette. She watched the other woman's hands caress his back, and then they pulled away from each other. Bridgette left N'Jobu standing there as she made her way back towards the pool. N'Jobu walked in another direction.

Califia didn't jump up to leave, it would've been too obvious that she was spying, so she leaned against the metal fence near the gate entrance and scrolled through her social media. She heard the pool gate open, and when she looked up, Bridgette was eyeing her. Her eyes were pinkish, and she was holding her hands together staring at Califia. She looked defeated.

"Good luck with him," Bridgette said, no malice or shade in her voice.

Califia stayed silent. There was nothing she could say to this woman. It felt uncomfortable and nerve-wracking to be near Bridgette. She was the woman N'Jobu would be with if Califia were not in the picture.

"Protect your heart well. Just know he'll shatter it anyway," she said, pain in her voice. She fluffed her hair, threw her shoulders back a bit and returned to the party.

Califia made her way to N'Jobu's apartment, and when he pulled her in and smothered her with his lips, she knew he had a bit of remorse for Bridgette. Leaving Xavier hadn't been easy for her, and just maybe, N'Jobu was experiencing the pain of breaking a heart for the first time.

Whatever turmoil he and Bridgette went through faded the moment she crawled onto his face and rode him to a delicious orgasm. She wanted to reciprocate, but he denied her, claiming that they wouldn't leave the room for the rest of the party if he pulled his dick out and let her work him as only she could. He was saving up for later. And she knew he was so ready to get between her legs after promising him a condom-less fuck fest.
Returning to the party herself, she noticed a bit of the older crowd had left, the professors and married couples, and folks with children. The final phase of the party was indoors, the D.J. now playing mellow kick back music as folks spent more time talking and exiting stragglers took away leftover snacks.

By the time midnight had passed, the caterers had packed things away, and the hired cleaners had removed all traces of decorations except for the Christmas tree.

Califa gave hugs to Soliel, Rolita, and Aujanue as they left to go wait for a Lyft driver to pick them up in front of the complex.

N’Jobu’s squad was having an animated discussion, and Califia noticed Bakari’s face was not looking very happy. He had his arms folded over his sweater and his brow was furrowed in deep thought. Moises was talking and N’Jobu stood next to him grinning and listening. The rest of the squad was either smiling or nodding. Only Serah’s man, Addae, looked indifferent. Something was off. Califia bumped Serah’s shoulder and they sauntered over to listen.

Moises had his hands out, slapping them together to make his point.

"You cannot expect a West African man to come here to this country and automatically feel kinship with your struggle, bruv. When I come here, I am not a Black man, I am Nigerian. Igbo from Enugu state…I my village is called Iheaka. I know my roots. When I die, I will be buried there with my people," he said.

Dansu cut in.

"African Americans seem to have this romantic notion about Africa. Even what you call yourselves is weird, African Americans…are you a whole continent? What does that mean? What part of Africa?"

Moises jumped back on Bakari.

"And because there's a fundamental disrespect about us, you all make up fake things, appropriate shit and it is comical. Kwanzaa? What the fuck is that, bruv? Look at your name! You picked two names from two different countries! You people cherry-pick and take things that aren't yours because you don't have your own culture."

"You need to chill out, bruv," Addae said, glaring at Moises.

"You ex-slaves kill me. Don't even know who your people are, but you want to tell us who to be while we are here—," Moises railed against Bakari.

"Fam, he dies and goes to heaven and the ancestors will be like, 'Who dis'?" said the man from Ghana.

Califa glared at N’Jobu, who only snickered and shook his head. Bakari's face looked gutted.

"You're fucking going to let these assholes talk to him like that?" She asked him.

Califa shoved herself in front of N’Jobu, her words amplified throughout the room. The D.J. stopped breaking down his equipment to watch.

"Califa, don't worry about it," Bakari said, reaching for her arm and tugging on her sweater to pull her back.
N'Jobu looked startled by her veracity.

"They're just having a conversation," he said.

"That wasn't a conversation, that was a dressing down. That was a fucking insult to me too! You don't recognize the type of verbal violence that was?"

Califia searched N'Jobu's eyes, and he seemed genuinely confused by her reaction. Frustrated, she turned to Moises.

"You want to clown us because we don't know where we come from? You sit there looking like a piece of shit and tell us we don't have a culture when you use our vernacular against us? Do you know where the fuck 'bruv' comes from? It's from 'brotha'. Just like 'chill' and 'fam'. You colonized niggas sit up here and copy our swag, our cool, our culture, and then fucking use it to shame us? Everything in this country comes from us! Us!"

Serah tried pulling Califia away.

"Aye, N'Jobu. You need to check your girl," Moises said.

"FUCK YOU BITCH!" Califia screamed.

She drew back and punched Moises in his eye. Bakari grabbed her by her waist, lifted her up and pulled her back.

Moises cradled his eye, then drew up to his full height and lunged for her. N'Jobu clutched Moises' arm hard and yanked him back.

"Don't you even think about touching her unless you want to die!" he bellowed as his other friends intervened and pulled Moises away. Addae stood next to N'Jobu blocking Califia from them. Serah patted Califia's arm as Bakari still held her up as she thrashed in his arms.

"These the kind of bullshit friends you have, N'Jobu? These your fucking friends? Huh? These your friends? Put me down, Bakari! I'm gonna fuck this nigga up!"

"It's cool, it's cool..." Moises said, clutching his eye again.

Bakari dragged Califia out of the all-purpose room. Serah and Addae followed behind them.

Bakari threw his arm around her shoulder.

"Cali, I'm good. They were being punks—"

"Nah, B. N'Jobu should've said something and shut that down. He just let you get insulted like that...no consideration of your feelings at all," she shook her fist out glad that she didn't break any skin on her knuckles.

"Those dudes are always like that," he said.

"They are trash," Addae spit out.

"Moises has always been the ringleader starting bullshit. He is the most anti-Black American person I have ever met. I used to tell N'Jobu that hyena was no good. But you know, bros before hoes bullshit," said Serah.

"You said, hyena," Califia said, laughing out loud.
"N'Jobu looked like he was about to kill, Moises. You all see how fast he moved when that idiot reached for her? Like Jet Li fast," Addae said.

Califa was so pissed, she couldn't even appreciate the swiftness in which N'Jobu snatched up Moises. It didn't matter because the damage was done.

"What are you going to do?" Serah asked.

"I was supposed to stay over here tonight, but I'm going to sleep somewhere else. I can go crash with Soliel or Rolita. Oh, look, dang, they are still waiting out front."

They all made their way out of the complex and stood next to the women and another couple who were still waiting for rides.

"What's good?" Califia said.

"Holiday back-ups," Soliel said looking at her cell, "now my app is saying the driver will be here in ten minutes. Progress!"

"Can I stay at your place tonight?" she asked Rolita.

"Sure…but why?" Rolita said.

"Califa punched the shit out of N'Jobu's friend," Serah said, relishing the re-telling.

Califa's friends stood and listened spellbound as Serah updated them on the dust-up.

"Bakari, how are you feeling?" Soliel asked, rubbing his shoulder.

"I'm fine," he said.

"You didn't look fine," Califia said, throwing her arms around his waist and placing her head on his shoulder, "no one talks to my brother like that and gets away with it."

"Your hand okay?" he asked.

She flexed it for him.

"You don't ever change do you?" he said grinning at her.

"Always ready to throw hands for family," she answered.

Bakari gave her a hug.

"I'ma go back and make sure the room is straight. You want me to tell N'Jobu anything?"

She shook her head.

"You sure? That wasn't on him. He's going to come looking for you."

"I'm good, tell him not to waste his time. I'm out," she said.

Bakari hugged her and spread a few more hugs around before walking back into the complex.

"Oh, come on," Soliel said, looking at her cell again, "it's fifteen minutes now."

"I'll try Uber," Aunjanue said whipping out her phone.
Across the street, a group of N'Jobu's friends, mainly white grad students, waved at them. One guy, who Califia remembered as Bryan, called out to them.

"You guys getting rides dropped too?"

"Yeah, twice already. But we should have one here soon," Soliel yelled across to him.

"Crazy, right? Guess a lot of people had parties tonight," he said. They all nodded.

"We can squeeze you all in our rental," Serah suggested.

"That's so nice, but we're cool Serah. We don't mind hanging," Rolita said.

"You all have a good night then. Safe flights to those traveling away, and happy holidays!" Serah called as she and Addae walked down the block to get to their car.

"Girl, you still look pissed," Soliel said eying Califia's bitter-looking face.

"I can't believe N'Jobu hangs out with dudes like that. I should've punched him too," she said.

"You should go back and talk to him," Aunjanue said.

"He can kiss my ass too," Califia said twirling her fingers in her hair.

"This could be bomb ass sex time. Going away sex combined with angry sex combined with make-up sex. A damn trifecta, Califia," Rolita teased.

Califia rolled her eyes, still feeling upset by the incident. The last thing she wanted to do now was to fuck N'Jobu in any fashion. He could sleep with his hand tonight and go to the airport by himself. A great party had easily dissolved into shit. Fuck him and his buddies.

Califia and her friends chatted out front with the couple who were friends of N'Jobu's until a police squad car rolled by, then made a quick U-turn. It pulled up in front of the group with the lights flashing. Califia felt her blood pressure shoot up. She didn't make eye contact when the officer on the passenger side rolled down his window and addressed the group.

The cops didn't waste time with chit-chat or polite inquiries. Califia already knew what it was. Someone had called the cops on a group of Black people standing in front of a fancy and expensive complex. They didn't fit the profile of who should be there.

Rolita went into whitespeak, being the lightest person of their entourage. Califia kept her back to them. Rolita explained that they were all waiting for rides, but the cops decided to get out of their squad car anyway.

"I.D.s," one officer asked for. Soliel and the others pulled theirs out. Califia refused.

"We're not doing anything wrong," she said.

"I.D.,"

"I don't have to show you my I.D. for just waiting for an Uber ride. I know the law."

"What's your name?" he asked.

Califia closed her eyes. Rolita concurred with Califia.
"We don't have to show you I.D., officer," Rolita said.

The officer raised his tone.

"Are you going to ask those people across the street for their I.D.'s too?" Califia asked, scoping out N'Jobu's friends who stood down the street watching them. There were eight of them over there compared to the five people she was with.

The cop's partner tugged on a radio attached to his shoulder and called for back-up. When he dropped his hand on his gun, just resting it on his holster, Califia felt her mind spin a bit and the skin on her knuckles where she punched Moises itched. She flexed her fist.

###

She was like lightning. All N'jobu saw was Califia's eyes squint a bit after she cursed Moises, and then her fist flew out of nowhere. He had been buzzing a bit with liquor, and when Bakari got into it with the fellas, N'Jobu was just playing bystander, not invested in the conversation, just counting down the minutes he could be alone with Califia again. Then it all went left.

Moises must've been out of his mind to lunge for Califia, but N'Jobu reacted immediately, placing himself in front of her and shoving Moises back with a strong grip.

The tone of Califia's voice as she yelled at him about his friends unnerved him. He felt ashamed, but he also felt scared. They had never gotten into an actual fight or argument where she would raise her voice like that to him. But when it happened, as Bakari was lifting her up and her eyes were challenging him, her vocal cords straining in her throat, he felt like he had torn something inside of her. He would try to fix it with her quickly, but first, he had to get Moises and crew away from them.

He walked Moises and his boys to the car they rode over in, Dansu's leased red Lexus.

"N'Jobu, man, sorry…" Dansu uttered as he climbed into the driver's seat. The others got in the car, but Moises stood by the closed back passenger door.

"Look, bruv—" Moises said.

"Don't bruv, me. You made my woman get upset. You insulted my friend—"

"How was it insults when I was speaking the truth? These Akatas have you twisted my friend. Why you fucks with them I don't know. The girl, yeah…we all see why…but Bakari—"

N'Jobu grabbed Moises by the throat with both hands and lifted him up until the man was on his tip-toes and gasping for air.

"Don't you ever in your trifling life call my friend or my woman that. These people don't deserve that level of disrespect—"

"N'Jobu!"

Bakari walked over to him.

"Let him go, man," Bakari said.

Moises struggled in N'Jobu's grip.

"C'mon, N'Jobu. He ain't worth it."
"You had the audacity to step to my woman. My woman?! What did you fucking think you were going to do? Beat her ass? Is that what you thought? Ngizokubalala!"

Dansu jumped out of the car, "N'Jobu, please, stop this. You're not going to kill anyone. Let him go. He can't breath."

Moises hands gripped N'Jobu's wrists as tears streamed from his eyes. N'Jobu let him go and the man fell to his knees, gasping and clutching his throat.

"Get the fuck out of here," N'Jobu said.

Dansu helped Moises get into the back seat, then hopped back into the driver's seat and took off.

N'Jobu glanced over at Bakari.

"I was not a good friend," he said.

"You can't be responsible for what other people say."

"But I can be responsible for who I hang around with. I am truly sorry. I'm done with those clowns."

They stared at one another solemnly.

"Is she gone already?"

"Staying over Rolita's or Soliel's."

"Was she still mad?"

"Yeah, she still big mad. You in the doghouse."

N'Jobu folded his hands on top of his head, closed his eyes and stretched his neck.

"No nookie for you tonight, nigga," Bakari teased.

"Don't I know it…shit!" N'Jobu said, kicking his foot in an exaggerated fashion.

"Well, your flight isn't until seven in the evening. There's still time to make up and make out later today."

"N'Jobu! N'Jobu!"

Suzanne, N'Jobu's study partner in his Global Diplomacy class came running through the parking lot.

"Suzanne!" N'Jobu said stopping her mad dash to find him. Her face was flushed red and she was gasping.

"The cops are out front…they have your girlfriend," she said.

"Oh, shit…shit!" Bakari said and started running towards the front of the complex. N'Jobu sprinted ahead of him.

###
Nights Over Egypt

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of the Christmas party. N'Jobu heads home.

Chapter Notes

Hi All!

Had to split the chapter in half again, so sorry for the delay. I meant to get this up yesterday.

Up next....Wakanda.

"Oasis in the sand
Where life once began
Under the moonlight
Your eyes won't believe
What your mind can't conceive"

Jones Girls— "Nights Over Egypt"

N'Jobu ran out from the complex gate. He saw Califia handcuffed and leaning against one of the cop cars. Without thinking, N'Jobu rushed forward to be with her. An officer pushed him back.

"That is my girlfriend. Why is she handcuffed?"

"Sir, please step away and let us handle this," the cop said.

"Why is she handcuffed?" N'Jobu demanded, his voice thundering, causing another officer to approach N'Jobu.

Rolita stepped to N'Jobu.

"The cops just came to mess with us because we were standing out here waiting for our rides. They asked for I.D. We don't have to show them anything without probable cause. We know the law. She wouldn't show them anything."

Damn it, Califia, he thought, staring at her helpless. She had her eyes closed like she was willing herself to fade away from the scene. Why couldn't she just play along, show her I.D. and just let these cops move on? His mind was already thinking bail, getting her a lawyer before he left, figuring out if he could postpone his flight to get her out of this mess. There was two thousand in cash already in the apartment. He could fix this.

He saw his classmate Troy accosting the officer blocking Califia from a safe distance. Troy had his cell out and was taping the altercation, demanding that the cops release Califia.
Bakari leaned into N'Jobu, "Man, go get your boy, I know he thinks he's being a good ally, but yelling ain't helping her. It's making these fools itchy to escalate. We gotta get her up outta here… she's re-living shit."

"Re-living what?"

"She was with her Dad when that cop pulled a gun on him. She saw that shit go down and it's coming back. I see it in her. This ain't good, bruh."

N'Jobu felt his heart sink.

"I'm going to get my friend away from that officer, is that okay? I can see he is hindering your work, sir," N'Jobu said, using his most refined upper-class Wakandan accent.

The officer blinked, listening to N'Jobu's voice.

"I'm sure this is just a misunderstanding. All of these people are my friends. We just had a holiday party. They are just trying to be responsible citizens by catching safe paid rides home."

"Come with me," the officer said. N'Jobu followed him, making eye contact with Soliel and Aunjanue who looked terrified. N'Jobu held a hand up for Bakari and pointed to Califia's friends. Bakari immediately went to stand with them in a protective stance.

N'Jobu circled a finger around his ever-present kimoyo beads, activating a camera that would record every detail…just in case. All of his previous reconnaissance training kicked in. He also activated a bead that was used for defense. If shit turned, he would have to stun the cops. And all the witnesses.

He could see Califia shaking. They had her arms behind her, the handcuffs digging into her wrists. Her eyes were still closed.

"Hey, Troy, buddy, could you step away for a minute?" N'Jobu asked.

When she heard his voice, Califia opened her eyes and turned her head towards him. All he saw was, anger and underneath it, the hurt he had caused her, and something else much deeper. Fear. He thought of her father trying to protect her when that cop pulled out his gun and aimed it at him, right in front of her as a kid all those years ago. His fatherless and motherless woman. Shackled like that because of what she looked like.

"Califia, hold on. I'll take care of everything," he said in the gentlest tone he could muster. All he wanted to do was crack heads open. But he had to get her to safety. That was the number one priority. Get her out of those cuffs, and back into his apartment in one piece.

N'Jobu called upon all of the diplomacy skills he had to de-escalate the situation. His charm seemed to work, the sergeant started to use a more informal tone with him, trying to justify his officer's actions. N'Jobu nodded and pretended to grasp their point of view, reminding the officers that the holidays always made people drink and get a little rowdy and that's why he made folks take Ubers and Lyfts home. He explained how they had an argument earlier, so Califia was already in a bad mood, and their presence just upset her. She was just projecting. He pointed out that they all had to stand outside the complex to catch rides because the gate had a code, and he couldn't give the code to every driver who showed up to pick up his guests. He even ran back to his apartment and retrieved his diplomatic passport and I.D. to prove that he lived there. His diplomatic passport was a subtle way to show them that he wasn't one to be fucked with.

Troy kept reminding the sergeant that the officers didn't bother the group he was with because they were white. N'Jobu held his tongue while another officer released Califia from the cuffs. N'Jobu
reached out and put his arm around her. She buried her face in his chest.

It was over.

N'Jobu thanked the sergeant and asked for his card for future reference in case he had questions about future parties. The officer gladly gave it. N'Jobu pocketed it and made a note to deal with them all later. His kimoyo bead scanner had recorded all the cops who were there. When he got home, all he had to do was tell his father about some nefarious behavior and these men would be transferred to shitty assignments or out of jobs.

They all watched three police vehicles pull away.

A number of Lyft and Uber drivers showed up, taking folks home.

When Soliel and Rolita's ride appeared, N'Jobu waved them off, walking Califia back through the complex gate. Bakari followed them.

N'Jobu could feel Califia crying against him. He swept her up and carried her in his arms, cradling her face in his neck. He felt her hot tears and her warm breath shuddering into him.

"It's okay," he cooed to her, his voice rumbling with seething anger. This night was a disaster for her.

He held her tight as he carried her up the stairs of his apartment. Bakari unlocked the front door and they walked inside.

Califia slid down from N'Jobu's arms. Her face wet, eyes red, and her voice a fragile wounded shell.

"I'm just going to stay out here. Sleep on the pullout," she said, not looking N'Jobu in the eye.

He looked at Bakari who shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you want to talk about what happened—" N'Jobu started to ask.

"I don't want to talk about shit, okay? Just…just leave me alone…please—"

"Do you want to smoke a bowl real quick?" Bakari offered, trying to assist N'Jobu.

"I don't want to do anything. Can you both just leave me alone? Please?"

Her eyes didn't focus on either one of them.

Bakari threw up his hands.

"Okay, okay. I'm going to bed," he said leaving N'Jobu alone with her.

N'Jobu moved past her and started taking the cushions off of the couch. Califia ran into the bathroom slamming the door behind her.

Bakari came back out of his room.

"I don't know what to do," N'Jobu said.

Bakari helped him fix up the pullout bed.

"Go get her some pillows," Bakari said, smoothing out the sheets and velour blanket that was already on the pullout.
N'Jobu walked into his bedroom and pulled two of the four pillows he had on his bed. He searched his closet for an extra blanket for her. Stepping out of his bedroom he could hear her crying in the bathroom. She was running water to try and muffle the sounds, but he heard the pain in there. He stood near the door and tapped his foot on it.

"Califia, are you okay?"

"Leave me alone, please. I'll be alright…I'll be alright."

He heard the rattling sounds coming from her chest, the wretched sobs so loud he felt his throat tighten.

"Listen to me. I'll sleep on the pullout. You take my bed. I want you to be comfortable. I won't…I won't bother you, but I'm here…okay, baby? I'm here. We can talk or whatever you want to do…"

Bakari stood next to him.

"Cali, we're here for you. Shit was fucked up tonight. But we're all okay-"

"I know, I know…" she said between sobs.

N'Jobu was ready to kick the door in.

"Keep talking to her," Bakari whispered in his ear, "the walls come up, but it helps to hear your voice, even if she tells you no to everything."

N'Jobu nodded. Bakari looked at the worry in his eyes. He patted N'Jobu's shoulder.

"You did good out there," he told N'Jobu.

Bakari went into his room and closed his door.

N'Jobu tossed the pillows and an extra blanket on the couch and went back to the bathroom door.

"You want a cappuccino or anything? There are some great leftovers if you're hungry."

"No. I don't want anything. You can go to bed if you want," she said. Her voice wasn't so sob-heavy now.

"I'm fine right here."

"Go to bed. You should be tired. You really went all out for this party. I know you've been up all day."

"I wanted to impress you. Anyone can put together a simple house party, but I wanted something different."

She turned the water off. He could hear her breathing. It was steady now.

"It was really nice. The Christmas tree was really pretty."

He wanted to apologize for Moises and so much more, but he kept his thoughts on getting her to come out.

"N'Jobu, please don't stand there. Go to bed. I'll come out when I'm ready."
"I don't mind standing here for you."

"Seriously, don't."

"Ok, I'm going to go lay down. But I'm here for you. If I doze off, just wake me up," he said.

He stood in front of the bathroom door for a few more minutes, then eased back into the living room.

He hopped on the pullout and was surprised that it actually didn't feel that bad. He took off his tunic and left his linen pants on. They were light enough to be sleepwear anyway. He slipped off his shoes and reached for the TV remote. He turned to the comedy channel and set the tv timer to go off in thirty minutes. He figured once the timer turned the tv off, he would go check on her again if she was still in the bathroom.

Ten minutes in, he heard the shower go on. He relaxed then and tried focusing on a very un-funny stand-up comic.

He dozed off listening to the sound of the shower running.

###

He cannot reach her.

He is running with Bakari towards the complex main entrance, but his legs feel weighted down and the air around him has become thick, like an invisible wall keeping him from moving forward.

He can see the police car lights flashing, hear his classmate's voice arguing with the police, but he can't move any faster.

He screams out Califia's name, but his voice is sucked into a vacuum.

The cement beneath his feet turns into sludge, and he finds himself sinking. Now he claws the ground grabbing fists full of liquid granite, swimming like a struggling salmon upriver, and when he crawls past the entrance gate, the cop cars are leaving and Califia is nowhere to be found.

N'Jobu's eyes snapped open and he gasped for air. His arms felt heavy and he could still feel the gravely sensation of the liquid cement in his fingers and toes. He couldn't lift his left arm, and when he turned his head to figure out why he couldn't move, he feels Califia's hair on his arm, and realizes the weight on him is her head.

He had fallen asleep and sometime during the early hours, she had crawled into the pullout bed to lay with him. He turned his body and pressed his forehead into hers. Her peaceful breathing settled his unease from the dream. She was safe and in his arms.

Lifting his wrist and checking his kimoyo beads, he knew it was six thirty in the morning. He could hear Bakari's loud snores seeping out from the back of the apartment.

He needed to urinate.

Lifting her head, he eased off of the pullout bed and padded his way to the bathroom. Relieving himself quickly, he rinsed his face and brushed his teeth to get rid of the sour taste in his mouth. Looking at his face in the mirror, he saw slight bags under his eyes.

He made his way back onto the pullout. He pulled Califia closer to him and she woke up when he touched her back.
"Morning," he said, giving her a faint smile. She glanced at him, then pressed her face back into his arm.

"We don't have to talk if you don't want to. Just rest," he said.

She covered her face with her hand. For a long time, he just listened to her soft breaths puffing against his bicep.

"I just want to forget…" she said.

"We can do that. We'll strip yesterday out of our memory—"

"No, I mean…what happened with my Dad."

N'Jobu pushed her hand away from her face so he could see her.

"You don't have to say anything if it will—"

"I want to tell you this. So you can understand."

"Okay."

"My father confronted a cop who molested my friend. That cop took out his gun…aimed it at my father. I was there. Standing next to my father. That cop didn't even care. I saw his hands shake when he had that gun pointed at my father. He was going to kill him. I was so scared. My Dad told me to get behind him…and when I moved…the cop must've turned the gun on me because my Dad just reached out and shoved him…"

N'Jobu wrapped his arm tighter around her.

"I just want to forget it happened. I want to forget my Dad is in prison. I get so angry when I see them. I feel like they fuck with us too much. We were just standing there minding our business. Just existing is a problem for them. I see them and I see my Dad, and I try to ignore them…and then I get angry."

N'Jobu stroked her hair.

"If you didn't come to get me, they would've taken me to jail. They would've found out who I was and who I come from."

"I wouldn't let them do that—"

"I heard your voice…I heard you…you said to hold on…and then…I don't know why, I thought of that old song my grandmother's church sings around Christmas, "Hold On Just A Little While Longer", and then I thought of my grandmother, and how she wouldn't want to see me in jail like my Dad…and all I remember is you carrying me."

Her fingers trailed up his face and she shifted up on her side to look at him.

"Thank you," she said.

"I'm sorry about everything from last night, Moises, Bridgette….you wouldn't have been out front—"

"They still would've come even if I wasn't there."
"I wanted last night to be great for you—"

"You're great for me. You have shitty friends, too many exes, and the cops in your hood don't take kindly to negroes…but, I still want to hang with you."

He touched her face and she crawled on top of him and kissed him, straddling his hips and stroking his scalp. He circled his hands around her lower back and held her still as their tongues entwined and their lips sealed a new bond between them.

All he wanted was to hold her. She wanted to forget, and he wanted to help her forget.

He rubbed his fingers up and down her back, then cupped her ass cheeks with his hands as their mouths continued exploring one another. She wore one of her own t-shirts that she left at his place, so it was easy to palm her ass.

She lifted up away from his lips, sat back and pulled off the t-shirt. He automatically reached up to play with her tits, pulling on her nipples first as she rocked and grinded on him. The sensation of her pressing down on his burgeoning erection made him sit up so he could suck on her nipples. She tossed her head back and held onto his shoulders as he suckled her, pushing her tits together so that his tongue could lick her nipples and his lips could engulf them.

She reached behind herself and fondled his balls and he released her nipples.

"Bay-bee…" she whispered only loud enough for him to hear. Her tone of voice let him know she was ready for him.

He slid her panties to the side, stroked her clit with his thumb and inserted two fingers inside of her. He groaned when he felt how sticky she was.

"You're dripping. You ready for this dick?"

"Hmmmmm," she strained out. He was enjoying how hard she was trying to remain quiet.

"Tell me you want this dick, baby."

"I want it."

"Do you?"

"Yessss."

"Take it then," he said, leaning back down on the pullout.

She unfastened him and he helped her remove his pants and underwear. When she removed her panties and crawled back on top of him, she straddled his hips. His dick was stiff and lying on his stomach.

"No condom?" he asked, just to make sure they were on the same page.

"No condom," she answered, and they both saw his dick jump when she said no condom.

She lifted his cock and stroked it slowly, up and down. He felt his mouth partially open as he watched her work him.

"Dick just big for no reason," she said, and they both laughed.
"Big for you," he said.

She stared at him then shifted forward, lifting up her body. She played with her clit in front of him while still stroking him.

"Oh, shit, baby…teasing me…" he said rutting into her hand.

She spread her lower lips.

"Califia…" he moaned, feeling his cock swell in her hand a bit more.

She rubbed her clit with three of her fingers, then slipped them down to open and close her pussy. She knew exactly what he liked and his eyes stayed on her fingers as she alternated playing with her clit and spreading her labia for him. Her fingers were coated with her slick and when she heard him groan like he was in pain, she lifted up higher and inserted his cock inside of her.

"Damnnnn-!" he squelched out as she rotated her hips and twisted her opening around the head of his dick. He could see the thick bulb stretching her entrance, and the sensation of his unsheathed cock being rotated on nearly made him nut too soon.

"Oh, bitch…. you bitch…fuck me…fuck me…" he huffed out grabbing her waist with both his hands.

"Does it feel good, baby?" she purred, her eyes narrow and laser pointed on him.

"Yes!"

"This is what you like, right?" she asked, still winding around the head of his dick.

"Yessss—"

She dropped down a bit on his dick, then lifted up again real fast, still teasing him. She kept circling her opening on him, then pulled off all the way, dropping back on it a couple of inches.

N'Jobu's eyes rolled back into his head, his back arching, and his hips thrusting up to get all the way in her, but she controlled the depth and pulled off of him again.

"Open your eyes, baby," she said.

N'Jobu did as she said, and she leaned down and kissed him. He reached up with one hand and grabbed her hair as they kissed. He yanked her head back and looked in her face. Her tongue was touching the tip of her top lip and her eyes were caught up in a gauzy, dreamy expression. He pushed himself slowly into her, feeling every ripple of muscle in her tight walls. He started thrusting and kept her hair fisted tightly in his hand as her mouth widened from the sensation of his raw dick. He found himself groaning each time he thrust.

"This is my pussy," he panted up into her face.

"Yes," she could barely whisper, he was hitting her spot and the bravado she had before was muted.

When she got like this, he knew she was close to cumming. He snaked his other arm around her waist and held her hips still. He was doing the fucking right now. He needed her pussy with a desperation that thwarted him while they were attending his party. All that pent-up arousal they played with before it was interrupted by bad friends and bad cops came back through his hips. He had less than twelve hours to be in this pussy as much as he could. He was going to put in some
work. And he didn't care that their mutual buddy was probably hearing them from the back of the apartment.

"Damn this pussy. You love gripping me tight, don't you?" He pulled her hair more, making her neck lift up so he could see her face.

"Yeah, ooh...Jobu," she panted.

"Fuck you feel so good!"

He flipped her over and spread her legs wide, plunging deep. He slowed down his strokes as he watched her face below him.

"Fuck!" he shouted when she clenched her walls around him.

He couldn't prove it just yet, but he believed that she had some of the best pussy he'd ever had.

"We aren't ever using condoms again," he said lowering his head to suck on her neck. She wrapped her legs around his waist, "you hear me?"

"Yes," she answered with a weak voice.

He released his lips from her neck and smothered his entire weight on her body as his face pressed into the mattress. Her arms were around his neck and she was murmuring his name, but all he could do was gasp out intense exhalations as he continued driving himself into her releasing unintelligible words with each breath.

He pushed back a bit so that he was on his knees. He gently stroked her clit, his fingers pinching the hood and pressing down on the bundle of nerves as he pushed in and pulled out with a rhythm that was driving her to thrash under him. He was so enamored with watching his dick fucking her. When he long stroked her, smashing his balls against her ass, they both had to work harder to keep their voices quiet. The pullout bed wasn't helping them with the noise control, the thin mattress springs creaking with each of his thrusts.

"Look at your pussy taking my dick," he said.

Califia lifted her head to watch.

"You only get wet like this for me, huh?"

They both saw the coating that her slickness gave his cock. He couldn't take much more.

"Jobu," she panted, and then her thighs began to shake, "you feel that? You feel that?" she wailed, her back arching, a silent scream etched on her face as her voice ended.

"Baby, you're cumming. I'm going to cum with you...I'm going to cum too...here it comes, here it comes....ahhhh....here it comes..."

His head snapped down to watch himself pumping into her. He held still as he saw his cock surge then thrub with a steady flow of cum shooting into her.

"Fuck..." he tried to whisper as he saw his balls constrict to squeeze out the last drops. Pleasure rippled through him as he stared at her face. He watched loose tears falling from the corners of her eyes.

"Ndiyaku thanda..." he said to her, kissing her lips. His eyes widened when he realized what he had
said out loud to her. But because his brain often thought in two languages at the same time while he was in the States, it took him a moment to confirm in his brain that he had told her he loved her in his language, not English. He closed his eyes for a few seconds before looking down at her again.

"How are you?" he asked.

"Excellent she said," smiling up at him. He needed that smile from her more than she could know.

He pulled back from her slowly, and when the head of his penis came out, a bit of semen spilled out from her. He leaned back to look at it. The beauty of his creamy white inside her pinkness, dripping onto her lovely brown.

He had finally done it. Cum inside a woman. Not just any woman though…the one he loved, and that made the moment equally sweet and divine.

He reached down and dipped his thumb in the semen and smeared it on her clit. Her shiny eyes watched him.

"You're beautiful," he said. She closed her eyes and stretched, a huge grin on her lips.

He curled up next to her and she rubbed his neck while he kissed her. He still felt amped and knew he would be ready to go again soon.

###

When he woke up again, N'Jobu saw that it was noon. Califia was curled up on top of him and asleep with only the sheet covering them.

N'Jobu heard Bakari in the kitchen fumbling with some pots.

"You alright in there," N'Jobu called out.

Bakari popped out from the kitchen.

"Just cleaning up and getting rid of stuff that we won't use."

"Califia is staying, so she might be able to use some things."

"Some of the stuff in here already went bad."

Bakari stopped talking and looked at Califia sound asleep on top of N'Jobu. N'Jobu was glad they had a sheet over them because she was definitely very naked and drenched in his cum in more than one place.

If there was any embarrassment, Bakari played it off, probably trying to pretend that Califia was just some other chick that N'Jobu was boning hard.

"I gotta run over to Shavonne's and drop off her dog at the daycare and run some errands. I will be back by three-thirty to get you to the airport."

"We can leave at four-thirty," N'Jobu said, wanting to get an extra hour of Califia time.

"Okay, cool. Uh,…she alright?"

"Yeah, she's cool."
"Bet. I'll see y'all later. Try not to break the couch."

N'Jobu rolled his eyes as Bakari grabbed a jacket from the door and took off.

His kimoyo beads warmed up.

He glanced at the signature. Zinzi.

N'Jobu rolled Califia off of him and covered her up with the sheet and the blanket before sneaking off to his room. He pulled on some sweats and a t-shirt and sat on his bed.

He popped in an earbud, so he could play her transmission in private.

"Zinzi," he said.

"Your Highness, Prince N'Jobu," she said, bowing her head.

N'Jobu felt his eyes snap open in surprise at how gorgeous Zinzi was. She was sitting in what looked like a family sitting room wearing a resplendent jade lounging robe. Her face was made up and her hair was hidden beneath a traditional Wakandan reed hat with large matching green earrings.

Seeing her fashionable appearance, he felt bad popping onscreen in just whatever he had available after fucking his woman back to sleep. Despite what he thought of his appearance, the way she was drinking him in let him know he must not look too shabby.

"Did I disturb you, your Highness?"

"No, I just woke up. You are good."

"I am glad. I just wanted let you know that I will be at the dinner your parents are throwing in your honor once you arrive home."

"Okay," he said, curious as to why she thought this was important.

"There will be a lot of state dinners while you are here, but this particular one will have a man there. Captain Gcuma. Have you heard of him?"

N'Jobu's mind was making connections. The surname was familiar, it was a clan name from the Border province.

"Continue," he said.

"Captain Gcuma is my friend."

Her eyes told him what she was not saying.

"Ah, I see," he said.

This man was her lover. And he was coming to a dinner where Zinzi and perhaps some others would be introduced as part of his betrothal march. He stood up and went to his closet to pull out the one travel bag he was taking with him. It was already packed with things he really didn't need, but he couldn't just get on an international flight without any luggage.

When he turned to look back at Zinzi, she was checking out his clothes. He caught her eyes sweeping down to look at his sweats. Sweats he was swinging commando in at the moment. He sat back down.
"No one is aware of your friend?" he asked.

"We have been discreet, your Highness. I am hoping that all the excitement over your return will spur some action into him. Hopefully, before you make a final choice."

She wanted her man to propose.

"I am clear on the situation and will act accordingly."

He took a long look at her.

This could be the mother of my children, he thought. She was already regal-looking, and carried herself much like his mother, sitting primly, right at the edge of her seat the way royal women in his family sat.

He could imagine her wearing a traditional isicholo crown like his mother, walking up to greet him on his return trips from the United Nations, three or four children following behind her yelling out, "Baba!" to him.

Staring at her, he could see his future before him. It really didn't look that bad to be quite honest.

He heard rustling in the livingroom. Califia was awake.

"I will see you soon, Zinzi," he said.

She eyed him curiously then bowed her head again.

"Your Highness," she said.

He turned off the transmission.

"Good afternoon," he said to Califia when he returned to the livingroom.

"Is Bakari still here?"

"He left a few minutes ago."

She threw back the covers and jumped out of the pullout bed.

He reached out and snagged her hand in his.

"Where are you going?"

"I want to take a shower."

He stared at her naked body. Her nipples were swollen from all of his sucking, and even her vulva was still engorged from all of his attention. Her mouth was juicy from his kisses still. She had splotches of his cum on her neck and chest where he had fucked her tits.

"I'm not done with you."

She heard the heat in his voice.

"Ugh, N'Jobu, I am so nasty right now. Let me shower first—"

"I want you nasty."

"You can't possibly have anything left," she said.
"Try me," he said placing her hand on his sweats, his dick print not very subtle.

She groaned in a whiny way and stomped her feet. "But I want to take a shower."

"No."

He held her shoulders and kissed her, his tongue going deep into her mouth. His dick rose from his sweats, sticking out and tenting his pants with her hand still on it.

Califia sucked on his tongue and gripped his dick.

"Pull down your pants," she said.

He slid his hands inside the waistband of his sweats and yanked them down. She took that moment to run off and lock herself in the bathroom. He heard the shower run.

"That's messed up, Califia," he said, his dick sticking out looking stupid without her mouth on it.

By the time she was done, he was ready to clean himself up, a little disgruntled that he couldn't hit her up one more time.

He showered, dressed and shot off a message on his kimoyo beads that he wanted his black suit ready for him when the Royal Talon Fighter picked him up in Cairo. The first leg of his trip would have him fly into Atlanta, and then catch a Delta flight to Istanbul, and then he'd jump over to Egypt where he would take a private car into the desert to meet the Dora Milaje and fly home on the Fighter.

For now, he would wear a comfortable tracksuit and sneakers.

Califia wore a nice fall blouse with a short flouncy skirt and flats. She kept asking him if he had his passport and cell phone. They had exchanged Christmas gifts, but they were not allowed to open them until Christmas Eve. He packed her gift to him inside his suitcase, and she left his on his desk. He made sure she had his key fob and gate key card.

She kept bugging him for hints as to what her gift was but he wouldn't tell her. The box was about the size of small carry on suitcase.

They snacked on leftovers and waited for Bakari to pick them up as they watched TV.

###

She heard him talking in his bedroom. She could tell by the way his voice shifted in tone that he was talking to a woman. It could be his mother. Or not.

Sitting on the couch with him, her head leaning on his shoulder, she thought about how much better she felt. Over the years she had learned coping skills to help her process the trauma she experienced with her father and that officer so long ago. Meditation. Counting backward. Learning to unseat triggers when it came to cops being around her. She had done well for several years. Perhaps it was the combo of punching Moises and having adrenaline and anger mixed together running through her veins that set her off with the cops.

Whatever it was, she was in a bad place until N'Jobu came for her. She sat in his bed for hours processing her rage, shedding a few more tears, and then feeling restless without him next to her.
He wasn't kidding when he said he was going to make love to her as many times as he could. He had shifted into damn beastmode after he came inside of her, and she stayed on the same level as him, giving as much as she was getting. There was no place on her body that he didn't cum on. It was like he needed her dipped in all of his essence before he left. She had even let him stick his thumb in her for a bit of anal play. She wasn't interested in anal sex in any way, but she did enjoy his thumb ghosting around her entrance and then pushing in just an inch. The sensation of cumming with his thumb inside of her felt very different, and she knew they would add it to their sexual repertoire.

Their sex had relaxed her about his leaving, and she felt that they both would be productive while separated.

But then she heard him talking to an unknown woman, and she was a little concerned. Being thousands of miles away from each other for weeks. She regretted not letting him make more sex tapes of her. Or she of him.

Bakari texted N'Jobu as she flipped channels. He would be there in less than an hour.

"What's that look for?" he asked after putting his cell away.

Her eyes gazed at his face with a longing that made him shift his body towards her.

"Are you okay?"

She reached out and stroked his cheek, then his impeccably groomed goatee, and then she rubbed her thumb across those incredible lips that could make her cry and cum at the same time.

"Are you going to miss me?" she asked, her voice gone soft and seductive.

"Of course," he said. Something must have shone in her eyes because he was looking at her in a way that was erotic and needy.

She crawled onto his lap with her back towards him and started rotating her hips on his thighs. She looked back at him.

"How much are you going to miss me?" she asked.

His eyes ogled her hips and his hands reached out and gripped them.

"How much baby?" she muttered, lifting up her skirt.

"A lot," he said lifting her up and pulling her back on his dick.

She knew she was feeling insecure. She had no idea what his life was back home, but the money he had, the car, the clothes let her know he did come from the best, and that meant that he hung around the best. And that meant Wakandan baddies, women who could probably spin circles around her without lifting a finger. It didn't matter if he was in love with her, all it took was one slip up. And she also knew African women were some of the most beautiful women on the planet with skin that often matched his delectable hue. And maybe he was bored with fucking American women. Maybe he would sneak a little ass while he was gone. She wouldn't know.

At that moment she was both agitated about her thoughts and turned on by how he was staring at her.

"Pull these down," she said patting his track pants. She lifted up her skirt and wrapped it around her waist, tucking it, and slid her panties to the side.
"Hmmmmm..." he said as she sank down on him. She gripped his knees with her hands.

"Oh baby, bounce on me," he said.

And she did, letting him hear the loud claps off her ass on him as she stared back at him, her lips pursed in a succulent pout.

"Tape me," she said as she slowed down her waist.

He reached for his cell on the couch and tried his best to focus the lens on her ass.

"Bay-bee, I'ma miss this dick," she said and really started hammering her ass cheeks down on him. He dropped the cell and leaned back into the couch.

"Bounce, baby—" he gasped, and then his voice shot up a few octaves, making sounds she had never heard coming from him before, and she just kept fucking him and staring back at him.

"Are you going to miss me?" she asked again.

He couldn't even respond. All he could do was watch as she milked his dick.

She felt his cock swell inside of her and she knew he was cumming.

"Yes, baby, fill up my pussy..."

His eyes squeezed shut and all she felt was jerking from his hips.

"I'll be waiting for you, Jobu," she said.

He raised up then and smashed her back into his chest, gripping her so tight that she had to loosen his hands.

"You just fucked the shit out of me," he whispered in her ear, his voice finally sounding a bit normal.

It was a fast and furious fuck, but Califia wanted to give him one more reason to only think about her.

She lifted off of him and slid her panties back in place. She fixed her skirt as N'Jobu pulled his pants up. She was just about to hit the bathroom when Bakari came lumbering in.

"Y'all ready?"

"Yeah, just going to the restroom real quick," she said, winking at N'Jobu.

###

The dry heat of the Cairo night air struck his face. On this side of the world, the air was intense. He was met at the Cairo airport by two Dora Milaje dressed in simple black dresses and serious black heels. One took his bag and followed behind him, while the other guided him in the front. He saw people staring at the two bald Wakandan women escorting a Black man in a tracksuit and dark sunglasses.

An obsidian Mercedes Benz awaited him as he and the Dora were whisked away to the J.W. Marriott hotel in the Heliopolis district. Once there, the Dora watched his suite as he showered and refreshed himself. He ordered room service and sent a text message to Califia and Bakari that he made it safe.
The two Dora were efficient and spoke very little, their duties to their Prince taken to the extreme. They would not eat until he had eaten. They did not rest, even when he retired to his suite bedroom. One would catnap, while the other kept a vigil on his bedroom door.

After a few hours of rest, it was time for them to drive over into Giza.

Camouflaged in the sands of the Sahara, N'Jobu could feel the energy of the Royal Talon Fighter, even if he couldn't see it. He and the Dora were dropped off and watched their driver disappear. One of the Dora's hit a bead on her own kimoyo and a multi-spectral camouflage shield protected them as they boarded the ramp that led into the Talon Fighter.

Inside the fighter, it already smelled and felt like home. The stealth and tech just jumped out, and he was quickly reminded of how far ahead his people were compared to everywhere else in the world.

"Your Highness," a Dora said holding out her hands toward a cushiony seat in the rear. He took off his dark glasses and handed it to her as he settled in.

The second Dora handed him a glass of hot Bria tea, and when he sipped, his senses immediately went to his mother and the times they would sit and drink and gossip together.

The first Dora took her position in the main flight seat. Her legs crisscrossed and her fingers held together to start lift off, she glanced back at him.

"Your Highness," she said.

He saw her communications screen flashing gold lights. It was his father.

"Put him through," N'Jobu said, still drinking his tea.

The Dora waved a finger and they all saw his father's expansive face in front of them in full 3D.

"My, son," King Azzuri said.

The two Doras bowed their heads and N'Jobu smiled.

"Baba, I am almost home," he said.

"I see. We await your arrival. Try to get some rest on the way here. Your itinerary is very full. Your mother has you on a tight leash."

"I am sure she does."

"You look good, my son. California is treating you well?"

N'Jobu thought of Califia and he couldn't help but cheese and flash all of his teeth.

"Very well, Baba."

"We will see you soon. Bring him," King Azzuri commanded.

"Yes, Your Highness," the Dora pilot said bowing her head.

N'Jobu felt the Talon fighter give off a low hum, and he felt a slight vibration in his feet, and then a smooth liftoff had them gliding above the sand.

N'Jobu waved his hand over a side panel opening a window, and he was able to see the Saharan
sand below them. The moon was partially full and he caught a lovely view of the Giza Pyramids.

"Swing around," he commanded, and the Dora pilot whisked them around so he could look at the Great Pyramid of Khufu, the oldest pyramid still standing.

"W'sup Khufu?" N'Jobu asked. He caught the second Dora smiling at him after he spoke to the Pyramid.

They flew past the Sphinx on their way out and N'Jobu settled in for a five-hour flight. He handed his tea glass to the Dora. Her name was Ometeko. The pilot was Yejide.

"Yejide, wake me when we are an hour outside of Wakanda," he said.

"Yes, your Highness," she said.

Ometeko sat near him, ever watchful.

As N'Jobu closed his eyes, he remembered why he enjoyed being in California.

Freedom.

###
African Sunset

Chapter Summary

N'Jobu adjusts to returning home to Wakanda where he and Zinzi connect.

Chapter Notes

Hi All!

Our Prince is back home.

Thanks for keeping up with N'Jobu and Califia's adventure!

Working on having something else up in a couple of days.

"The sun has set boys
The cows must go back to their fathers
The sun has already set boys
The cows must go back to their fathers
Looking at the hills, but I don't see anything
How you going to pay the dowry if you lose the cows?
They've gone with the wind
Boys where are the cows of the fathers?
Oh boys take your kiris
And go and find the cows of the fathers in the forest
Oh boys take your kiris
And go and find the cows of the fathers in the forest"

Miriam Makeba - "African Sunset" (translated)

"Your Highness, we are one hour away from Wakanda."

N'Jobu kept his eyes closed but turned his head in a lazy arc against the headrest of his seat. He had fallen in and out of sleep with his earbuds on listening to a playlist of music Califia had made for
him. The music was mainly deep cut instrumentals, and most of it had a meditative quality that allowed him to catch a few z's.

"Thank you, Yejide," he said.

Sitting up, N'Jobu found Ometeko standing at a mini-kitchenette inside the Talon Fighter. The tea dispenser was dripping fresh brewed Bria tea.

"No sugar this time, Ometeko," he said standing up and walking to a bin where his small carry on was held.

"Yes, your Highness," Ometeko said, keeping her eyes on the drip.

"Yejide, please go around to Umbono Cove, I'd like to take a swim before we arrive at the palace."

"As you wish, Prince N'Jobu. Shall I alert the palace that we will arrive late?"

"No need, Yejide, I won't be in the water for long. A quick dip. I can't change up my mother's schedule too much. She likes precise time."

N'Jobu rummaged inside his carry on and pulled out navy blue swim trunks. He slipped inside the small onboard restroom and changed. When he stepped out from the restroom, he placed his garments and underwear inside the carry-on. Ometeko handed him his tea.

"Thank you, Ometeko," he said, blowing the steam from the top of the tea glass and looking at the Dora. Ometeko was newly assigned to him. He had seen her work with his father for a few years, and she had a stellar reputation. She was tall and lean; her angular face very serious as she moved around N'Jobu.

"You can relax, Ometeko. I am not my father. You can breathe around me."

Ometeko let a small smile slip from her lips as she handed him cinnamon dusted tea biscuits. He took two of the small treats from her and ate them, then walked over near Yejide to look out over the flight deck. The sun was out blazing already. This side of the equator was beginning their summer season.

When he finished his tea, he handed the glass to Ometeko and sat in front of a viewscreen to watch the local news from Central Wakanda.

His ears and eyes quickly adjusted to being immersed in his own culture again. From some of the news stations he scanned through, the public didn't seem to be thrilled with the upcoming coronation. One particular panel on a popular news talk show speculated on his father's health, and also the aptitude of his brother. N'Jobu was a little surprised to see the panel mention his name and show his picture onscreen. One panelist even broached the topic of N'Jobu being a better replacement because of his experience being overseas longer than T'Chaka and perhaps having an ideal skill set in dealing with Americans and Europeans in general.

"Keep my name out of your mouths," he said to the screen, and he heard Yejide giggling from the cockpit.

"Your Highness, you ever thought about being King?" Yejide asked, looking back at him.

N'Jobu heard Ometeko hiss with a sharp intake of breath from hearing Yejide address him with that type of question in such an informal tone. Wakandan society had elaborate formal and informal speech codes, and Yejide's words and tone were highly informal.
"Relax, Ometeko. Yejide and I go way back. This is just a conversation between us. Understand?" he said, watching the Dora read his body language.

Ometeko nodded and took her seat near his chair.

N'Jobu regarded the screen again.

"We all know how heavy the head is that wears the crown. I am not interested in carrying that weight. Bast forbid something were to happen to my brother and I would have to take his place. In that case, I would do my best for the nation. But...eh, I am happy where I am."

He glanced over at Ometeko. She looked like she was dying to ask him something. He spun his chair around to face her.

"Yes, Ometeko?"

Her face registered confusion.

"I know you want to ask me something—"

"No, your Highness—"

"Are you sure? Right now, you are safe to ask me anything. You are charged with protecting my life wherever I am, so I think at this moment, I will give you permission to ask me what you are burning to know."

Ometeko glanced over at Yejide, but Yejide was busy plotting flight coordinates and making sure their stealth was keeping them off the literal radar of their neighboring countries.

"Your Highness, it is nothing serious. I am just curious. What is it like in the States?"

He wasn't expecting that question. He thought she would ask about becoming an Ambassador, or some bit pertaining to his upcoming nuptials. Or maybe a question about the royal baby that was on the way.

"It is very different."

"Do you like it?"

"Most of it, yes. I have met some very good people. Made some great friends."

"The things I see when I go on the global confuse me so much. They are supposed to be the most advanced nation out there, and yet they seem to be the most primitive. Do you not find that confusing?"

"They are a confusing people, Ometeko."

"What are the Black people there like?"

"Hmmm...complex. Passionate. Smart. Curious."

Ometeko stared at him, and N'Jobu found that his answer really wasn't for the collective of Black Americans per se. Just one in particular.

"Your Highness,...Umbono Cove," Yejide said.
N'Jobu walked back to the cockpit and stared out over the wide expanse of Umbono Lake as they glided down towards the cove. The lake really did live up to its name—a Vision—as it sparkled below them.

"Hover above, I'll get out from here," N'Jobu said walking back to the exit.

Yejide nodded, positioned the Talon Fighter, then put it on autopilot.

N'Jobu activated the exit ramp, and they all watched the ramp slide down and open as they floated a good fifteen feet above the light greenish-blue waters. Warm air breezed through the Fighter.

"Your Highness," Ometeko said handing him a pair of light swim goggles.

N'Jobu slipped on the googles and walked down the ramp. He looked back at Yejide.

"I'll meet you on Flat Rock."

Yejide nodded and the two Doras watched him dive off the ramp breaking the calm waters below with a delicate splash.

N'Jobu's body sliced through the crisp cold water as he made his way towards Flat Rock, a large flat geological formation that was large enough to be used as a landing pad for the Royal Talon Fighter.

He paused his swimming to watch Yejide land the sophisticated piece of machinery before he kicked off again, his muscular arms and legs stretching through the coolness. He kept his earbuds in and was still listening to Califia's playlist, even though his Wakandan music player was still on the Fighter connected to the onboard Talon computer.

When he was closer to the shoreline, he stopped to explore the diversity of colorful fish Umbono Lake and the Cove were known for among the craggy underwater rock formations the fish liked to swim around, especially during mating season.

While diving under the water and enjoying the fish, the music in his earbuds changed to Califia's voice. He popped back up to the surface and floated on his back. The Wakandan sun kissed his sable skin with a thick and heavy heat that let him know he was truly back home.

"Start the last track," N'Jobu said. His earbuds re-played Califia.

"N'Jobu. Hi! Thought I would sneak this on here. If you are listening to this, then my playlist must've been pretty good since you got this far!"

N'Jobu smiled and stared up at the sun as he floated.

"You have only been gone for almost a day, and I miss you so much already. Please take pictures and tell your family hello. You might be really busy once you get there, so don't feel bad if you can't call or get to me right away. Just text or send me an email every now and then. Okay? Um, are you ever going to give me your list of books? We've discussed all of mine, but you still haven't given me yours. And since I have a full four weeks to do nothing but read for fun and eat all day until you get back, I was hoping to get started. Okay. I think that's it. Take care of yourself. Be safe. Ugh, be safe? You are a diplomat's son, so of course, you'll be safe. Duh. That was silly. Okay. I'm rambling now…um…I think that's it. I really miss you and….and um…I love you."

N'Jobu splashed up from his floating position. His hands flailed a minute and he saw in the distance Yejide and Ometeko jump down from Flat Rock where they were watching him. They were racing down to the shoreline.
"I'm okay! I'm good! A fish just nibbled on my foot!" he yelled waving at them.

Yejide and Ometeko stopped running but they waited for him at the shore, their sonic cannon spears by their sides. Ready.

"Replay," N'Jobu told the buds.

He listened to Califia's message again as he swam back to the shore, breast stroking through the water to stretch out his upper body and arms.

"I love you…"

N'Jobu felt a smile beam from his face that was brighter than the sun beating down on his back.

When he stepped out of the water dripping wet, his chiseled body flexing from the exertion of swimming, both Yejide and Ometeko watched him with great amusement.

"Everything alright, Your Highness?" Yejide asked.

N'Jobu realized he must've been grinning maniacally and looking weird to them.

"Just received some good news," he said shaking his body.

Ometeko brought him a soft robe and he wrapped himself in it and followed the women back to the Talon Fighter.

Using a sonic shower, N'Jobu cleaned himself and rubbed a rich cocoa and coffee emollient into his skin and hair. He changed into the black suit he requested and both Yejide and Ometeko stared at his clothes.

"You don't like it?" he asked them, staring at himself in the viewscreen.

"It is a nice suit, Prince N'Jobu," Yejide said.

"But," he said staring at her from the viewscreen.

"It's so…Western," she said.

"Well I am the son returning from the Western World, so I should look the part, no?"

He turned around and stared at them both.

"Ometeko?" he asked.

"It is a very nice suit, your Highness. The young people will love it," she said.

"Ah, the elders," N'Jobu said winking his eye, "that's why I put on the classic cocoa and coffee butter. I may look like the prodigal son, but I will smell like he-who-has-come-home-to-serve."

Ometeko laughed out loud, displaying the cute gap in her teeth. He was glad she was finally relaxed around him.

###

They flew over the lands of the Border Tribe and high above the rift valley. N'Jobu stood next to the pilot seat as Yejide flew them through the camouflaged rainforest cover. Once they made it through
the protective vibranium shield that surrounded the heart of Wakanda, N'Jobu had already settled into the pleasing knowledge that his woman was in love with him. The lover had become the beloved.

They swooped into his homeland and glided across the metropolitan skyline of tall spires reaching into the heavens mixed in with the deep layering of a healthy emerald green forest that balanced the ancient ground with the modern skyscrapers peppering the landscape. Being in love now, he saw the land of his people with fresh appreciative eyes. To outsiders, it might look like some futuristic imagining, a realm of impossibility that should not exist. But this was home.

Birnin Zana.

The Central City of Wakanda. The place where the ancestors became one people, and one nation (even if the Jabari tribe walked into the mountains out of spite).

This was the place where he was born and would return to permanently one day.

Gold lights flashed on Yejide's screen. She glanced over at N'Jobu and smiled.

They were given permission to land after being screened before passing through the barrier and then checked once more as they approached the palace.

"Don't answer it," N'Jobu said, "my mother is so impatient. Look at her, I can see her and she still wants to talk before I leave the ship!"

They could see the royal family lined up and waiting for him on the Talonport in front of the grand entrance hall doors. His mother, wearing a purple isicholo crown and her favorite silver choker was dazzling in her apple-green dress with an elaborate train. She was clapping her hands as she watched the Royal Talon glide in. His father, King Azzuri, was radiant with his close-cropped silver hair and beard. He was draped in traditional black royal robes.

T'Chaka and Bathandwa stood beside them, both wearing soft sky-blue raiments that complimented each other.

N'Jobu was barely off of the Royal Talon Fighter ramp before his mother broke protocol in front of the family and came running up to him and hugging him with a ferocity that pushed him back.

"My son! My son! You are home! Let me look at you!"

The Queen stood back, her hands clasped to her cheek as N'Jobu held out his arms towards her.

"Umama," he said gently, reaching up for her face and kissing her cheeks. She was already crying and his father took that as his cue to come and rescue him.

"Baba," N'Jobu said pressing his forehead to his father. His father kissed his forehead, lifting his head a little since he was slightly shorter than N'Jobu.

"Baby brother!" T'Chaka said walking over to him. They embraced in a solid hug and N'Jobu broke it when he glanced over T'Chaka's shoulder and saw Bathandwa smiling at him, her hands cradling the underside of her belly.

"Look at you, Sister!" N'Jobu said. He gave her a gentle embrace and then looked down at her stomach.

"May I?" he asked. She nodded.
N'Jobu took his right hand and placed it on her roundness.

"Hello, Baby," N'Jobu said. Bathandwa's hands reached up and held N'Jobu's forearms, her touch pressing into him softly.

"Prince N'Jobu, I am so happy you are here." Her eyes were shiny and her voice tinkled like soft windchimes in person. He gazed into her eyes, and perhaps it was his thoughts of Califia that made him bold and extra loving, he gave kisses to her cheeks too. She was surprised by it, and he pushed away from her before the others could really notice her expression.

"N'Jobu, you must be hungry. Come now, let's feed you and get settled," his mother said. N'Jobu cocked out his elbow and his mother slipped hers around it as he escorted her into the palace. His personal Doras followed behind him joining the other half dozen that were standing watch nearby at the entrance.

"Mother, can we please move the council meeting until much later today?" T'Chaka asked, trailing behind them with Bathandwa.

"Why?" their mother asked, turning her head back to look at her eldest.

"N'Jobu probably wants to eat and then sleep for a while. He's had a long flight.

"Yes Umama, I will be at my best later. I didn't sleep very much on the flight from Giza. Can we do something short and sweet, perhaps before dinner tonight?"

It was almost ten in the morning.

His mother sighed. They were passing through the grand hall and heading for the family dining suite.

"Fine. I will push back the time. Four o' clock okay?"

"Perfect, Umama," N'Jobu said.

N'Jobu glanced back at his brother and gave him a head nod of thanks.

A fine spread of his favorite breakfast foods awaited them all in the dining room. The fruits, mandazi breads, jams, fried plantains, roasted meats, and sweet rice porridge that he loved had his mouth watering. The chefs made sure there were some American-style breakfast meats and juices for his enjoyment too. There was also an omelet bar with a cook standing nearby to prepare food to the taste.

The royal family sat together, watched over by four Dora Milaje in the room. They ate, talked, and laughed at some of N'Jobu's stories about California. It was nice to be able to dip his fingers into familiar comfort foods and listen to the musicality of his families excited voices. There was a bit of gossip concerning one of N'Jobu's childhood classmates, a potential scandal concerning an unplanned pregnancy with a divorced noblewoman. There was talk of expanding some open land for biopharmaceutical research, and whispers of climate change possibly affecting some of the planned research.

He had sent them a link to Califia's performance at the McKenna and just gave the offhand comment that she and Rolita were friends of his from school. Bathandwa raved about the performance along with his mother, but his father and brother were more interested in the political climate of the States on the West Coast.

The food was delicious, his family swelled his heart, but by the end of the meal, he was done.
Exhausted. His swim had enlarged his appetite, and he overate much to his mother's delight and that of the head chef who came out to greet him.

T'Chaka and Bathandwa had a doctor's appointment and were escorted away by their Doras, so it was N'Jobu's parents who escorted him to his private bedroom suite.

Once there he took a moment to marvel at how expansive his bedroom was compared to his apartment in Berkley. His suite was the size of six graduate apartments. But that was normal in the Wakanda palace. The size considered the eventual pairing of a spouse and could act as a luxury apartment for two on a moment's notice. His suite had a living area, an office space, bedroom, luxury bath, a sauna, and a private balcony. Here, it was just a bedroom. No big deal.

His mother kissed him, his father patted his shoulder, and the moment N'Jobu closed the double doors, he was ready to flop on his bed.

He stripped naked, leaving his clothes tossed on the black divan near the entrance. Everything in his suite was black and silver and very minimalist the way he liked it. He padded his way to the restroom, washed his hands and face then threw himself on his bed. The plush mattress cradled him like a baby. He crawled under the covers and let his eyes drop. He pressed one of his kimoyo beads and replayed Califia's message again.

He drifted off to sleep listening to her say "I love you."

###

The council meeting was insufferable.

N'Jobu arrived on time with his parents into the throne room where the council elders were already seated in a circle. They all rose when they walked in and bowed their heads as his family took their seats. He made sure to wear a simple short royal blue tunic with matching loose drop-crotch pants and traditional dark sandals. His toes itched from the leather thong style of the sandals rubbing into his skin, but he knew the elders appreciated him keeping the old styles in the present.

There was general chit-chat, time given for them to ask about his time away from home, and then it got to the nitty-gritty. Talk of his betrothal march. He was told that the evening's dinner would have a few of his potential partners present, as well as some heads of the military.

He endured the council for a good ninety minutes. He had been gone for over a year and listening to the council now, things were pretty much the same as when he had left. The elders took their own sweet time discussing the plans made for his stay, as well as touching upon his responsibilities to the public. The press wanted to speak with him for some tv news spots concerning the transition of power. The council was adamant that N'Jobu stay hyper-vigilant in conveying to the public his support for his brother. This was without question.

One elder council member from the Merchant tribe, Efetobo, who was only in her mid-fifties, gazed at N'Jobu. She clasped her fingers together and leaned forward in her seat, her oversized gold earrings looked like round clam shells resting on her ears. They looked heavy and intimidating.

"Prince N'Jobu, there is talk among the press corps about you and your place on the throne. We would prefer that you deflect questions of that nature to the King."

There was murmuring among the others agreeing with her.

"Efetobo, I am sure the press is more interested in his betrothal march. There has been wild speculation already," King Azzuri said, chuckling.
Kholiwe, the oldest council member with piercing eyes and white hair coiled in long thin spirals with one side shaved low, turned her ancient gaze to N'Jobu's face. As a child, N'Jobu always found her fascinating because she spoke very little in public, but once she did, there was always a feeling of gravitas with her words. She always wore elaborate rings on every finger and looking at her in the present, that hadn't changed. She had to be in her nineties by now.

"I agree. I believe the whole of Wakanda is more excited about Prince N'Jobu's upcoming nuptials more so than the transition of power. I dare say the excitement level was more than when Prince T'Chaka was set to be engaged," she said.

Queen Niyilolawa smiled wide and glanced over at N'Jobu.

"My Queen, there are many women upset with you that you only had two sons!" Kholiwe quipped, flexing her fingers.

N'Jobu's mother simply smiled. N'Jobu shifted in his seat, trying hard not to glance at his kimoyo beads to check the time. He was feeling antsy. This "short" meeting was running longer than expected. He was ready to see his friends, eat rich hearty foods and deserts, then wild out at his favorite club. Studying hard and hiding his identity in America had hijacked his brain. He was now free to think his own thoughts and be himself. Tonight, he wanted to have fun before the drudgery of royal life really took hold later.

His mother sensed his restless energy.

"Well now," she said, standing up and clasping her hands in front of her as a sign of respect towards the council, "Prince N'Jobu needs to freshen up for this evening. We are all so happy to have him with us. So much is happening. I thank you all so much for shifting your schedules in order for my son to rest."

King Azzuri stood, and the council rose up after him. Queen Niyilolawa lowered her head towards Kholiwe because she was the oldest in the room, and held out her hand for N'Jobu to clasp onto. He did so and thanked the council for their time.

"We will see you all in the Silver State Room for cocktails before dinner," she said, ushering N'Jobu with her as two Dora Milaje followed them out.

"Thank you Umama," N'Jobu whispered kissing her cheek.

"They can be so long-winded. I think they like to call random meetings just to hear themselves talk," she said.

"Are things going well?"

"For the most part. I'm sure you've probably sensed that people are not happy about the changes."

"I've seen the news. Umama… is Baba well? Tell me truthfully."

"Your father is fine. Really. He's just tired and doesn't want to end up like his father and his father before him. Sitting on the throne longer than necessary and not enjoying their families. The new baby is all he thinks about. He wants the country to have new, young voices, ones that he can help guide. This is why it is so important that you finish your studies and come home so that we can show the young people of this country that we are looking forward by having leadership that is youthful and not stuck in the past."

"Has Baba been criticized?"
"Some pundits have questioned his leadership over the years. The same old generational conflicts that all nations face. Now that we have a larger population of young adults, your father feels that T'Chaka would best suit the needs of the people now, not twenty years from now. Our population is exploding and we have to look to the future. Your brother is the future. And so are you."

His mother guided him to a wing that led to his bedroom suite.

"I will see you in the Silver State Room, soon, eh?" she said.

"Yes, Umama."

"My heart is so full right now, son."

She hugged him tight and he watched her stride down the hall followed by the Dora Milaje.

He entered his suite. It would be early morning in Berkeley. He needed to call Califia.

He opted to use his computer to face chat with her. He sat on his bed waiting for her to answer. As the sing-song ringtone of his computer rang in his ears, he felt his face growing a bit warm and he felt his heart thud a little harder.

She didn't answer.

He tried calling her on her cell. Still no answer. He thought about calling the landline, but if she were trying to rest, he didn't want to disturb her. She had an exhausting school term, and he wanted her to have the time to chill.

He typed up a quick message telling her he missed her terribly and would try calling her again tomorrow.

He was disappointed. But knowing that her feelings for him were real, he got over the disappointment quickly.

His kimoyo beads vibrated. T'Chaka telling him to hurry up so they could sneak a quick shot of plum liquor before the dinner. If T'Chaka was already starting off with plum liquor shots, he knew his older brother was feeling stressed. Plum liquor was like the blues of liquors in Wakanda. It was the shit you broke out with when you needed to commiserate your troubles to your boys.

He swiped his computer screen to shut off face chat and accidentally hit a jpeg of Califia that opened on his screen. It was one of several screenshots he captured from the lewd videos he made of her. This one was of her riding him, her face nowhere in the shot, just her breasts waving in his face. Her big areolas looked dark, and her plump nipples were prepped for sucking. He felt his dick stir and he quickly closed the photo. The last thing he needed to be doing was looking at her body while wearing the pants he had on. They would show everything.

He spoke to his beads.

"T'Chaka, I'm on my way. Have my shot glass ready. Actually, make it two."

###

There was a cocktail hour in one of the smaller State Drawing Rooms, and when N'Jobu entered, he found T'Chaka waiting for him near the entrance. A male server was next to him with their shot glasses.
"Hurry up and take this," T'Chaka said.

They both quickly downed the bitter liquor right before their father approached. They followed King Azzuri like obedient puppies as they made the rounds to receive their guests, and for N'Jobu to be welcomed back. It had been over a year since he had been home, so N'Jobu forgot that a small dinner party in the palace was not so small after all. There were at least eighty people in the Stateroom. His mother chose this particular space because some of the oldest family portraits hung on the walls, and Queen Niyilolawa wanted everyone in the palace tonight to be reminded of the Udaku legacy, thus to be on their best behavior and bring their tightest game in order to be considered good enough to be around her sons. Quite literally, their ancestors were watching from the walls, the oldest portrait dating back to the 1300's. Umama was calculating and quick to put people in their place covertly.

N'Jobu met two of his potential brides-to-be. Nobantu, a heart-faced woman with deep-set light brown eyes who wore a red dress that he knew his mother found inappropriate for the occasion, but other men in the room found enticing with its plunging neckline and snug waist corset.

The other frontrunner was Vela, who was shorter than most women he'd been with but had a snappy personality that made her seem larger than life. She wore a sheer black blouse over a dark halter top with an A-line skirt that he thought was more revealing than Nobantu's dress.

N'Jobu really snapped to attention when his father introduced him to Captain Gcuma. N'Jobu was a little surprised. Gcuma was much older than he expected, ten years his senior.

Handsome with a broad nose and heavy brow, and overly articulate, N'Jobu found himself really concentrating on the man. This was the person Zinzi was in love with. Basically, N'Jobu's competition. As wine was being passed around by servers, N'Jobu discussed his upcoming military duty with Gcuma, explaining his already extensive martial arts training and body conditioning. Gcuma advised some intensive weight training to prep for boot camp.

N'Jobu's mother snatched him up for a bit to meet more important people, and he wished he could stay with his father and T'Chaka.

"Ah, Zinzi!" his mother exclaimed when they were passing the balcony. N'Jobu heard her name and stepped forward to get a closer look as Zinzi lifted the sides of her flowing orange skirts and moved closer to them. She wore a smart cropped blazer over a silk camisole top. Her hair hung in loose braids. It was her cheekbones and silver lipstick that caught his eye first, and then when he took on the rest of her face, he was struck by how much more gorgeous she was in person. Just a shade lighter than him, her skin was radiant. Flawless. Living black velvet. She was his height too in her low heels. Her parents stood behind her.

"My Queen. Prince N'Jobu," Zinzi said bowing her head. Her formal voice was impeccable. N'Jobu greeted her parents knowing in the back of his mind that they were praying for this union between their families. Their teeth shiny and bright in his face, N'Jobu was well aware of how to play the game.

They heard the tinkling of a bell as the signal for the start of dinner.

N'Jobu crooked both of his elbows as his mother and Zinzi linked arms with him. He escorted them towards the front as others in the room stood back to give them space to walk ahead of them.

N'Jobu was pretty sure Zinzi's parents were leaping cartwheels in their minds. The simple act of escorting Zinzi with the Queen looked iconic for them, a symbolic cementing of Zinzi's possible ascension to the palace.
N'Jobu noticed how Vela looked annoyed as he passed her. Nobantu only smiled, as if she knew all was not truly lost. It would be interesting to know the maneuvering that would take place that evening. All he knew was that he promised to show Zinzi favor, especially in front of Captain Gcuma. When they passed him by, N'Jobu noted the dumbfounded look on his face, like he was just realizing that Zinzi was one of the baddest chicks in the game. He felt Zinzi's hand tighten around his arm when they passed the man, and he enjoyed the sound of her skirts flouncing past. She was working the room and he wasn't mad at her.

They were stuck in this together and had to make it do what it do.

"Nice job," she whispered in his ear as they stepped into the grand hall and headed for the smaller of the three dining rooms the palace had. It was a nice walk, and N'Jobu knew the guests were enjoying their status by being inside the palace. And dining inside the smaller dining room was a rare privilege because only the highly select were allowed in there.

Making their way to it, he wondered how Califia would react to his home if she were on his arm, draped in the finest dress he could find for her, walking with his mother and breaking bread with the elites of Wakanda. The fantasy played out in his head. Of course, she would wear her hair in that big giant sunburst style of hers, her lips stained with a berry wine lipstick, her kohl-lined eyes taking in the enormous palatial estate. She would wear something skin tight but respectful in his mother's eyes, her exquisite heels would clatter across the marble floors. She'd wear a large choker around her neck with long beaded crystals that would drop down to her waist and jingle as she swerved her hips. The thought of her hips forced him to push the image away lest his body should react at this inopportune moment. This was Wakanda. He was Prince N'Jobu Dumisani Udaku, the Golden Panther, the second son of a great King and a magnificent Queen. This wasn't Berkley where he was sharing a two-piece meal of Popeye's chicken with Califia on his couch while in a t-shirt and basketball shorts. He had to act and think the Wakandan way and not his Northern Cali way. The adjustments were ongoing.

Inside the dining room that could seat up to one hundred, his father was already standing at the head of the royal table flanked by T'Chaka and a glowing Bathandwa.

N'Jobu's mother whispered in his ear where to drop off Zinzi, and he did so with grace and care so as not to appear too familiar or already set on choosing her as his wife. He walked with his mother to the head of the main table and waited for the rest of their guests to find their tables and seats. Everyone stood until his father seated his mother and then sat down himself.

Lucky for N'Jobu, only his immediate family was seated at their table, so he could relax a bit.

The meal started on time with servers bringing out dishes that the guests could serve themselves in family style fashion on their tables.

N'Jobu didn't waste any time digging into the spicy prawns and grilled piri piri chicken on skewers. He almost wept when a server brought out his favorite, a platter of grilled chambo from Umbono Lake. There was braised kale and spinach with peanut sauce, coconut rice, a variety of flatbreads, strip steaks and black pudding.

The one thing in Wakanda where even a Prince could cut loose for was eating. Wakandans were the ultimate foodies, and his parents were delighted watching him tuck in like a starving man. Lips, tongue, fingers, and utensils acted in unison for N'Jobu. He could hear the others in the room also indulging in the meal with great satisfaction, smacking lips with verve and gusto.

Several courses were brought out, with a traditional cleansing broth soup served last to help their stomachs digest the meal properly.
King Azzuri stood up and clanged his butter knife against his wine glass to get everyone's attention while the servers poured champagne into a crystal flute on every table.

"Queen Niyilolawa and I are so pleased you all could join us tonight in celebrating the return of our son, Prince N'Jobu. The reuniting of our family is always a happy occasion, especially as we embark on a new chapter in our lives with the upcoming coronation of our eldest, Prince T'Chaka. These next few weeks will be exciting…challenging…and part of our legacy of progressive change. Please join me in a toast to Prince N'Jobu as we welcome him home, where he belongs…among his people."

Everyone raised their glasses and drank. N'Jobu swallowed his champagne, but it didn't slip past him that his father wanted him back soon by the tone of his words. N'Jobu started to worry that his father may pressure him to end his pursuit of a Masters degree and return home early. That was a fight his father would not win. He needed to be with Califia for as long as he could. Now that he knew what real love was, he had to drown himself in it before he committed to someone else. Someone that he may very well never have intense feelings for. Ever. He was so ready to hit the club with his boys.

A few of the guests stood and made grand pronouncements towards N'Jobu that celebrated his return, and by the time they all retired to the Queen's Tea Room for coffee and various deserts, it was already nine-thirty in the evening. He needed to shower and change. The sandals were killing his feet.

He had to admit, the best part of the meal so far was mingling with Zinzi. She knew how to work a room. The elders on the council adored her, and his mother was not subtle in showing her favor over the other two women vying for position as his future wife. There was something about Zinzi that fit in his mind. Her intelligence was evident as she talked circles around two military officers. Captain Gcuma interacted with her a lot, and at one point, N'Jubu looked up from speaking to his brother and sister-in-law to find Zinzi standing alone with Gcuma. Something compelled him to walk over and join them.

"Zinzi," he said, eyeing Gcuma.

Zinzi's eyes lit up when she saw him.

"Prince N'Jobu, tonight has been wonderful."

"I'm glad you are enjoying yourself. Captain Gcuma, sometime this week I am to visit the officer's club. I would like to request your presence if you don't mind."

"I would enjoy that, your Highness."

"Great. You don't mind if I take Zinzi off your hands, do you? I would like to introduce her to my sister-in-law, Princess Bathandwa."

Gcuma's eyes narrowed a bit, and N'Jobu didn't even bother to wait for him to answer as his left hand held Zinzi's elbow and led her away. Zinzi giggled.

"That was perfect," she said.

N'Jobu felt his kimoyo beads warm up, then vibrate. He glanced at it and saw that the signature was Califia's. He had interfaced his beads with his suite computer. She was returning his face chat call. And he wasn't available. Damn.

"Sister, may I introduce you to Lady Zinzi Chiume?"
"Princess Bathandwa," Zinzi said, bowing deeply.

"Lady Zinzi, we finally get to speak. I apologize for not seeking you out earlier, but the baby keeps me running to the restroom."

Zinzi giggled and N'Jobu felt a wide smile paint his face. Bathandwa was just too cute.

"Brother, how does it feel to be home tonight and celebrated?" she asked.

"Annoying. This is usually T'Chaka's realm. I feel like I'm under a microscope. Every woman I pass by is looking at me like I'm glazed meat, even the older ones—"

Bathandwa slapped his wrist.

"Heyyyy!" he yelped shaking his hand.

"You don't say things like that in front of our guest," she said.

Zinzi giggled and held her hand to her lips.

"Oh my,…Princess Bathandwa…that was hilarious," Zinzi said.

"Ha, ha, ha," N'Jobu said rolling his eyes at Zinzi.

Bathandwa reached over and rubbed his hand. Zinzi's eyes took note of it.

His kimoyo beads lit up again and vibrated. This time it was his boy Jachike, whom everyone called Jax. N'Jobu started looking around the room for his father.

"What's going on?" Bathandwa asked.

"A little night action, so, I'm going to make my final rounds and get going."

"Tonight? Already? T'Chaka was looking forward to having an early breakfast with you tomorrow."

"I'm here for four long, very long, very, very, long weeks. I want one night with the guys."

"Where are you going?" Zinzi asked.

"Oba Oba's," he said.

"Fancy!" Zinzi said.

"Very much so," he said.

"And exclusive," she said.

Something in her eyes was playful. The feeling of needing to be free and himself fully surged. He was himself when he was in the States. Just a hidden and more subdued version. The thick curl of Zinzi's eyelashes captured him for a moment. She was giving off a party girl vibe and he was liking it.

"Well, I'm afraid this is my exit. If your parents weren't here, I'd ask you to tag along," he said.

Bathandwa's face took on a curious look of amusement as she watched the two of them.

"Actually, I was going there myself tonight with some friends."
"Oh, yeah?" he said, cocking an eyebrow at her.

"Bet you I get out of here before you do," she said.

"Okay, bet. Come see me in V.I.P. later."

"My friends and I already have our own V.I.P. Princess Bathandwa, it was a pleasure to meet you in person finally."

Zinzi bowed her head.

"Your Highness," she said to N'Jobu. But she didn't bow to him and walked away.

Bathandwa watched N'Jobu watch Zinzi saunter away.

"I like her," Bathandwa said.

"Hmm," he said, his eyes still fixed on Zinzi.

###

N'Jobu showered and went through his closet looking for something to set off his night. It was already eleven. Oba Oba's didn't really start popping until after midnight. There were no messages from Califia, just the missed call. He checked her social media accounts, but she wasn't active on them.

Finally settling on an eclectic t-shirt from a top Wakandan designer and the hottest jeans to hit Paris Fashion Week, N'Jobu threw on his retro black combat boots and grabbed a pair of dark glasses. The press and paparazzi normally gave him his space, but because he was about to start formal courting, he didn't want anyone to catch a photo of him looking like he was ogling random women. He did have the party Prince rep from a few years ago, sloppy fun times that he didn't regret, but now things were different, optics were everything. He planned on getting fucked up with his crew and he chose Oba Oba's because they looked out for him and appreciated the status he conferred to them by simply showing up. There were clubs dying to have him just stand in front of them, desperate for the chance to brag that royalty partied inside their domains.

If the Prince came through, then people were making loot that night.

In the States, N'Jobu didn't go to clubs on the regular. He had to be careful and avoid places that could get a little wild, and out him as royalty. He tended to be lowkey.

Califia liked to party, but the last few months kept her busy. He didn't know what would happen once summer hit and they were both free. He'd have to come up with excuses to avoid overly crowded spaces. Once in a while was okay, like the time they went to the reggae spot. But if she were like other typical university students, clubbing was life.

Ometeko and Yejide were waiting for him outside of his suite. They were dressed in club clothes to blend in with the crowds and not kill N'Jobu's vibe by being in regular Dora Milaje uniforms.

They both looked at his clothes and seemed to be happy with his appearance. He grabbed his personal comm tab so he could make and receive calls in private as well as check for things on the global which was Wakanda's version of the internet. It looked like a regular cell phone except it was razor thin with a bendable frame.

Flanked by his personal Dora, N'jobu left the palace through a private garage exit. A dark black
Exxy with sleek lines and chrome wheels was driven by his personal chauffeur, a man named Kenji who stayed on call all night for anyone in the palace.

Looking out of the car window, N'Jobu enjoyed reacquainting himself with the city, watching nothing but beautiful Wakandan people go about their summer nightlife.

Within a half hour, they had reached Oba Oba's and driven into the underground parking structure and straight to the V.I.P. entrance.

Ometeko walked in front of him and Yejide took up the rear as he entered a secret entrance to avoid press and paparazzi. Try as he might to blend in, the moment N'Jobu stepped into the club, his presence was felt hard. Patrons knew better than to try to take pictures of him openly. They would be escorted out and banned for life if caught.

But the world inside the club knew he was there. And they were watching. Especially the women. Word was out about his betrothal march, but that didn't dissuade women from trying to catch his eye.

There were rumors for years that all Wakandan Kings, Princes, and nobility in the past and present had mistresses. Marriage wasn't just one way to snap up royal connections.

And Great Bast, the women in here were killing him. Every single one was a dime piece.

He was in love with a woman that was thousands and thousands of miles away from him, but right now, he was surrounded by hungry sharks. And he was chum.

He took off his dark glasses and tucked them into the front of his shirt.

"Aye! You there, with the tight shirt and ugly ass face!"

N'Jobu looked up towards one of the several V.I.P. spaces Oba Oba's had on the second floor. He spotted Jax grinning down at him already drinking straight from a liquor bottle and holding it out towards N'Jobu. Next to Jax were five of his closest childhood friends. They were already lit.

"What's the lowdown?!" N'Jobu shouted and made his way towards his buddies with his Dora Milaje in tow.

Tonight was his night and his alone.

He could be Prince N'Jobu once again.

At last.
Is It Good To You?

Chapter Summary

N'Jobu learns of a rumor that may cause T'Chaka some problems because of him.

Chapter Notes

Hi All,

Dropped this update now so I could get the next chapter rolling without splitting chapters again.

Doing my best to write faster and crank out more quickly.

Enjoy, because things are going to go downhill for a moment in the Udaku clan soon.

Thanks for keeping up, and thanks for the kind words on here. Many of you know this, but sometimes when we all write, we never know how things are being received. So thanks to all responses and kudos.

"When my love comes down, I don't have to run around
I've got you and you know just what to do
to fulfill all my needs and satisfy me
But I'd like to know if the sexual healing is mutual,
do you feel what I'm feeling?
Do I please you? Do I fill the need? I know I might sound bold,
but I'd just like to know
Is it good to you? I want to know
Is it good to you? Oooh, I got to know, yeah
Is it good to you? C'mon and tell me, boy, yeah
Is it good to you?"

Tammy Lucas – "Is it Good to You?"

Damn near shit-faced.

That's how N'Jobu felt sitting around the V.I.P. table with his friends. Drinks flowed, the music was
out of control, and it felt so good to curse with Birmin Zana slang without having to check himself. He had known these guys since he was six years old. They were loyal, discreet, and fucking funny as hell.

Once N'Jobu caught up with the current happenings in and around Birmin Zana, and who was screwing who on the down low and in public, the conversation took a turn when he discovered that it was Jax going through the pregnancy scandal with the newly divorced socialite and River Tribe noblewoman.

Tossing back more plum liquor shots, N'Jobu heard the sordid tale straight from the jackass's mouth.

"Like, damn, Jax. Why the hell didn't you use protection? Ngqundu wako!" N'Jobu scolded.

"I'm an ass? Masende kayihlo!" Jax cursed back grabbing at his balls to insult N'Jobu.

"Eh, my father's balls? Nyo kanyoko!" N'Jobu shot back using his fingers to tap his tongue as a counter insult towards Jax's mother's private parts.

The other guys laughed and balled their fists up to their mouths at the bickering of two best friends.

"She said she had it covered. What can I say? I was doing it and thinking she would handle all of that. She's a noble. Those women should know better. Plus, she just got divorced. Ikaka, it might be her ex-husband's," Jax said.

"She keeping it?" N'Jobu asked.

"She can't."

"What if she does? What are you going to do?"

Jax sipped on a bottle of beer.

"She's not having it. I'll make sure she doesn't."

"She can get a DNA test you know," N'Jobu said.

"Not my problem. Plus, I hear her ex wants her back."

"Man, still…wouldn't you want to know if the child is yours? I mean if she keeps it, and it's yours, won't your families want legitimacy?"

"Ohhh, noooo, don't try to put that marriage yoke around my neck. You're the guy that has to get tied down for King and country! Filial obedience!" Jax hollered, slapping N'Jobu on his back.

N'Jobu only stared at Jax in disbelief.

"How many of your choices came to that dinner tonight?" Jax asked.

"We are talking about you, not me."

"Let's stop talking about him. I don't think she's pregnant anyway. I saw pictures of her drinking here last week for a birthday party. Pregnant women don't drink," said Odwa. His twin brother Paki was nodding his head.

"I saw those pictures too. She's playing you Jax," Paki said.
A popular song blasted the conversation and Jax jumped up shaking his hips, his thin twisted locs bouncing around his head.

"This is our cue, gentlemen. Our Prince has returned from fucking American women…don't roll your eyes at me N'Jobu, we know you! Odwa, look at his face, he's sitting here trying to act like he's been a good schoolboy in America."

"I know your comm tab has been blowing up since you got home. Who has been calling you to split them open before you go back, eh?" Paki said.

"Let's go dance, this is the song!" Their friend Chisulo said, dropping his body low and twisting his feet to the massive bass rumbling throughout the club.

Sekani, N'Jobu's third cousin on his mother's side took a long drag from a bottle of peach vodka. He wiped his mouth after drinking and stared at N'Jobu, his bald head shiny under the club lights.
"Cousin, let's go," he said.

N'Jobu stood up and followed them as they walked past several elite sections. As N'Jobu sauntered through, he felt eager eyes on him and saw people giving head nods out of respect for his presence. Before they reached the stairs, he had to stop and use the restroom.

"I'll meet you guys down there," he said.

His Dora Milaje were discreet, but still watching his movements closely.

After relieving himself in the restroom, N'Jobu circled around towards the stairs.

"Prince N'Jobu!"

N'Jobu's head snapped to his right and he saw Zinzi and a group of women sitting in their own section. He recognized several of the women, their parents had eaten with him at the palace earlier.

Zinzi wore white skin-tight pants and a white leather corset top that showed off her ample bosom. N'Jobu didn't feel any shame when he let his eyes dip low to check out her breasts. She wasn't shy about showing them off. Oba Oba's was the place to see and be seen. She caught his reckless eye-balling and smiled.

"Zinzi," he said, stepping to her. He reached for her hand and kissed it. The women with her watched him with fierce sparkling eyes.

"Hello Ladies, you all look amazing," he said, acknowledging them. The one sitting closest to him, a pretty woman with dimples and a baby afro who he didn't recognize, kept biting her lip as she gazed at him.

"How come you didn't come over to my section?" he asked, placing his hand over his heart and pretending to look offended.

"You looked like you were in deep conversation with your friends. I didn't want to disturb your reunion."

"You disturb me? Never! Come, dance with me," he said, clasping her hand in his. He felt her fingers squeeze his a little. Her friends looked gobsmacked by how familiar he was acting with Zinzi, his informal Wakandan inflections scandalous to their ears. She did ask him to be seen with her so that the gossip could get back to her lover.
"Sure, your Highness," she said.

"Ladies, excuse us please," he said.

He led Zinzi down the stairs and through a boisterous crowd of dancers. They both could feel more covetous eyes on them. Zinzi's fingers felt warm and smooth interlaced with his, quite comfortable in fact.

He could see his boys throwing down already with women who were serving them hips and dips. The music was funky and not for the rhythmically challenged.

N'Jobu wasted no time grabbing Zinzi's waist. She was already tossing her ass back at him in that slow teasing way that women from this part of town were famous for doing. One leg up and bent, then the other lifted, bent at the knee, tiny steps alternating left to right, hip twisting, ass cheeksiggled in precise isolations. River tribe women were known for those type of moves, but a dance craze that caught on a year ago filtered over into Birnin Zana from that region. Now everyone was doing it.

N'Jobu had to create an artificial barrier between him and Zinzi. Yes, he was connected to a woman in the States, and yes, he was committed to being faithful to her, but he was also a man who had a body that reacted to fine women. And Zinzi was fine as Ethiopian honey wine. When her ass got too close to his groin, he made sure not to press into her.

She turned around and raised her hands in the air, and that was a problem because now he could not stop looking at her chest and the way her breasts bounced to the music. He quickly forced himself to keep dancing but focused his eyes elsewhere as if he were taking in all the sights and sounds of the club.

A popular song called "Zana Highlife" came on, and N'Jobu really cut loose with Zinzi. She was fun to dance with and actually kept up with him.

"You're good, Prince N'Jobu!" she said, moving around him.

He smiled at her as he worked his shoulders in time with his hips.

"Okay your Highness, I see you!" she called out, trying to match his moves.

They partied to five songs and then N'Jobu took her hand and walked her over to a bar and ordered drinks for them. All the drinks were on the house for him. He asked for two house wines, and when they arrived, he took them and had Zinzi follow him to an open table in a booth. The other tables near them were empty because people were on the dance floor. From the corner of his eye, he saw Yejide and Ometeko positioning themselves near him. No one would bother them at the table or in this section.

Sipping their white wine, N'Jobu kept eyeing Zinzi. She might actually be the one for his family's legacy. They got along so far as adults. He had known her when they were kids, but that was a long time ago. She was a woman now. An amazing one.

They did a little small talk about her current work organizing counseling for mental health and advocating for geriatric outreach. They spoke of his education and the excitement of the new royal baby. He showed her pictures of his friends in California on his comm tab. Always group shot photos, and usually he was in the back of the pictures trying to be obscure. He made sure not to show her any photos that he had of Califia and him together. Those were his private stash, mostly selfies of them kissing.
Califia seemed to adore photos of them tonguing each other down. Kissing between them was almost as good as intercourse. It had turned into a necessary extended act of foreplay that he enjoyed very much, especially when paired with his licking her all over from her front to her back. They once had an intense kissing session on her grandmother's couch when everyone had gone to bed. Califia had worked him up so bad that when they stopped twisting their lips and tongues together after forty minutes, he had soaked a section of his pants with pre-cum and he thought he had ejaculated because the stain was so big.

"Any girlfriends out there in America?" Zinzi asked.

"No," he said sipping on his wine, hoping his face didn't betray him.

"But you are seeing women, right?"

"Yeah. I date. But school is pretty intense."

"I hear you're a top student."

"Always. That's an Udaku trait."

"Okay, I guess," she said.

"You and Captain Gcuma…?"

He was curious.

"You were great tonight. Thank you."

"So, what's the deal with that? Why don't you two just get married? I can tell he is into you. He looked shocked when he saw me stepping up."

"My parents. He's older. Divorced. No children. They think being divorced is a sign of bad character and because he never had children with his wife, he must be infertile."

"Who was he married to?"

"Wananeya Duzi."

"The Duzi family? Whoa. How'd he screw that up?"

Zinzi punched his leg.

"Be nice. He fell in love with me."

"You were messing around with a married man?"

"They were separated for three years before he and I…"

"I understand," N'Jobu said.

"I was finishing up my military stint. He was my commanding officer. He just…we just…"

"Easy, Zinzi. You don't have to explain. The picture is clear."

"To be fair, he is descended from the Oni family. His mother is an Oni. He has noble blood."

"But the whole divorce, and maybe him being a lot older is an issue, eh?"
"Yes. But I don't care. My family wants to be in the palace. You know this. But I'm in love. I just want to get married and make that man some babies."

"Does he want to marry you?"

"I know he does. But he's scared to ask. Scared of losing his rank if my family goes after him because they disapprove. That's why I asked you to be seen with me openly. I want him to see that he could lose me. I want him to get a taste of seeing me with someone else."

"And that's supposed to do what? Make him propose?"

"Yes!"

"Well, if I were him, I would say screw the military and elope with you."

Zinzi's face lit up.

"Yeah?"

"Of course. Look at you. Beautiful. Smart. Funny. You remind me a lot of my…"

"I remind you of what?"

He sipped from his wine glass. Her eyes got big.

"You have a girlfriend, don't you? In the States."

"Keep this to yourself."

Zinzi studied his face.

"What?" he said.

"I knew something was up with you."

N'Jobu quirked his lips like she was talking nonsense.

"No, really. I noticed something about you when you were at the dinner. You seemed preoccupied but in a good way. And the way you are in this club right now, with all these beautiful women? I know for sure that when I throw this ass back on a man, they try to catch it. Are you in love, Prince N'Jobu?"

He sat back in the booth seat and sighed.

"Yes. I am."

Zinzi smiled.

"Can I see a picture of her?"

"You must keep this to yourself," he said.

"I've told you my deepest darkest secret that I don't want anyone to know about. You can trust me. I'm not looking for trouble."

N'Jobu pulled up one of his favorite photos of him and Califia together. She is straddling his lap and
looking up at his cell phone while he is kissing her cheek. His eyes are closed and his arms are around her and squeezing her tight. Her hair is a big thick ball of fury and her freckles are so vivid on her face. But it's her smile that melts him. Those luscious lips. Her teeth. That cheeky twinkle in her eye. The love of his life at this moment.

"My Bast, Prince N'Jobu. She is striking. No wonder…no wonder."

Zinzi is quiet and they both watch the crowd dance. N'Jobu can see his buddies still cutting up, the life of the party on the dance floor.

"Do your parents know about her?" Zinzi finally asks.

"No one. It's a new relationship. I've dated a lot over there. But this…this is something…I don't even know how to act sometimes. I mean, that girl…that girl has got me. What's crazy is, I wasn't even looking for this. I was happy just screwing around…and then, I don't know…something changed. I've never felt like this before, Zinzi. And it bothers me. It weighs on me. Because I can't keep her. I have fallen in love with someone for the first time in my life, and it's with a foreigner. I can never bring her here, and I can never stay there. I'm fucked."

He hadn't meant to lay all of that at Zinzi's feet. But it felt good talking to Zinzi. She made him feel open and trusting. She reached out her hand and cradled his fingers in hers.

"Your secret is safe with me. Although our situations are different, I do understand what you are going through."

"Thank you," he said, giving her a half smile.

"What time is it over there now? You should call her."

"It's around five."

"Call her," Zinzi said getting up, "I'm going to rejoin my friends for a bit."

She hesitated for a moment.

"Zinzi?"

"Before you leave, make sure we talk again. There's something I want to hip you to. A rumor you should be aware of."

"Okay. Is it about me?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Give me a few minutes. I'll come find you."

She nodded and eased back into the crowd.

Tapping his comm tab and placing his earbuds on, N'Jobu hit Califia's cell number.

"Filter background," N'Jobu whispered, and the earbuds worked on blocking out much of the loud music and background voices. It was pretty loud, but he hoped the noise reduction filter would do enough so he wouldn't have to move.

He almost gave up on the ninth ring when he heard her pick.
"N'Jobu!" she exclaimed, and the excitement in her voice made him close his eyes.

"Califia," he said, his voice a gentle whisper.

"How is everything? Is your family thrilled to have you back? What's the weather like—"

"Califia, I love you too."

The music in the background was still a little loud and he thought she didn't hear him.

"Baby?" he said looking down at his fingers. They were trembling.

"I wanted to tell you before you left. But I chickened out. I was going to wait until you came back home to me and tell you in person. But…it just came out like that, and maybe, I dunno, maybe I was scared to say it in person—" she said.

"Say it to me now," he said.

"I love you, N'Jobu. I love the hell out of you."

He released a loud exhalation of breath. He let his eyes drift across the dancers and the bright lights and the wonderful chaos that was his favorite club. His friends were at the bar lifting their drinks to him, their smiles wide and grateful that he was here with them once more. But at this moment, his heart and mind were far away.

I think I have loved you since the first time I saw you, Califia. When you touched my hand that first time…when you were checking out my bracelet…you looked up at me and …and there was something in your eyes that just caught me. Baby, this is so new to me. But I will do my best to make you happy. Okay?"

"Yeah," she whispered, her voice trembling over the call.

"I'm going to be thinking of you every day here."

"Same."

"I'm hanging out with my friends right now. We're at a club, and it looks like we're about to hit the dance floor again. Or drink some more I'm guessing. They are holding up shot glasses for me."

"Get off this phone and go have fun!"

Her laughter thrilled him. He would survive this trip. He didn't miss the fact that she had said coming back home to her. She was home. She was where he wanted to be.

"My schedule is going to be a bitch, so I may not be able to get at you until a few days from now."

"Maybe we can face chat next time?"

"I'll try to make that happen. A lot of political stuff is happening and my family is involved, so my time is really messed up. I'm glad to be back. Everyone is well."

"Good," she said.

"Talk soon?"

"Yeah."
He heard her give him a big wet kiss over the phone and then the call was done.

A stirring of confidence filled up his chest and he strolled over to his boys with a serious dip in his step.

###

After spending time at the bar drinking, N'Jobu let his friends return to the dance floor as he bounded up the steps of V.I.P.

He found Zinzi talking with her friends in her private section and he spirited her away to his V.I.P. section where they could be alone together.

"Spill it," he said, fingering a glass of water.

Zinzi tossed her braids over her shoulder.

"There has been talk about you and Princess Bathandwa. The entire country knows your family wants an heir. Everyone also knows that your brother and sister-in-law have been trying for awhile to have a baby."

"So? What does that have to do with me?"

Zinzi's eyes went downcast. She fidgeted with an ornate ruby ring on her index finger.

"There's a story going around that when Princess Bathandwa went to visit New York last June with the Women's Delegation, you flew there to see her because a month after she returned, it was announced she was a few weeks pregnant."

N'Jobu thought back to June. Bathandwa was part of a global women's movement to help neonatal health in so-called Third World countries. They were having a big conference near the U.N. and Bathandwa was giving a speech on African women's progress in East Africa. It was part of Wakanda's political maneuverings in the outside world, feigning the appearance of being a struggling nation with health issues.

During that time, N'Jobu had been messing around with a dish water blonde who taught at Mills College, a professor who he met at a university mixer who talked so much shit to N'Jobu that made him think she was cool that he ended up rearranging her guts in her apartment until he realized later in the situationship that she had a fetish for Black men. Especially dark-skinned men like him who had prowess in bed.

He had screwed the professor and missed a flight to JFK airport where he was to meet Bathandwa and her delegation for a quick hi and bye over dinner. They never met up and she flew home right after her speech.

"We never saw each other," N'Jobu said.

Zinzi shrugged.

"It doesn't matter. She leaves Wakanda after years of trying and comes back announcing a baby on the way. People started talking. There's also your reputation too."

"What is my reputation, hmm?"

"Womb wrecker? Damn."

"Listen, the people love that about you. No offense, but Prince T'Chaka is like the uptight country Uncle, and you are like everyone's favorite city nephew. They're going to talk."

"How long has this rumor been going?"

"Honestly, at first, it was like a big joke, you know, the stuff people say to poke fun of nobles. But then it started gaining traction, and I am afraid it has reached the ears of the palace. I am quite sure your brother is aware of it."

N'Jobu drank his water and pondered her words.

"I noticed tonight that Princess Bathandwa is very affectionate with you."

"And?"

"You may want to be very careful of how you two interact, especially during this time of the coronation. I do not mean to be rude, but people are watching you closely, and not just because of the betrothal march. Some people really believe that her baby is yours."

"Great," he said sighing heavily.

"This will pass. The good thing is, you will return to the States, and once the baby is born, everyone will see that the royal couple finally received the child they have been praying for."

"Let us hope so," he said, "any other gossip I should know about?"

"Your friend Jax, he is not the father of the baby that Yasmin is having. Your other friend Odwa is."

"Oh, shit."

"I know. You did not hear it from me."

"Hey…I talked to my girlfriend."

"Good. How is she?"

N'Jobu beamed.

"She sounded great."

"You are so cute when you are in love. Just all teeth right now."

N'Jobu smiled wider, then stared at Zinzi with a more somber expression. He rubbed his chin.

"Can I ask you something else, and be honest with me?"

"Go ahead."

N'Jobu glanced around to make sure they were still afforded privacy.

"In your opinion, how are the people taking the change. Are they for or against my brother?"

Zinzi's eyes squinted a bit and she pressed her lips together.

"From what I gather, and this is coming from my parents and other nobles, the change is viewed as a
good thing among people under forty. It's the older people who are not thrilled. They are accustomed
to our Kings and Queens ruling until they drop dead. No offense, your Highness."

"None taken."

"People generally like Prince T'Chaka. He has a level head, but, some feel that his crowning should
come later when he is more mature. How do you feel about it?"

"It seems fast to me. But I will trust my father's judgment."

"It lessens your time being a playboy I bet," she joked.

"Look whose showing teeth now," N'Jobu said.

"You know they weren't going to let you dangle out here for long."

"Lady Zinzi!"

Jax stepped back into the V.I.P. along with the rest of N'Jobu's crew. Zinzi stood and greeted all the
guys.

"I'll see you later, Prince N'Jobu."

"I'll call you for lunch."

"Do that," she said, leaving their private space.

Jax and the others watched Zinzi's hips sway as she walked around to rejoin her party.

"Sekmet in heaven. Please tell me you are choosing her, N'Jobu," Odwa said.

"I have tried for years to get that woman to look at me. I think she's stuck up," Jax said, grabbing his
crotch in a crude manner.

N'Jobu thought about asking his friends about the rumor, but if it were that serious, one of them
would've pulled his coattails by now.

All he knew was that if what she said was true, and the rumor had reached T'Chaka, that may be part
of his stress besides becoming King.

The guys were ordering more rounds of shots, and the music was getting hotter.

He'd worry about T'Chaka later.

###

N'Jobu rolled back into the palace way after six in the morning.

He sent his mother a message that he would not be joining the family for brunch, but would be
sleeping in before attending the planned evening outing, the opening of a brand-new opera in the
West Zana district. The royal family would be having dinner at a chic new restaurant so that the press
and paparazzi could get pictures. One of his other top picks for the betrothal march would be joining
them for dinner and attending the opera with the family.

Once inside his suite, N'Jobu showered, slathered his body in freshly made cocoa butter, and sat
inside his sauna to let the rich body butter soak into his skin. His limbs felt sore and heavy from
dancing long and late. He was proud that he wasn't hung over.

The heat softened his skin and he ran his hands up his thighs massaging his muscles. A viewscreen popped up on the glass of the sauna door, and N'Jobu stood up from the wooden bench of the sauna to check it. He forgot he had set a reminder alarm for himself to go jogging in the royal garden.

He reset the alarm for the next day, changed his mind, and set it for later in the afternoon. His wet fingers slid across the screen as he checked for messages. He opened an app for his computer and looked for his private Califia folder. The heat of the sauna woke up his skin. He ran his hand across his pecs, then double tapped the folder. He searched for a particular clip that he filmed with his kimoyo beads. He saw the thumbnail for the clip he wanted and tapped it.

Califia.

As big as life, projected into the sauna in full 3D.

She's on her knees facing him, naked on his bedroom floor. She has her hands on her breasts. He hears himself tell her to play with her tits, and she does, her eyes watching him. He feels bad for a second because it's the only clip he has of her face, and he wasn't trying to film it, he just got caught in the moment and he wasn't using his cell to tape, so the kimoyo beads captured everything.

N'Jobu stepped back from the projected image and just watched, his hands at his sides, the steam in the sauna causing Califia's image to look real. He watched her hands slide up her waist, circle around her stomach and then reach her chest. Her fingers toyed with her nipples first, and N'Jobu fought the urge to touch himself. He simply wanted to observe her.

She pushed her breasts together once her nipples hardened, and he felt his dick stir, blood rushed to help thicken it.

"Turn around, face down. Show me that ass," he said in the video.

Califia pivoted and crossed her arms on the carpet and laid her head on her hands, right on top of a pillow that was on the floor. Her ass sat up in front of him.

"Arch that back," his video voice commanded, and she used those dancer skills that trained her body to bend with complete control to pop that ass up higher. Her thighs parted and her ass cheeks separated enough so that her pussy was visible to him.

In the sauna, N'Jobu was weakened, his cock jutted out more as his eyelids drooped from the blessing that sat before him.

"Hhhhm….baby," he slipped between his gritted teeth. The bulb of his cock was fully fleshed out. He reached his hand up above his head towards a shelf that housed a small black box. He reached inside the box just when Califia's right hand reached between her legs and rubbed tight counterclockwise circles on her clit.

"Oooooohmmmmm..." N'Jobu groaned as his dick bobbed. It felt so heavy.

"Let me see those hands," N'Jobu commanded on video, and Califia pressed her face on the pillow. Both her hands reached back and pulled open her cheeks. Her fingernails were painted a satiny dark maroon, and they looked so pretty against her skin.

N'Jobu moaned again when he saw her opening give a small spasm and he saw her tasty pink pussy gap open wider. This woman is fucking art, he thought. There should be paintings of this fat juicy vulva throbbing open on museum walls. This is why men waged wars for centuries. Just to have the
power to control this pulsing, throbbing, dripping wet and divine thing. Looking at Califia, even in a
digitized state, he knew what a living Goddess looked like.

"Babb...byy..." he stuttered, slipping his fingers out of the black box and pulling out the item he
needed. A red cock ring.

He slipped the red band over his dick and rolled it all the way around his balls. His sack was very
sensitive when he touched it, and when he released his balls, they felt massive hanging from him
even with the new constriction placed on them.

"Jobu...Jobu..." Califia was panting out his name.

"Keep your hands where I can see them. Don't you let go," he said out loud to himself in the sauna
as he stroked his erection, the shaft slick from the cocoa butter and steam, his stomach muscles taut,
and his pecs flexing from the strain.

"Please...please...Jobu...fuck me..." she begged, spreading her cheeks wider.

"Shit..."

N'Jobu reached back into the box and pulled out a silver glans ring and twisted it around the girth of
his frenulum. When he released it, he felt his glans swell more. He stopped touching his erection and
just watched Califia begging for his dick. It was torture, an excruciating test of self-control. The more
she begged for his cock, the more his dick jumped. He used his own muscles to make his dick move,
the sweet pain of the cock rings constricting him building up his intense pleasure.

He watched himself slap Califia's sensitive clit with his hand, sharp strikes that made her yelp as he
watched her own body's natural lubricant ooze out of her glistening center.

"Dammit," he muttered, watching her squirm and not touching himself.

He watched himself move into the scene and grab her waist, slowly sinking his cock into her pussy.
N'Jobu found himself being even more turned on watching his own dick placate his woman who had
been begging and pleading for that moment of entry. Now he was listening to her cry out in pleasure
as he forced her to keep that back arched by pressing one hand down on her lower back.

"Jobu...huhhhnn...s'deep...hmmmmmnn...you in so deep...s'deep...fuck...DADDY...you in there...you in there..."

She was wailing and squirming harder, but he kept his dick deep inside her with a repetitive short
slow thrust. The movement made his balls just smash softly against her clit.

N'Jobu began to stroke his erection, because now what he was waiting for was coming up soon. He
watched himself jump from doggy to froggy style as he kept that agonizing deep thrust. Califia was
lying back on her hands again, trying her best not to collapse from overstimulation and no release.
His balls would press into her clit and she would wiggle to try and get the friction to offset her
orgasm, but the swivel in N'Jobu's hips prevented that. He was torturing her on purpose.

And he was torturing his real self too as he watched. He gripped his cock tight. A thick stream of
pre-cum spilled out in a long clear drizzle down to the sauna floor. His climax was in sight. He
watched himself plunge down deeper into Califia and hold still.

"Cum on this dick!" his video self barked at her.

Califia's ass jiggled and then he watched her entire vulva spasm and pulse around his cock.
N'Jobu's eyes shut tight as he shot hot ropes of cum onto the glass door of the sauna. His voice bellowed and grunted freely in the soundproof space as he coated the door with so much cum, it looked like someone had thrown a glass of milk on it.

When his eyes opened, he caught the last part of the video where he pulled out of Califia with his jizz spilling behind him from the release.

He leaned against the glass and gulped in as much air as he could, but he had to exit the sauna because it wasn't enough to revive his breath with the heated air going into his desperate lungs.

He pulled off the cock rings and dropped them on the sink in the bathroom. He stared at himself in the mirror and saw his blown pupils gazing back at him.

"Shit!" he yelled out, trying to gain his composure as he gripped the edges of the marble sink.

He staggered into his room and flopped onto his bed, still winded.

He fell asleep in a matter of minutes.

###
Be Thankful For What You Got

Chapter Summary

Califia visits her Dad and gets Christmas gifts from N'Jobu. A New Year's celebration may change some things.

Chapter Notes

Hi!

A new update. Pushing myself to be faster!

Thanks for keeping up with these two crazy kids.

"Though you may not drive a great big Cadillac
Gangster whitewalls TV antenna in the back
You may not have a car at all
But just remember brothers and sisters
You can still stand tall
Just be thankful for what you've got"

Andy Allo (version)—"Be Thankful For What You Got"

Califia took her time filling out the prison visitors pass neatly. It was a routine to help her prepare mentally for seeing her father. Big letters. Even lines. Slight slant with the numbers. Index finger and thumb making slow meditative movements. Methodical deep breaths.

First, it was her father's name and then the CDCR number. Next came her relationship to him and then her name and address. She signed her own name in a large flourish.

She handed the pass to a staff person and they checked her info on a computer. Once she passed that checkpoint, she removed her riding jacket and her motorcycle boots along with her keys and fanny pack, placing them on a conveyor to be X-rayed.

Her pass directed her to one of two waiting rooms, and when she arrived at the one to where she would meet her father, she handed over her pass once more. Then found a seat.

Visiting day on this day was a bit full. The day before Christmas Eve.

Califia wore a long sleeve red shirt with a holiday wreath on it and straight-legged black jeans. She waited thirty minutes and her father, Dante, finally arrived in his prison blues, his new eyeglasses odd-looking to her. It made him seem older. Dante pushed his glasses up on his nose and held out his arms for her. Califia moved easily into his warmth, and although every visit she tells herself she won't cry, she stood there with water leaking from her eyes in her father's arms. Dante stroked her back and murmured soothing words into her ear.
"Hey…hey…babygirl…"

Califia pulled it together and wiped her eyes.

Dante kissed her forehead and led her to an open table with seats. His hair was grayer, the thick waves combed back from his forehead. Even his beard had more white hairs since her last visit. Dante stared at her hair and chuckled.

"Nana?" he asked.

Califia reached up and let her hand swipe down the side of her hair. Her normal happy to be nappy crinkly fullness had been neutered by Nana Jean's flat iron with the ends of her hair bumped like she was in junior high again.

"I'm going to midnight mass with her tomorrow."

"It's cute. You look like a ginger-haired Aaliyah when she was in that Jet Li movie."

"Romeo Must Die?"

"Yeah."

"Nana said Veronica Lake."

"Her too."

The ends of her flattened hair touch past her shoulders, and she debates cutting it before June when she would face the maestros in Brazil. Baggage and negative energy could be carried in the hair, and she debated a big chop to help get her mind ready for her final test.

"You look great, babygirl."

"Thank you, Daddy."

Her father was always a handsome man. A pretty boy. He was probably her reason for falling for guys who were extra easy on the eyes. A light cola nut brown, his skin was still smooth except for the few worry lines in his forehead. Medium build with a silky voice, Califia was very clear as to why her mother fell for him. Her daddy was smart. A college-dropout who went to work for the city sanitation department when her mother "fell" pregnant with her during their senior year of college. Her mother graduated cum laude with a Biology degree and Califia on her hip.

Califa's father was on his way back to finish up his derailed education when the cop incident happened. Her family never recovered.

"How's your mother?"

Califa hated it when he asked about her mom. She couldn't help but to still feel anger towards her mother. Califia knew other people in her life who had a father go to jail or prison. And their mothers were ride or die. Not her mom, though.

Melissa Stevens chose divorce and a new husband after her father was in jail for two years. Moved clear across the country to be rid of the stigma. There would be no fifteen-page letters or conjugal visits, or Polaroid pictures of their family next to a plastic prison Christmas tree.

"She alright," Califia huffed.

"Your little brothers?"
"Daddy, please. I can't stand them."

"Hey, that's your family."

"You're my family. Can we not talk about her or them? Please?"

Dante folded his hands on the table. She reached out and held his hand.

"My cap and gown came in yesterday!"

"Aye!" Dante said, high-fiving her, "I'm proud of you."

"If I can keep my G.P.A. the same next term, your girl will be, ahem…summa cum laude."

Califia dusted her shoulders playfully and her father high-fived her again.

"I'm going to take the CBEST early, and I should be able to get into the accelerated Teacher's program next August."

"Okay, Miss Handle Her Business. Are you ready for Brazil?"

"When Bakari gets back he's going to work with me every Saturday and I'll train with Phillip and them on Mondays and Wednesdays. I'm crossing my fingers that my class schedule will line-up the way I need it too. I'm so done with this part of school, Daddy."

Dante patted her hand, then sat back a bit, looking her over and smiling.

"Nana tells me you have this new boyfriend…"

Califia's face heats up. She hated discussing men with her father. He could be so relentless and corny with his teasing.

"His name is N'Jobu."

"She said he's a foreign student. African, right?"

"From Wakanda."

"She said you see him a lot. He's been hanging at the house kinda late. She said she had to remind you all about staying past an appropriate hour—"

"Daddy, I'm grown."

"Are you paying bills in Nana's house?"

Califia felt her mouth close tight.

"I know you're a good girl. Responsible. Nana doesn't want you messing up like me and your Mama."

"I'm a mess up?"

"I'm talking about dropping out and not finishing your education like me in case…y'know…you get caught out there."

"Ugh, why are we talking about this? I'm not getting caught nowhere. Believe that."
"Nana wanted me to remind you that her house rules are rules. Not suggestions. Your little boyfriend can't be hanging around until two in the morning."

"Daddy, I spend the night at his house three or four times a week. We're not having sex in Nana's house."

"For Nana's sake, can you have your gentleman friend leave at a decent hour when you happen to be over there? Please? To keep the peace."

Califia rolled her eyes out of annoyance.

"Don't roll your eyes at me, little girl," he said, chuckling.

"So annoying. Junie pays no rent, but be having girls sneaking in and out."

"Junie's not my child. But I will talk to Nana about that, though. Are you at least kicking her ends every now and then?"

"Yes."

"So…about this N'Jobu…"

Califia started smiling wide. Her father grinned.

"He must be special with you smiling like that."

"He is."

"Treats you well?"

"Very. He's the reason why I don't work at the Blue Rose anymore."

"What? The titty bar? You gave that up?"

"He went to my job and told my boss she had to find someone else. Then he put a bunch of money on my account so I didn't have to work at all the rest of the term."

"Is that so?"

Dante stared at her hard for a while.

Califia pulled out a picture from her jean pocket printed up on computer paper.

"This is him,' she said.

Dante picked up the paper photo. Bakari had taken the picture of them sitting on her grandmother's porch. They were hip to hip and holding hands, both smiling up for Bakari's camera.

"Got yourself a highly melanated brotha! Betcha girls be hawking him!"

"Yeah, they do," Califia sighed.

"You look really happy with him."

"I am. He's so good to me, Daddy."

He slid the picture back to her.
"I'll ask if you can keep this copy, Daddy."

"Thanks, babygirl."

"I put some money on your books. You want a snack?"

Dante nodded, and Califia walked over to the vending machines and purchased sodas and cookies for them.

The rest of their time was spent playing chess with Califia catching him up on family and political happenings in the city. He spoke to her of his on-going work helping other inmates prep for getting their G.E.D.'s. They both avoided talk of his parole hearing the following year, it was too painful for Califia to think about. She wanted to feel hopeful, but the past few years had shown her nothing but letdowns in the legal process. They mutually excluded the topic and spoke of other things. The thought of her father not getting out on the appeal they were praying for hurt too much.

She spent the entire allotment of visiting hours there with him. When it was time to leave, she didn't cry because her father had filled her with wonderful energy and positivity. She was able to give him the picture of herself and N'Jobu.

"I'll be back up in a couple of weeks," she said hugging her father tight.

"Give Nana a big hug for me. I'm proud of you, Cali. You're on your way."

"It's because you believe in me, Daddy."

"I wish I could be there to see you graduate."

"Nana and 'nem will take a ton of pictures. I will bring you my diploma."

"How long will your Mama be out here for?"

"It's just her flying out. She said four days."

"You should go spend time with her this summer before you go to Brazil—"

"Daddy, you know I don't get along with anyone back there."

"Not even your mother?"

"She is so judgmental, and she spends most of her time catering to her husband and the boys. It gets on my nerves. Saddity negroes. I'm about to walk with honors and they still complain that I should've gone to Stanford or Berkley."

"You could've gone, y'know…"

"But I wanted to stay here and go to school where you and moms met. I'm happy there. I did well. But that status shit—"

"Hey—"

"Ugh… that status thing is all they care about. Last Christmas her husband sat at the table in front of his family and bragged about going to Princeton and how his boys were going to Princeton, and how my public education would hold me back. I'm a kid from Oakland who got into every school I applied for. Private and public. I'm walking summa cum laude when his butt barely kept a C average at Princeton. He didn't even graduate!"
"Forget that fool, babygirl. Your mother is your mother. She loves you…"

"She doesn't act like it sometimes, Daddy. Sometimes when she looks at me, I feel like I upset her. Nana says it's because I look too much like you."

Dante stared at Califia and gave her one last hug.

"You look like a winner, sweetheart. You look like a winner. I'm so grateful for that."

###

She rode her motorcycle for the three-hour trek back to N'Jobu's place with happy thoughts. She bought a cheap polaroid picture of her and her father in front of the prison visiting room Christmas tree. This was one of her better holiday visits with her father. Holidays were always rough for inmates and families, but she felt that her joy over N'Jobu had something to do with her Dad's great spirits. She had spent more time talking about N'Jobu, and her Dad seemed to feed off of her excited tone.

Her father's last words to her as she left was to tell N'Jobu hello. That made her smile. It also made her heart grateful for N'Jobu telling her he loved her over the phone. She felt surrounded by love, and not so alone anymore.

###

Califia was boiling apple cider with cinnamon sticks inside N'Jobu's kitchen when the doorbell rang. She turned off the stove and went to the front door.

Peeking out of the keyhole, she didn't recognize the person outside at first until he called out Bakari's name. She hesitated. Then opened the door.

Moises.

"Oh, hi. I thought Bakari was home. I saw the lights on from the balcony," he said.

Califia kept the door cracked open, just peeking her head at him.

She had on leggings and one of N'Jobu's sweatshirts.

"How did you get in through the gate?" she asked.

"Someone else was already going through, so I didn't have to use the call box."

"What do you want?" she asked, keeping herself curt with him.

"Califia, right? Moises," he said, pointing to his eye.

She waited.

"I just came by to apologize to Bakari. But since you are here, I'd like to apologize for my behavior at the party."

She kept silent. She could tell he was not used to the silent treatment.

"The things I said…they were foul…"

"Yeah, they were."
"You are not going to make this easy at all, huh?"

"Nope."

Moises nodded.

"N'Jobu almost choked the hell out of me that night. I went home and did some thinking. And my friends came down on me too. My Black American friends…"

"What? You actually have Black American friends?"

Her sarcasm made him smile.

"I deserve that. I know. But, listen. I went and looked up your performance online. It was excellent, and it made me re-think my words, and I'm going to do better. I sometimes rub people the wrong way—"

"Tuh…ya think?"

"Well, your dance and what you conveyed to me at the party meant something. So please, accept my deepest apologies. And if you see Bakari, let him know I'd like to apologize to him in person too."

Calafia looked deep in Moises' eyes. He seemed truly sincere.

"I'll let Bakari know you stopped by."

"Thanks."

Moises stood there on the top step staring at her. He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a small party flyer on card stock.

"I'm having a New Year's party. I'd love for you and N'Jobu to come. All kinds of music. Kind of like an African fete. There's a cover charge, but I will put all your names on a guest list."

He handed it out for her. She took it.

"I'll think about it."

"Good. Again, I'm very sorry, Califia."

He made his way down the stairs. She opened the door all the way and looked down at him.

"Hey, Moises."

"Yes?"

"I'm not sorry I punched you,… however, it's not always easy to apologize sometimes. You really hurt Bakari and me with your words, but I'm willing to forgive. You just stick to your promise about doing better."

"I will do that."

She watched him head out towards his car. She went back into the apartment and looked at his flyer. A club across the bridge. A nice one at that. Looked like it might be worth the trip.

Looking around N'Jobu's livingroom, the loneliness crept back in. One way to fight it was to stay
busy. She poured herself a glass of hot apple cider, mixed in some strong Haitian rum, and then fired up Bakari's latest video game. She drank and played, cursing her lack of success in wiping out the zombies chasing her avatar. The rum may have had something to do with that.

Her cell phone pinged, and when she checked it, several texts from N'Jobu popped up with photos. She felt her cheeks stretch from smiling.

The first three photos were group shots of N'Jobu with his friends in a club. Califia felt her stomach flutter when she saw his smiling face. His friends were good-looking and dressed like runway models. One of the photos had a picture of a woman in white pants and a very revealing white corset. She was standing next to N'Jobu and he had his arm around her shoulder. Granted, he had his arm around the shoulder of a male friend too, but the woman's beauty made Califia feel slight unease.

Another photo showed N'Jobu standing...damn..., she tapped the photo to enlarge it. He was standing waist deep in clear running water. She could see the beginnings of his trimmed pubic hairs, and those V lines she loved in his groin. In the background, she could see rock formations and trees. It was the creek he told her about. The spot he wanted to take her to if she ever went to Wakanda one day.

There were a few more photos of what looked like street vendors serving N'Jobu food that looked delicious, and one final photo of N'Jobu lying in a giant hotel bed with a sheet barely covering his nude body. The text with that photo said, "Wish you were here with me."

She looked over all the photos again, especially the one with him in the water. She held her cell up above her head and snapped a photo of her playing Bakari's video game. Looking at her selfie she opted to erase it and went into his bedroom instead, with her laptop.

She hopped on his bed. Angling the laptop where she wanted it, she stared at the computer camera and pressed record on face chat.

"N'Jobu, thank you for the pictures. But I'm upset with you. Why did you have to send me sexy pictures of yourself when you know I can't touch you? Such a tease," she said.

She slowly pulled his sweatshirt over her head, revealing her naked breasts. She cradled them and stared at the camera.

"You made my nipples get hard, see?"

She plucked at her pebbled nipples, then massaged her breasts while still staring at the computer camera.

"There's no one here who can help me but you, baby," she said pushing her tits together and looking at them. She squeezed her fingers around her areolas and thought of N'Jobu naked and warm next to her, his thick veined dick tapping on her lips. She felt her eyes roll back and her clit began to thump from imagining him being there with her.

Before she knew it, she had forgotten about the laptop and pulled off her leggings, her thighs splayed out and her fingers groping her own folds.

"Baby, I need you..." she whispered, plundering her own pussy and tugging on her tits with her free hand.

"I need your dick, Jobu...I need it...I need it...hunnnhhhh...I need you..."
out onto the duvet. She pushed back and shifted onto her knees.

"Look at your pussy," she whined, her fingers splaying open her wet center, "you should be inside me."

She couldn't control the clenching her pussy was doing inside of her. She was drunk and feeling bratty.

"Who's going to take care of this pussy while you're gone?" she said, giggling.

She jiggled her ass and played with her clit until she felt herself on the verge of cumming. The landline phone rang.

Califia flopped back over on the bed, her face flustered. She rubbed her tits then looked at the laptop. The landline rang again.

"Ah, I see he finally got here. This is what happens when you go away, baby. A replacement."

She patted her clit with her hand then turned off the computer camera. She attached the recording to N'Jobu's face chat email and sent it off.

She threw on her clothes and ran to get the phone.

It was her pizza delivery, waiting to be buzzed in.

She waited for the delivery person to run up the stairs with her large pepperoni with pineapples. She was going to have to get more drunk or high in the next few weeks, or stay hella busy because being without N'Jobu sucked balls. And pizza was a lousy stand-in for a boyfriend. Even with extra cheese.

###

Christmas had come and gone and the wrapped box N'Jobu had left for her was all the books he wanted her to read for their couple's reading challenge. And a few other things. She was excited to see they were titles she had never heard of. One was a book of love poems by a Wakandan writer. Another was a book of Wakandan folktales. Two were fiction anthologies by two Black British writers in London. The final pick was a photo book about the continent of Africa by a West Indian travel photographer.

Califia flipped through the travel book and then looked back in the box. Wrapped up in a soft cloth were three gorgeously framed photos of her and Rolita dancing at the McKenna. The full-color shots of their famous touching of hands as Califia leaped above Rolita's head.

There was a final box under the picture frames. One the size of a deck of cards.

She unwrapped the box and inside were three delicate strands of colorful glass and crystal beads mixed in with precious stones that were a purplish-blue that glowed a lovely electric blue tint when held at the light in certain angles.

She opened the card and read the note inside.

"Califia, I hope you like these frames. They are for your mother, father, and grandmother. I have a photo for you too, but you can pick out the frame you want when I get back and I'll have it fixed up for you. I still think of this dance and how dynamic the two of you were. I keep this photo on my cell."
In Wakanda, these beaded hip chains are given to young women by their mothers. My culture has traditions that they still cling to and women often wear these to denote their relationship status as being off the market. Taken. Wives wear them for their husbands in intimate settings. I want to hear what they sound like when I return to you in the quiet of our bedroom.

I hope you have a wonderful Christmas holiday with your family.

You are always on my mind.

Until I see you again,

N'Jobu

Califia felt her cheeks flame when she read the lines again about the beads. Wives and husbands. The way he wrote "our bedroom". Being taken. Thoughts and feelings about him flooded her body with nervous adrenaline.

She had held up the beads and heard the tinkling sound they made rubbing together. She carefully hooked each strand around her waist and wiggled her hips. They were so pretty. The gift made her feel so special.

###

She decided to wear N'Jobu's beads to Moises' New Year's party.

She had convinced Bakari and Shavonne to go with her after Bakari accepted the apology from Moises.

She wore a cute pair of ripped jeans with Mary Jane platforms and a snazzy looking black top her mother sent her for Christmas. She found the top her mother gave her a little risqué, her neck and breasts all covered in the front, but the back a crisscrossing of strings showing all of her back. She didn't wear a bra with it. Her flat-ironed hair was slowly going back to its natural frizzy state, so she twisted it into a neat top-knot and wore dangly earrings. The delicate chains N'Jobu gave her for a gift made her outfit pop, and she felt a lovely sense of being his while wearing them. They hadn't spoken since his one-time call while at the club, but she wasn't concerned. She had been wrapped up in reading the books he gave her and looking up pictures of Wakanda online. She couldn't find any pictures of Black Creek, but there was a gorgeous photo of a lake and some underwater photography of a wide variety of fish.

She tried to find some information about political happenings in the country, but the one web page she found that was the country's official fact page didn't have any useful info. Just stats, weather, animal migrations, and basic info on the head of the royal family, King Azzuri Udaku. She skipped all of that scouring for photos of the landscape. Nothing popped up for N'Jobu's last name under diplomats.

The myths of Wakanda fascinated her, and the other books were really good. But the Wakanda love poems…

She did not expect them to be that erotic. The first poem was a lovely ode to women and their kindness and importance in raising a nation. But then after that, the poems went far into the reaches of sensuality, the writing focused on the senses and rewards of carnal delight. She found herself re-reading verses, feeling herself tingle all over. It made her wonder about the sex lives of all Wakandans. If they were reading poetry like that, no wonder N'Jobu was the way he was in lovemaking. She couldn't wait for him to get back and read to her in bed. She wanted to memorize a
few of them so she could say them to him while making love.

Bakari and Shavonne greeted her with hugs and great energy for the night. They opted to take the
BART into the city and joined crowds of people seeking parties and party people.

"How's the separation?" Bakari asked her as she walked with them towards the club.

"I'm doing well. I miss him like crazy though."

"Ah," Shavonne said, her arm clutched to Bakari's.

"I like those beads," Bakari said looking at her hips. They jingled as she walked.

"A gift from N'Jobu. In his country they mean a woman is taken."

"That is so sexy," Shavonne said glancing at the chains.

"My nigga got you locked down for real," Bakari teased.

Califia bent forward and shook her hips.

"Get it, girl," Shavonne encouraged.

There was a line outside the club.

"Wow, you sure we can get in?" Shavonne asked looking at the line as it snaked around the block.

"We're supposed to be on a list," Califia said.

They walked to the front of the line and found a white woman in a silver party wig holding a large
Ipad.

"Is this the guest list?" Bakari asked.

"Yes," the woman said, scrolling to a particular page, "Names?"

They gave them and quickly found themselves going in and hearing groans from some of the people
still waiting outside.

Inside the club, the festive atmosphere and the hard-driving African pop songs had Califia and
Shavonne already moving their hips.

"This is jumping!" Califia said, glancing around.

The dance floor was huge, and people were already grooving even though it was barely ten in the
evening.

A beautiful Black woman with a multi-colored party hat and noise-makers walked over to them
handing out hats and horns to them.

Califia cocked her party hat to the side of her head, stuck a horn in her mouth and headed onto the
dance floor.

"You fired up already!" Bakari shouted leading Shavonne out onto the floor.

Califia was already feeling her gummy edible kick in. It would be the last one she would take for a
while until midnight. Califia glanced over to a corner of the club and saw why the music was hitting
so hard; there was a live ten-piece band next to the D.J. booth.

A man with hips that were just as active as Califia's joined her, and she enjoyed the man's attention, letting her hips swivel, N'Jobu's beads jumping in time to the rhythm. The drum beats elevated her spirits. She felt her tits bounce freely, the sensation of her silky top rubbing against her nipples was delicious. Her skin was coming alive because of the edible. She had one more left in her pocket she was going to eat before the countdown.

There was a spotlight zipping around the patrons on the dance floor as well as strobe lights. Califia was dancing with another cute Black guy with a 'fro that was big enough to rival her own when she wore one. He bent his head down and whispered in her ear.

"What is your name?" His accent sounded French.

"Califia," she said, moving around, feeling the music go through her body, the blood pumping through her veins, the Wakandan erotic poetry still filling her head up with dirty thoughts. The dancing made her feel amorous. It had been a long time since she just shook her ass for fun.

"You are beautiful, Califia," he said, moving in closer, whispering in her ear.

"Thank you," she said.

She turned her back on him to watch Bakari and Shavonne.

Bakari had his hands on Shavonne's waist and was grinding into her backside.

Califia felt a bit of envy, wishing N'Jobu were there so she could throw herself back at him. The music shifted, a Fela Kuti song erupted.

"Oh, shit, they are not playing!" Califia shouted, her hips and ass cheeks taking over. Her body felt hot, a light sweat breaking out on her skin. She really began to notice how skimpy her mother's gift blouse was. It really was just a swatch of cloth in the front and a few strings clinging to her back. Sexy as fuck. And she was feeling herself, dropping her legs low and shimmying her waist.

"You must be West African," the 'fro dude said when she turned to face another direction.

"Nah, man, pure Oakland," she said, giving him a smile.

"I'm from Senegal," he said.

"Nice," she said, arching her back, feeling her arms start to swing.

She felt the spotlight on her, the blazing lights blinding her for a second. She kept her eyes down and watched her own hips gyrate.

"Get it, Cali!" Bakari hollered.

She twirled around to face him and found herself looking at a fine-looking woman with skin the color of rich burnt sienna. She had on a vest made of cowrie shells and her short skirt let Califia know she had legs for days. The woman wiggled her body and looked Califia up and down, then started winding her hips and arms in a way that challenged Califia.

The woman started slow isolations of her hips, and Califia thought of turning around and ignoring her, but the weed in her system was feeling quite lovely, and her own tits were turning her on, so she stopped her waist from winding and just let her hips and ass do the work, dropping down to her
ankles in such a slow erotic way, that folks around them stood back to make room.

The woman smiled and started popping and thrusting her hips at Califia like she was trying to control the situation, but Califia simply rose back up and switched up on ole girl by bringing the dance style of Brazil into the mix, her feet and arms taking her back to the days of dancing with Soliel during carnival time. The woman seemed confused, so Califia switched it up again, bringing Geechee Girl magic to the mix, her arms swinging, her ass bouncing, N'Jobu's beads thumping on her hips. The music changed to something an East Bay crowd would snap to.

Califia felt a man's hands on her waist, the spotlight heat back on her face. Twisting her head to the side, she saw it was Bakari joining her, bringing that Oakland swag. They grooved together like they did as teens, each anticipating the other's moves.

"Bakari, I'm so happy right now! Thank you for coming with me. I needed to get out!" she shouted, throwing her arms around his neck. He twirled her around, then grabbed Shavonne's hand.

"Aye!" Califia shouted, moving past the woman who challenged her who now smiled at Califia.

Someone grabbed at her hand, and when she drew back to see who it was, she caught the flash of Moises' teeth as he smiled at her.

"Califia! You made it!" he said, dancing with her.

Bakari gave Moises a head nod, and Califia felt better about dancing with him.

"You are really moving out here! Getting people hyped."

She regarded the room. More people were on the dance floor, the band was cooking deep Afro-beats.

"This is really nice. Thanks for inviting us."

"Where's N'Jobu?" he asked, looking around.

"Still in Wakanda."

"He let you come out by yourself? Is he crazy?"

"I'm a big girl," she said.

"All kinds of eyes are watching you. I wouldn't have you in a club if you were mine and I was gone."

Califia shrugged.

"I'll keep an eye out for you. Let me know if the wolves get too frisky," he said.

"You're the biggest one," she said.

He gave her a look that tugged up the corners of his lips.

He pulled out his cell.

"Hey, Bakari, come get in this," Moises said.

Bakari put an arm around Cali's neck and held Shavonne's waist as they took a selfie with Moises,
who placed his face near Califia's.

"This will make him jealous," Moises said, typing into his phone, "I just sent it."

Califia continued dancing, trying to ignore some of the men who kept pulling at her arm when she moved near them to get her to dance with them. She moved closer to the band and found a jovial partner in a lanky young man with boundless energy. She turned her head to look around and she felt her heart squeeze.

She saw Xavier dancing with a woman near the middle of the floor. Did he see her?

His head turned in her direction and they made quick eye contact. Califia turned and made her way to the bar to get water.

Xavier must've had the same idea because he headed over to her, with his girl.

"Califia," he said.

"Xavier, hi,"

They hugged and then Xavier slipped his arm around the waist of his really tall date and pulled her closer to Califia.

"This is Fern. Fern, this is Califia."

Fern smiled, her bone straight raven hair cascading down the front of her shoulders. Fern looked a bit ambiguous. Califia wasn't sure if she was just extra light skinned or actually white. She was pretty in a San Jose kind of way, which wasn't really saying much.

"Hi, Califia, nice to meet you. I'm going to the restroom, I'll be right back, hun," Fern said. Definitely not Black as far as Califia could tell.

"Alright, I'll wait for you here," he said. They both watched Fern waddle her way towards the back in super high heels.

"Interesting," Califia drawled out, sipping her glass of water.

"Are you high right now?"

"Maybe," she said, then started giggling. Xavier smiled. He had cut off his twists and now sported a clean-cut look. Nice.

"I saw Bakari out there. I see he and Shavonne are still hanging."

"They are moving in together next year."

"For real?"

"Yep. He in love."

The music was bubbling, and Califia let her hips shimmy with it.

"So, Fern…" Califia teased.

"Yeah?"
"Really tall," Califia said.

"Spit it out," he said.

"What? I just said she's really tall...nigga, that bitch is really tall."

Xavier just chuckled, and Califia laughed with him. She was happy they could be cordial.

"I saw you out there," he said.

"Swangin' it!" she said, moving her hands around.

"How do you know Moises?"

"Uh, he's a friend of a friend," she said.

Xavier nodded.

"How was your Christmas?" she asked.

"Good. Family is all good. You?"

"Also good. Saw my Dad. He's doing well."

"Nice," he said.

Xavier started looking around.

"She get lost or something?" Califia asked.

"Maybe," he said glancing around. They both spotted Fern talking to a couple of Black guys. She towered over them both.


Fern looked over at them and waved at Xavier. Then she kept talking to the guys.

"You want to dance?" Califia said, feeling bad for Xavier.

"Um..."

"Dude, she's not going anywhere."

Califia grabbed his arm and dragged him out to the dance floor with Bakari and Shavonne.

Bakari gave Califia a coy look but greeted Xavier with enthusiasm. They all danced together for a few songs, and then Fern came shimmying over. Califia let Xavier get back to his date. She felt good. Xavier had someone...sort of...and their interactions at the club were cool.

Califia popped her last gummy edible and watched as Moises and his friend Danso joined their little group on the dance floor.

"This is like the best music!" Califia shouted at Moises, grabbing his arm. He clasped her hand and twirled her around, and she laughed as she bumped into Xavier and Fern.

"My bad," Califia said, patting Fern on her shoulder. Moises reached for Fern's hand and twirled her and they all laughed as she squealed in delight.
"Girl, how are you able to move in those shoes?" Califia asked.

"Very carefully," Fern said.

The music switched into Salsa, and Califia gave Xavier a look, but he was already linked up with Fern again. Bakari was busy with Shavonne, and Moises had left to grab a mic for the countdown. Danso was shaking his tail feathers, but Salsa was clearly not his forte. She thought of stepping away from the dance floor, but then she felt Xavier's hand clasp hers. Fern was shaking it was Danso.

"Old times sake?" Xavier asked.

"Boy, get it poppin'," she said.

Xavier swung her out and she shook her hips, then brought her hand back into his and they were off to the races. Their shit was still tight, and it brought back memories to Califia. It was an Oakland Salsa club where she originally met Xavier. He had been ripping up the floor, and Califia had tried her best to catch his attention so she could dance with him. But girl after girl swung out with him, and by the time she was ready to call it a bust, he had walked up to her and said, "I know you're not leaving without dancing with me," and she felt her chest flutter as she took his hand and he worked her out. They danced the rest of the night together, and she felt giddy being with him.

Twirling with him now, muscle memory automatically knowing when to catch and release with him, pressing herself into a body that knew how to move to the beat and lead her well, she felt exhilarated. Although they were moving fast, the weed in her system was slowing down her perceptions, and she felt like a perfectly divine being caught in the flow of the percussion. The beads on her hips glinted in the club lights, and the horn section of the live band made her swerve hard. Others in the room were moving just as fluid as them, especially the serious Salsa connoisseurs.

When the music died down, Moises was back in the middle of the group with a mic in one hand, his cell phone in the other, and the spotlight on him.

"10…9…8…7…" Moises spoke into the mic.

Everyone in the club crowded onto the dancefloor, counting down with him. Xavier had his arm around Fern's waist and his other arm around Califia's shoulder. Califia's eyes were on Moises, her little noise-maker horn pressed next to her lips.

When Moises hit zero, balloons and confetti fell from the ceiling, and Califia blew her horn and shouted Happy New Year to everyone. She scurried over and hugged Shavonne, then gave Bakari a big hug and kiss on the cheek.

She felt a hand slip into her back pocket and pull her back. She turned and Xavier had his hands on her.

"Happy New Year, Cali," he said, crashing his lips onto hers.

She felt his tongue slip in, the heat of it ravaging her mouth.
Chapter Summary

Xavier and Califia and N'Jobu oh my....

Chapter Notes

Back again. I'm doing better!
Thanks a bunch for reading!
I'm off to write more and get something posted by Friday, if not sooner. Cranking out chapters faster!

I apologize for any spelling or grammar errors on the last few chapters and for the upcoming ones. FYI: I suffer from perfectionism and doubt that masks itself as procrastination. I'm not using a beta reader because I would use it as an excuse not to write or post anything, and I am trying my best not to compare myself to my fave writers on here who write fast and it sounds like poetry from jump. My goal is to crank the meat and potatoes of the story out with the idea that I can go back and edit/fix later down the road. Just wanted to throw that out there!

Again, thanks for hanging with me!

All this love and aggravation
I wasted so much of my life
All this truth and separation
We worked so hard to make things right
Got that lovin', got that seed
Got that suga', got that sweet
Got that money, got that beat
Got that whatever you need
Oh, I can't fight it
You're my world
Got me thinking I'm no good
Chocolate lover, you're so sweet
Got me thinking on my feet...

Robin Thicke & Faith Evans- "Got 2 Be Down"

Xavier's hand reached up and caressed Califia's cheek as his wet tongue carved out space between her lips. His hands dropped down and grabbed her ass, N'Jobu's beads twisting between his fingers. She felt someone bump into her from behind and her body bowed a bit, pressing into Xavier's midsection before Califia had the mental wherewithal to push him away from her.

"The fuck, Xavier," she blustered while moving the back of her hand up to her mouth. Her brain was fuzzy and still playing catch up with her body.
"It's just a New Year's kiss, Cali," he said, stepping closer to her, his hands reaching for her again.

Califia made a bee-line to the bar and ordered herself a tequila shot to wash the taste of Xavier from her mouth.

Xavier didn't follow her to the bar, instead, she watched him give Fern a hug as the band struck up another song to keep the celebration going.

She felt flustered, not just because Xavier had kissed her, but because in hindsight, she had liked it. The dancing and touching of hands, the swinging into his arms and feeling the vibrations of the drums and horns, the sensual movement of his hips and her hips, the THC coursing through her brain and slowing down her thoughts—they all made her open and receptive to him. She had only been alone and without N'Jobu for two weeks, and already, she couldn't even go out in public without slipping into her ex's arms like that…in fucking public. All because she was horny and high, and missing her man. There was no need to ask Xavier to dance. She could've walked away and found a suitable partner. But Xavier had looked so out of sorts watching Fern talk to other men. She just wanted…she just wanted…she just….

She wanted to be touched by someone who knew her, who found her sexy in that moment of time. Her head was filled with Wakandan poetry, her breasts were swaying, the sensual heat between her thighs and on her back from rubbing together on the dance floor…all those elements made her feel aroused. Xavier probably picked up on it, probably some weird pheromone magic he smelled on her once he stood next to her.

Despite having his new girlfriend with him, Xavier had reached out and kissed her, and not Fern, to ring in the New Year.

"Hey, beautiful," Moises said, leaning against the bar next to her, the mic still in his hand.

"Hey," she answered, waving to the bartender to give her another shot.

"You can't slow down now dancing Queen, you make people want to move. Come back out with me. Bring in this New Year the right way."

Califia felt her anxiety kick in. Two tequila shots back to back was not a good idea.

"I need…I need some air…" she gasped, clutching the bar.

"You okay?"

"I need air…"

"Come outside," Moises said, guiding her by her arm and out through the front door of the club.

He walked her to the corner.

"Breathe, go ahead, breathe deep," he said.

Califia gulped in air.

"Put your hands up above your head like football players do. That opens up your lungs more so you can get more air in," he said.

She did as he said, her breasts lifting up. He was staring at her chest.

"Keep taking deep breaths," he said.
They walked around the corner into a small alleyway. She leaned up against the emergency exit doorway of a building connected to the club.

"How are you feeling now?" he asked, standing in front of her.

"Better," she said.

"Can I get you anything?"

"No. The air is helping. Thanks for walking me."

"Califia!"

Xavier ran up to them. He regarded Moises with caution in his eyes.

"Hey," she said, shifting her weight and standing up straighter.

"What's going on?"

Xavier moved to be next to her, angling his torso to block Moises from her.

"Mixed too much tequila and you know what," she said, giving him a weak smile.

"I got this homie," Xavier said, staring daggers at Moises.

Moises, who was much taller than Xavier gave a dismissive glance towards him and rubbed Califia's arm.

"Ok. Come in when you feel better, Califia," Moises said, heading back to the club.

"Thanks, Moises," she called out after him.

Xavier leaned against the door with her.

"You okay for real?" he asked.

"Getting there soon, I hope," she quipped.

"Listen…" he said.

"You shouldn't have kissed me. Your girlfriend was right there, dude."

"I know, I got caught up in the excitement."

"What did she say about it?"

"She's not tripping. I don't even think she noticed."

"You had your tongue all down my throat, how could she not see that?"

"Don't worry about it," he said.

"I'm heading back in. Let's just avoid each other inside," she said, stepping away from him.

"Cali, wait," he said. He snatched up her hand, and when she pulled back from it, he wrapped his arms around her chest, his chest pressing into her back.

"Just, hold on a minute…lemme…lemme just hold you for a minute. Please."
Califia stood still. She could feel his raspy breath blowing on the back of her neck, his shirt touching the skin on her back with ticklish scrapes.

"I miss you so much. I'm trying to move on, and it's fucking hard. It's so hard," he said.

"C'mon Xavier, let me go," her hands reached up and tapped his arms that clutched her tight.

"Just let me hold you, one last time like this, okay? Just let me have this."

Her head was swirling with all the reasons to deny him, but his sad breath on her neck and his despairing tone made her feel sorry for him. Maybe this was the real closure. She relaxed and let him confine her in the doorway.

"Thank you," he whispered.

He rocked her a bit and she closed her eyes.

"I know it's been difficult Xavier. It was rough for me too. But you'll be alright. We'll both be alright."

"I know," he whispered, his heated breath raising the hairs on her neck. She felt his lips touch the skin there, not exactly kissing her, but resting softly at the nape. It felt nice.

She felt his groin press into her backside. His breath quickened. So did hers. His hands slid down and gripped her hips gently.

"I miss you, baby..." he whispered.

She heard him crying into her hair.

The shuddering in his voice made her ache for him. She felt a stinging in her own throat.

Califia turned around and faced him. Xavier's anguished face broke her heart. She cradled his head in her hands and then hugged him tight.

"I want to see you happy," he stammered between his sobs, "but it hurts so bad...still."

She let him cry his eyes out, and when his shudders stopped, she lifted up his head.

"You better head back in. I'm going to hang out here for a little bit," he said, wiping his reddened swollen eyes.

"Should I get Fern for you?"

"Naw...naw...I'll find her later. I need to get my head together right now."

"Everything cool out here?"

They both turned to see Moises watching them.

"Came to check on you, Califia," Moises said, but his eyes were on Xavier.

"We're good. Xavier's just having a moment," she said.

What a clusterfuck, she thought as she stepped back from touching Xavier. Of all the fucking people to see them like this, N'Jobu's buddy. Dammit.
Califia walked away from both of them, but Moises caught up with her.

"Was he bothering you? Should I call someone?"

"No, it's good. He's a friend. Just hit a little bad patch and needed to vent."

Moises held a blank expression on his face. She read doubt there.

Back inside the club, Califia quickly distanced herself from Moises and sought out Bakari and Shavonne.

"I'm going to dip. I'm feeling a little tired," she said.

"We can bounce too," Shavonne said.

"You guys can stay longer if you want, I'll catch a Lyft," she said.

"We can rideshare," Bakari said pulling out his phone and picking out a ride for them.

Califia felt jumpy and her heart rate was off the chart. She felt disappointed by her behavior with Xavier. He had gotten to her. Made her feel something for him.

She was scared.

###

N'Jobu and T'Chaka were finally able to squire away a bit of time to ride hoverbikes across the Ibukun river and around Warrior Falls for an afternoon of brotherly fun.

The last three weeks had been filled with royal duties—hospital visits and brand-new school openings for the burgeoning baby boom happening throughout the country. New housing units and public park dedications needed to see the younger Prince cutting ribbons and schmoozing with various city officials in various districts.

N'Jobu's walk-in closet back at the palace was visited non-stop by himself and his personal tailor. Just as expected, he was changing clothes several times a day. And he had gained about ten pounds since being back home and eating palace-cooked meals.

Before heading out over the river, N'Jobu had his hair cut at his favorite barbershop, and the proprietor was so overwhelmed that both Princes were in his establishment at the same time, that he had to have some paramedics called by the Dora Milaje to give him oxygen. N'Jobu felt so bad about causing the man so much physical distress from the excitement, that he spent over an hour cutting heads himself until the owner felt well enough to take over his own job. Several citizens were tickled pink to have royalty lining up their hair. N'Jobu had to explain that he learned the skill from royal barbers who let him cut heads when he was younger when his father and brother were being groomed. He was quite skilled at it. The customers actually gave him tips, but he gave the money to the owner.

The weather was outstanding as T'Chaka and N'Jobu skimmed the water above the falls, the low hum of the bike pulsating against his thighs. Behind them, four Dora Milaje flew small Dagger ships to follow them and patrol the sky as the two Princes had their fun. Once they drew closer to the Falls, two of the Dora flew ahead to secure T'Chaka and N'Jobu's privacy. Citizens had already been taking treks up to the Falls to take pictures in anticipation of the upcoming ceremony.

In two days, they would be standing near the edge, T'Chaka walking down the ramp of the Royal
Talon Fighter and facing his people. Thus far, from what N'Jobu could tell, no one was destined to challenge his brother. He and Zinzi had made the papers several times, a private lunch at a café already had the grapevine abuzz as to who his main choice was during his march. Zinzi informed him that her family seemed satisfied with the appearance of N'Jobu's favors towards her, so she could pretty much guarantee that the Chiume family would not make a play at Warrior Falls.

"Let's park over there!"

T'Chaka's voice cut through his helmet radio, and N'Jobu saw where he wanted them to land. They glided the bikes down from the sky and onto a flatbed of sheetrock and slipped out of their biking gear. They stripped out of their clothes, both their naked bodies flexing in the dry heat.

"Forget the trunks, Baby Brother!" T'Chaka said, jumping into the pool of deep dark blue waters above the Falls. All N'Jobu saw was his brother's nude body careening over the sheetrock, his genitals flopping, and the loud plop as he splashed in.

N'Jobu took his time folding his clothes and simply dropped into the water. Sinking down, the cold rejuvenated his skin.

Breaching the surface, he and T'Chaka tread water near each other. T'Chaka glanced around. Their voices echoed. They both saw the four Dora Milaje spread throughout the tall rocks surrounding them and the enormous pool of dark water with their sonic cannon spears at the ready.

T'Chaka vented about the rehearsals and all the ceremonial pomp and circumstance he had to go through, but all N'Jobu could think about was how he had not been able to talk to Califia. Three weeks were gone, and all he had were a few text messages, occasional emails, and a couple of pre-recorded face chats. He told her she could call him early in the morning and he would take all her calls at two, three, or four in the morning…it didn't matter to him. Instead, she sent little video chat messages, telling him how she read all the books he gave her, how much she loved the beads and all the select pictures he sent her.

She wasn't working, but she did mention that she was training for Brazil, so maybe she was hyper-focused like him. He thought he would be the one to not have the time to talk to her because of his family schedule, but instead, it was her. Was she avoiding him?

He was able to speak to Bakari a few times over the phone, and he seemed to be under the impression that her time was spent training and caring for her grandmother. Kenny had moved to Atlanta, and Junie was back with his girlfriend, so maybe Califia was taking up for their absence.

All he knew at this point was that he had one more week in Wakanda, and then he was flying back to his baby. His fantasies about her were killing him, and even though he was draining his dick with an awful lot of masturbation to her video clips, his body would not be at equilibrium until he was seated deep inside of her once more in their bed. Until she was writhing under him with those brown legs wrapped around him, life was on struggle mode.

"Hey! Daydreamer!"

T'Chaka splashed water on him and N'Jobu splashed him back.

"What are your deep thoughts?"

"School," N'Jobu said.

"What about it?"
"Be honest, Baba is going to allow me to finish, right? Or does your ascension override that
decision?"

"It's only one more year. The time will go fast."

N'Jobu didn't like the sound of that. Tick tock, tick tock. It just made not hearing from Califia even
more aggravating. Every second away from her was stolen time.

They swam in lazy circles around the pool, then stepped out to sunbathe in the nude under the
watchful eyes of the Dora Milaje.

"T'Chaka, tell me…how do you feel about becoming King?"

N'Jobu's head was to the side staring at his older brother. T'Chaka turned to look at him.

"I am scared."

N'Jobu let his words sink in.

"What are you afraid of?"

"I don't want to let the people down."

"Is that why you are rough with the staff?"

N'Jobu opted to not beat around the bush. For three weeks they were never alone together, and this
was his one chance to speak to him man to man for Bathandwa's sake.

T'Chaka sucked in on his teeth and broke his gaze away from N'Jobu.

"I have heard and seen how you talk to many of them, Brother. I do not like it. This is me being
honest with you. How you treat your inner circle will come back to you. There is no shame in being
scared. No shame in asking for help when you don't know how to handle something."

"It is Baba," T'Chaka whispered.

"What has Baba done?"

"He tells me it is my time to lead, and yet he is still tethered to the throne. In meetings when I make
suggestions and my ideas seem acceptable to everyone on the council, he interjects and gives his
thoughts on how things should go. If I am to be King, then I should have final say, not this "Here's
what I want…oh wait, Baba, what would you have me do instead?" It drains my energy so much."

"Have you told him this?"

"He does not listen. He still talks over me."

"Then man up. Flex your sack, Brother!"

T'Chaka guffawed.

"Flex my sack? What will that do, N'Jobu?"

"Eh? You are the King and your word is law now. If Baba cannot accept his new role as counselor
to you only, then you must tell him to his face. Yiloo ndlela ke...that's how it is."
"That will upset him—"

"Then he should stay on the throne if wants to run things."

"You talk bold, Baby Brother."

"If it were me, I would tell him this. Right to his face."

T’Chaka sat up and stretched out his arms behind him. He closed his eyes as the sun beat down on his face. N’Jobu scratched his taut thighs and tugged on his penis and scrotum. He would need to get back into the water again soon. He was baking.

"This is why you need to be home, so you can stand with me," T’Chaka said.

"I’ll be back soon enough."

"Ewe! Ambassador N’Jobu!"

N’Jobu stood up and slipped back into the water. He treaded in front of T’Chaka.

"N’Jobu, I need you with me. Not just as my brother, but as my confidante. You are the main person I trust more than anyone else."

"Then listen to me. When they put the King’s jewels on you, and power is firmly placed in your hands, then you act like a King. Even among the family. You set the tone, and the world will follow. Do not doubt yourself, Brother. Find your own light and you will do well. You have already seen that our people await your rule. Your patience in all of this sudden change has been your power. Patience is your strength. Lean into it. Your patience will also serve you once you become a father."

T’Chaka smiled.

"Three more months," he said.

"That’s like tomorrow," N’Jobu said.

"I want to be a good father. I want to be like Baba—"

"No, you be like you, Brother. Bathandwa loves you so much. And you love her more than life itself. The love you have for each other, pour that into your child, and you will be a great father. Not good. Great."

"Baby brother, shall I give you these same words when you become a father one day?"

N’Jobu chuckled and splashed water at T’Chaka.

"Do you want to know a secret?"

"What?"

T’Chaka looked above them, way up on the higher rock formations. The Dora Milaje were discreet but aware.

"We are having a boy."

"Hey, another big head like yours!" N’Jobu teased.
"We didn't want to know at first, but then when we saw the doctor and asked about why the baby was so active in Bathandwa's belly, we got curious. And made a little bet. I said it was a girl because they keep you up with stressing over things, but then Bathandwa said a boy because they are so full of mischief. I lost the bet of course."

"You two will be great parents. Just listen to what I say, trust and believe your wise brother."

"Yes, you are wise, Baby Brother."

"What will his name be?"

"We had decided that if it were a girl, we would name her T'Handwa. But since it is a boy, his name is T'Challa."

"T'Challa. I like it."

"Will you come home for the birth?"

"Of course."

N'Jobu was pleased that the conversation went well. His brother looked visibly relieved. With the time remaining outside the palace, he decided to dredge up the rumor. Get it over with.

"I hear that people are saying that your child is mine."

N'Jobu was always known for being straightforward. T'Chaka's eyes looked shocked by the open admission.

"People tell me things, T'Chaka. How do you feel about that?"

"I know it's not true. You would never betray me."

"But how do you feel hearing that from the people?"

"I ignore it. Bathandwa says it doesn't bother her, but I know it does. People have judged her for not giving us an heir right away. I think the stress of that is what kept us from carrying a child to term."

"I already know it's going to come out looking like you. You look like Baba's twin, so the gossipmongers will eat ikaka when your triplet comes out."

"Yes, they will."

Both their kimoyo beads lit up.

"Mother," T'Chaka said.

T'Chaka tapped his bead and their mothers face hovered above his arm.

"Voodoo Pussy?!" Umama said.

N'Jobu grabbed onto the rock ledge.

"Umama? What?" T'Chaka said, his eyes wide with surprise.

"Do not "Umama what' me. I just saw on the global that you two were taped singing this song at a club last night. Look at this!"
The Queen swiped them a news clip of T’Chaka and N’Jobu back at Oba Oba’s singing along to a Ghanaian pop song with questionable lyrical content. Their mother glared back at them in all her digitized 3D fury.

"I have to sit in the palace and hear the two of you belt out such filth? 'We cook, we clean, we fight, we fuck, pat and call it -voodoo pussy'. What is the meaning of this?! Eh?!"

"Calm down, Umama," T’Chaka said.

"Both of you, back to the palace now. We cannot attend the Highlands Ball tonight with this hanging over your heads. T’Chaka! You should know better. I expect this from N’Jobu—"

"Eh, Umama—" N’Jobu interjected, his ego bruised from the accusation, even if it were true.

"T’Chaka is about to become King of this nation and the youth are seeing their ruler singing about Voodoo Pussy! A disgrace!"

N’Jobu quickly scrolled on the global social media network on his kimoyo beads. They were trending nation-wide. #THATSMYKING.

"Umama, I don't think you have anything to worry about. Looks like our duet is the talk of the country."

N’Jobu sent her links to the viral video comments.

"See, I knew T’Chaka shouldn't have gone out with you last night. Our detractors were just waiting for something like this. Home. Now!"

Umama's connection snapped off.

"You are going to get it!" T’Chaka teased.

They quickly put on their clothes, and N’Jobu saw T’Chaka giggling so hard, he had water leaking from his eyes and he was clutching his stomach.

"What?" N’Jobu said.

"Umama sang the song, oh my Bast, I'm going to die of laughter," he said doubling over and holding his knees.

###

Calafia woke up in N’Jobu’s bed after three weeks of separation still forgetting that he was not there. She still expected him to be spooned around her, his nose and lips on the nape of her neck, and his hands cradling her hips.

If it wasn't her time of the month or if she wasn't sleeping at her grandmother's because of next day classes, she and N’Jobu had the early morning routine of lovemaking. The sun never rose between them without his mouth plying open the seam of her lips, his fingertips softly stroking her breasts, and his strong thighs settling between her legs, pushing them apart so that his morning erection could rest on her mound.

The best part of early morning sex with him was that he loved to go down on her. For a long ass time. They were still learning each other's bodies, and discovering the quirks and kinks that enhanced their play. That's what sex felt like with him. Playing.
She liked to be bitten; her nipples, the back of her neck, the inside of her left thigh. He discovered that the right side of her inner labia was more sensitive than the left side, but if he softly bit the left side, it would flare up and become sensitized easily. She had no idea about this until he had spent time down there, licking, sucking, nibbling, and slapping her there. Their sex could be sweet and gentle, and then switch up to hard and aggressive in a single session.

She pressed her hand to her belly. Her cramps were right on time. Her period had arrived. She was thrilled she would get through her cycle before N'Jobu came back,

He had made her sore when she finished her very first period cycle with him. She didn't like having sex during her time, and her menstrual cycles ran seven days. N'Jobu acted like he was dying when she told him he had to wait. He offered to use condoms, told her he didn't care about the mess she might make on his sheets. She simply made an "ew" face and got through her period in peace. After five days his hands were clawing her ass until she told him there were still two days left. He looked stricken.

When her time was over, he fucked her straight off the bed. His sexual aggression was exciting to her. He knew her period was a part of nature, but the moment he slid the head of his dick in her, he actually sounded pissed that she made him wait as if she denied something to him out of spite. Male expectations normally bugged the hell out of her, and had he been some Joe Blow talking that shit to her in the outside world, she would've handed his ass to him.

But between the sheets with the tender pads of his fingertips plucking her nipples, his sculptured thighs pressing hard into her thick ones, and the wide tip of his dick teasing her entrance, Califia laid there and apologized to her man for keeping his good pussy away from him.

His beautiful juicy lips rested easy near the delicate curve of her ear and his warm breath demanded that she tell him "Sorry." His voice didn't have any playfulness in it. It was a command. A coming to terms with not giving him what he wanted when he wanted it.

At first, her natural bravado jumped up and she told him, "I ain't saying sorry. You on some bullshit, man."

And he pinched her right nipple hard. Twisted it until she was grabbing his hand to pull it away.

"Say you are sorry, Califia."

His voice was sharp. Bottom bass deep. He wasn't even looking at her, his lips still at her ear, his breath tickling her earlobe.

"Stop tripping," she said.

He twisted her other nipple and pressed his dick a little further into her and then dragged it back out slowly. He knew for a fact that when he did that, her body would weaken with his cock tugging on her clit. He could wear her down. Every time.

"Say sorry," he said. His voice was still firm, but then his tongue was in her ear and he was humming her name, twisting her nipples again.

"Give me that dick, nigga," she said pushing her fingers against his forehead. He grabbed both her hands and slammed them above her head with just one hand. He raised up his hips and grabbed her left breast with his other hand.

"Open your fucking legs wide," he said, and she felt her belly drop at the gruffness. He squeezed her breasts and when his eyes met hers, her pelvic muscles quivered.
"N'Jobu," she said trying to figure out the serious look on his face that was making heat bloom in her face and lower parts.

"Vulela!"

N'Jobu slapped her thigh hard, the sting of it making her spread her legs wide fast.

She understands that word since she's been sleeping with him. Open up.

"When I tell you to do something, you do it the first time I say it…I mean that, Califia."

His dick sunk into her, and her pussy made gushy sounds that embarrassed her while he was looking at her with such a storm of intensity in his face.

She was stunned that her pussy turned into a slippery waterfall just by his voice.

"Keep those legs up," he snapped, still gripping her hands above her head.

"Huuhnnn…"

"Say you are sorry!"

He was giving it to her, his cock showing no mercy, as his other hand snaked above her head and dragged one of her arms to her side, holding her down firmly.

"Making… me… wait… apologize!"

"N'Jobu!"

Califia whipped her head from side to side, trying to avoid eye contact, but he kept moving his head to stare her down.

"Be still!"

She pushed her head back into the fluffy satin pillow, her lips twisted up and her eyes filled with a questioning look.

"You will give me my shit when I ask for it—"

"Okay!"

"Okay is not the right answer—"

"I'm sorry—"

"Sorry for what?" he said, slowing down his thrusts, drawing his cock back, letting that fat head sit at the entrance of her pussy, stretching it open.

She gyrated her hips trying to get his dick back inside of her, but he pulled his hips back.

"N'Jobu," she whined, her jaw going slack.

"Sorry for what?!"

The thunder in his voice had her keening, she tried to pull her arm from out of his grip so she could reach for his thickness and pull it back in, but he held her down tight.
"Please…"

"What are you sorry for?"

"Not giving you this pussy when you wanted it…bay-bee…please…"

"Tell me what you want me to do," he said, his dark eyes becoming another gathering storm.

She searched her mind for the word. The thing he loved to hear her choke out when he was between her gaping thighs. She could say it in English. Spanish. Portuguese. Yurok. She said it in his own.

"Nditshele!" Fuck me.

Apology accepted, he proceeded to fuck her up and down the bed until they tumbled over the side in a messy heap. She walked funny for a couple of days after that.

Thinking of him now, on the other side of the globe for a month, she hesitated to imagine the state he would be in once he returned and they were in bed together again. Was there such a thing as pussy insurance? I can't walk to my classes cuz my man put it on me insurance? I can't answer the teacher's question because my jaw was dislocated by thick dick insurance?

She reached for her cell. Four new text messages and two voicemails from N'Jobu.

She scrolled through the texts. The first three were basic "I miss you, call me' notes that he sent around three in the morning while she was asleep. The final text made her heart leap in her throat. She read it four times.

"You better pick up the fucking phone and call me right now!"

Attached to the text was a video. When she played it, her heart felt like it sank right out of her chest.

The two voicemail messages were marked urgent. She didn't bother to listen to them.

He knew.

He knew about Xavier.

And he was furious.
Chapter Summary

T'Chaka's coronation and other stuff...

Chapter Notes

Already working on the next update. Should have it up on Sunday!

I was living the dream, believing things that just ain't true
Oh, I can't believe I ever believed in you
You had me chasing fools gold
I was chasing fools gold
I was chasing fools gold

Somewhere deep down inside I knew you wasn't right
But breaking your spell was a plan I never devised
I would have been here forever living for you
But I would had been living forever as your fool…

Jill Scott—"Fools Gold"

N'Jobu ran his tongue across the gold slugs he had placed on his lower teeth for the celebration. If he were a Princess, he would have panther or jaguar teeth around his neck or chin, but as a Prince, he wore them in his mouth. The old ways had the royal bloodline coat their canine teeth with gold, but no one did that anymore. Not since their great-grandfather, an insolent King who stuck to the old traditions and did it best.

Once the dentist placed the temporary slugs in his mouth from the freshly created molds, N'Jobu stared at himself in a mirror and wondered how Califia would react if he bit her skin with his decorated teeth. Mark up her body with Golden Jaguar teeth. He liked the thought of that. He might have the dentist create a pop-in pair to take with him back to Berkley.

The iridescent blue suit he wore for the coronation was his best sartorial decision to date. He adjusted the royal stole that draped across his shoulders as he watched his brother take his first seat on the immaculate curved throne. Made with a gold and silver alloy and trimmed with ironwood from the Jabari mountains, the large curved arcs that rose from the back of the royal seat looked dynamic with T'Chaka sitting there draped in all black. The council of elders surrounded him in their seats, along with additional seating for their father, mother, and Bathandwa.

His brother, now enshrined with the pristine night sky robes of the King, sat before them all with a sense of purpose. Bathandwa wore a large onyx isicholo denoting her new status as Queen. Umama wore a brand new pearl-colored isicholo that raised her to the new position of Queen Mother. She sat next to Bathandwa, holding her hand as Bathandwa's other hand cradled her belly. T'Challa must've been very active because she was patting one side as if to soothe his friskiness inside of her. N'Jobu
felt great pride watching his family as the seamless shift in power went off without a hitch.

T'Chaka took N'Jobu's words from the Falls to heart. Once the King's jewels were placed upon him, he immediately codified his father's new position by treating Baba in a formal fashion throughout the coronation ceremony. Umama immediately fell in step, a fierce pride in her eyes as her eldest child came into his own. The moment Adu, the eldest spiritual leader in charge of the heart-shaped herb, placed the royal claw necklace around T'Chaka's neck at Warrior Falls, N'Jobu dropped to his knee and lowered his head. It caused a ripple in the crowd as others followed suit.

Their parents stood watching. Umama's eyes glistened with tears as her hands gripped Baba's arm. Perhaps witnessing the final shift of power away from him, Baba stood there watching his progeny stand tall. When T'Chaka's eyes fell upon Baba, N'Jobu watched their father lower his head to the one true King. Once Baba had bowed, N'Jobu leaped up and yelled "Inkosi yami!" and gave the Wakandan salute to T'Chaka. The hundreds of citizens there dotted among the carved cliff openings followed suit, also yelling out "My King!", and N'Jobu saw his brother breathe deep, his bare painted chest swelling with the realization that he was theirs and they were his.

Standing in the throne room, listening to Adu give the final blessings to the new head of state, N'Jobu felt that one hurdle had been crossed in his royal duties. His next assignment was to complete his betrothal march. He had already made up his mind to tell his parents that Zinzi was his choice for a wife. It was better to choose now rather than have to spend the next few months flying back and forth to Wakanda vetting others and taking precious time away from Califia.

He would get Zinzi on board to push off the wedding for as long as possible, that way her lover could man up and claim her, or he could squeeze out an extra gap year after the military so he could possibly come back to Califia for a little more time. He ran scenarios through his head: ensconce Califia in one of the border countries like Azania or Niganda while he did his training. He could conceal her as an English Language teacher, or maybe just set her up in a private chateau on the Niganda side of Nyanza Lake. Maybe, quite possibly, he could smuggle her into Wakanda, sequester her in the sister city of Birnin Djata…

Several wild ideas ran through his head, even asking her to move to New York so that when he did make those trips to the states, he could maybe see her five or six times a year.

As always though, his ideas were not her ideas. How could he ask her to uproot her life and move anywhere just to make it easier for him to have access? What would she be doing when he was away from her? Sitting around waiting for him like some mistress or concubine? Letting him come through to fornicate and play house when he felt like it and then watching him return to a wife and family and duty?

The brooding contemplation in his head was taking him away from the moment. This was his brother's time.

"Thank you all," T'Chaka said regarding his family, the council and the fifty other relatives filling up the throne room.

T'Chaka stood and held out his hand for Bathandwa to clasp. She rose up, her royal purple gown flowing loosely around her sandaled feet.

"Shall we head to the banquet hall?"

T'Chaka's Doras ushered him and Bathandwa first, and then the rest of the immediate and extended family followed suit. N'Jobu's cousin Sekani was bumping into him rubbing his stomach and dancing near him.
"This food will be umlilo, Cousin!"

"I know! I am starving," N'Jobu said.

The entire Udaku clan made the long trek of leaving the East Palace and crossing the connecting bridge to the West palace where the banquet for two thousand people would be held, as well as the separate Grand Ballroom. Five thousand people were expected to attend the King’s Ball.

Baba was not happy to have a party that big, but Umama insisted that she wanted regular citizens to participate in the royal party, to have up-close access to their new King. N'Jobu agreed. On top of that, Umama insisted that T'Chaka attend several balls outside of the palace. T'Chaka agreed to appear at two as long as N'Jobu came with him to take the place of Bathandwa who would need to rest once she made her first walkthrough of the official palace Ball.

The palace staff made sure the bridge cover was up when the family finally started the march across. Summer rains had fallen after the Warrior Falls ceremony, and the palace wanted to be prepared.

N'Jobu could hear singing at the end of the long bridge. Young children and teenagers stood dressed in amethyst, mauve, lavenders, plum, cerulean, sapphires, and indigo colors, their faces painted white with the symbols of the royal family. They danced and sang the chants for the arrival of the new ruler.

Drummers surrounded the children, and when the head Dora pounded her spear twice, the children and drummers parted into two groups allowing the royal family to pass through the gauntlet. Ululations greeted them, loud and continuous as they entered the West Palace foyer and converged down twenty steps that took them into an expansive banquet hall. The entire hall audience stood when the Udaku's entered, with everyone singing the national anthem. The roar of voices crashed over them, and N'Jobu could literally feel everyone's energy and the power and pride of being a Wakandan. Of being an Udaku.

At the far end of the hall, N'Jobu saw the long banquet table the entire Udaku clan would take up. Normally elevated so that they could look down on the citizens, Umama made sure they were ground level like the people. The roundtables throughout the hall were strategically placed so that everyone could see the new King and Queen with ease.

This part of the West palace was seven stories above ground and the room was circular with glass walls. They had a spectacular view of the sunset and the golden city itself. The traditional family circling of the room commenced as all of the Udaku clan made their way around the guests as a symbolic gesture that this family protected and guided their country.

As they moved closer to the royal table, N'Jobu saw Zinzi and made a dramatic display of favor by stopping at her table and kissing her hand in front of everyone. Zinzi's mother looked like she was about to pass out, and her father puffed out his chest and darted his eyes about the room to make sure everyone saw what was happening. Zinzi seemed utterly surprised and quickly held her head down when he released her hand.

Sekani nudged him in the side and N'Jobu kept moving.

###

Seven courses and two desserts later, N'Jobu was crossing over the bridge again and taking an elevator up to his suite to change clothes. And to check messages.

Inside his room, he showered, rubbed himself down in cocoa and coffee butter with other aromatic
oils and checked his messages on his American computer and cell. He noticed some messages in his
ejunk folder, one from Califia. A face chat that was bumped from his main email. He sat at his office
desk and opened the message.

"You made my nipples get hard, see."

N'Jobu felt his lips go lax as he watched Califia play with herself.

"Goddamn," he muttered, his body relaxing into the ergonomic chair, the soft towel draped around
his waist tenting within a minute of playing the video. He just about came undone when he watched
her turn around on his bed and spread her sweet pussy lips. Her center opened for him and he felt his
face crumble into the look of devout submission. He yearned to touch her, taste her, lap up her juices,
and smother her with his body.

He fought to not touch himself, to not give in to her needy siren call. He would give her anything,
anything if he could. In one part of the video, she had stretched open her labia to the point where he
could see her inner tunnel actually open, and he paused the video message just so he could maintain
some sense of composure. Pussy had never blind-sided him like this so much. She had him feeling
pussy-whipped, and honestly, it was not a feeling he was comfortable with.

His kimoyo beads vibrated. His cousin Sekani.

"Cousin, where are you? I want to walk into the Ball with you. I'm changing in the guest suite,"
Sekani said. N'Jobu kept the message on audio. His cock was straining into his towel and was just a
little too obvious for a hologram chat. Califia's sumptuous body still beckoned him from his computer
screen.

"I'll meet you at the bridge in fifteen," N'Jobu said, looking at the screen with complete reverence,
"actually, make it thirty minutes."

N'Jobu left the chair and strode into his sauna. He reached for his cock rings. His favorite silver metal
glans ring, and a black rubber shaft and scrotum ring.

He walked back to his chair, unfastened the towel from his waist allowing his dick to spring free. He
put on the shaft ring first, then twisted the glans ring on and squeezed it to the desired tightness he
wanted. His balls felt untamed and ready to flood his cock. He didn't have time to edge, but he did
have enough time to tease himself by watching her one more time from the beginning. He rewound
the message, watching her pull off his sweatshirt. When she began to go all savage on her pussy, he
squeezed the slit at his tip watching pre-cum bead on the head. He stopped touching his dick and
placed his hand near his stomach where his fingers clenched, trying with great difficulty to avoid
jerking off. The veins in his dick were more prominent because of the rings.

His kimoyo beads vibrated again. Sekani.

Califia was back on her knees, stretching herself open and the pre-cum just dripped from him in a
steady stream onto his towel. His balls weresmarting from the pressure of the ring, his shaft turgid,
the head swollen to perfection. He squeezed the glans wring a little tighter. Califia's cheeks flexed,
and he saw her glistening pink tunnel again.

His voice hitched with raw need, "You nasty bitch....oh you're nasty...you're so nasty...fucking
slut...I love you, baby!"

He was beyond salvation now and stood up from the chair, creamy semen spurting onto the
computer screen in four long sticky lines that covered Califia's ass. He had cum without touching
himself. His heart fluttered in his chest, his stomach heaved from pressure, and his dick was still hard. He took deep breaths, still feeling the blood coursing through his shaft. He unfastened all the rings, still hard, and still horny.

He brought out hand towels and screen cleaner to tidy up his computer screen. He had spilled ejaculate on the keyboard and desk also.

After fixing up his computer and cleaning himself, he played the last part of her video. He heard the landline in his apartment ring.

"Ah, I see he finally got here," she said.

Who? He wondered, confused as to what she was talking about.

"A replacement," she said ending the face chat.

He rewound that part again. She had someone coming over to hang out?

He checked for other messages.

He was surprised to see Moises sending a mass message to all of his contacts. A New Year's party.

N'Jobu opened the message and saw three pictures. One of a group of their mutual friends outside of a club with a marquee that had Moises' name and 'Happy New Year' scrawled on it. One photo was inside the club with several pretty women. Another was a selfie of Califia, Bakari, and Shavonne with Moises. She did mention that Moises apologized to her and Bakari. He himself had received a voicemail message from Moises seeking forgiveness. He had ignored it while he was home. They all looked happy.

Califia looked like a whole ass meal in her skimpy black top with her hair pulled up. Moises had also sent a hyperlink to his personal blog page. N'Jobu clicked on the link and scrolled through more pictures. There were a few video clips too.

One of the clips caught Bakari, Shavonne, and Califia dancing together, and N'Jobu felt a saccharine smile creep onto his face when he saw that Califia was wearing his beads.

"That's my girl," he said to the screen.

The final clip was a close up of Moises' face showing him counting down with people screaming Happy New Year around him. There was a hyperlink to the club under the last video, and N'Jobu hit it hoping to see more photos of Califia.

Luckily, the club page had more extensive shots and videos. One clip was titled "She snapped" and when he opened it, it was Califia dancing with a woman. He watched his woman snake her hips and ass to the ground with his beads shaking on her in such a seductive way, he couldn't wait to get her on him so he could see and hear them shake in person. Damn this girl.

He was about to bookmark the page when a thumbnail clip caught his eye. It was Califia and a guy. He hit play and watched her Salsa with a clean-cut looking dude…wait a minute…

Xavier?

N'Jobu sat up in his chair and rewound, watching the clip from the start. The two of them were moving in perfect sync together, and N'Jobu's face tightened. His jawline became rigid iron. The clip
ended with Xavier pulling Califia towards him with intricate arm work.

He hit the next thumbnail under it and the Salsa music ended with Moises on a mic counting down with his cell phone in his hand above his own face. When he hit zero, he watched Califia grab Shavonne, then Bakari and then she was blowing her horn and waving it in the air.

He swallowed bitter spit when he saw Xavier grab her jeans, spin Califia around and kiss her with his jaws moving. He was fucking tonguing her? And he had his hands clutching Califia's beads? Did they go to the club together?

N'Jobu's hands balled up.

He checked for other videos to see if he could catch any more clips of them. He didn't find any, even though there appeared to be at least twenty more thumbnail clips of other people. He just replayed the one and felt his blood boil in his veins. She was into it. She was pressed into him. She was wearing his beads, but her ex was clutching them and her ass. Kissing her like they were about to—

Shit. Was that who she was talking about at his apartment? His replacement because he wasn't there?

He stood up and went to his bed, grabbing his cell phone. He called her twice, but her phone just went to voicemail.

"Call me right now!" He said in the first urgent message.

He watched the clip again.

And then again.

He left another urgent message.

"Why the fuck am I seeing you kissing your ex online? Call me right now!"

He texted her and waited.

He tried hitting her up on face chat. Nothing.

His kimoyo beads vibrated and lit up. His mother.

His stomach twisted in sour knots and his anger rose in his throat tasting like acrid bile.

He called the landline in his house. She should be awake.

His mind splintered into all kinds of bad. Was she fucking him right now? Is that why she wasn't answering? Or maybe she had been messing with him these past three weeks and that's why she was avoiding talking to him.

She said she loved him, N'Jobu.

How could she love him and let that dude touch her, kiss her, and fondle the ass that belonged to him? Those beads he gave her meant nothing to her.

He had claimed her with them, and she let Xavier touch-

He threw his cell against the wall behind his bed.

His kimoyo beads lit up again. T'Chaka.
N'Jobu got dressed.

Hold it together, he told himself.

Don't go half-cocked.

Give her a chance to explain.

But his mind kept thinking the worst. Images of her bouncing on that man's dick with his beads shaking on her ass…

"Fuck!"

He wanted to trust her. He talked himself down in his head. Compartmentalized his fears. Right now, he had to attend the Royal Ball and two other balls. That would keep him occupied until he could talk to her. He needed to focus on his family. For right now, that was the priority.

###

N'Jobu met his cousin Sekani on the bridge along with two other female cousins close in age. Yejide and Ometeko flanked him as they all walked into the Grand Ballroom. His presence was announced to all the guests at the entrance and he was given a round of applause.

Guests were dancing and T'Chaka and Bathandwa were sitting in comfortable seats on an elevated dais.

So many people brushed their eyes over him, and he took comfort in the distraction over Califia. His parents were chatting with dignitaries in a special section of the ballroom, and two of his youngest cousins, twin girls who had recently turned ten, ran up to him in their fancy periwinkle dresses barefoot, their ankles draped with gold bracelets.

"N'Jobu! N'Jobu!" they shouted to him as he felt their wiry arms encircle his waist. He picked up the younger of the twins, Mai Mai, and swung her around.

"You smell good!" Mai Mai said, pressing her nose into his neck.

"I like your dresses," he said.

He put Mai Mai down, and gave Neema, her sister, a big hug and kiss on her forehead.

They each took one of N'Jobu's hands and walked with him over to the dais.

"Inkosi," he said, lowering his head to T'Chaka, "Kumkanikazi Bathandwa," he said gazing at his sister-in-law who had changed into the most ethereal sleeveless coral gown with a matching colored isicholo.

Looking into his brother’s eyes, N'Jobu saw that T'Chaka was a bit tipsy. Good for him.

"Umama has been looking for you," T'Chaka said.

"Am I in trouble?"

"No, not yet, but Zinzi has been with her. Word is getting around that she is the one," T'Chaka said.

"I am ready to make it official," N'Jobu said.
T'Chaka gave him a sly smile, and Bathandwa hummed under her breath.

"So soon? You don't want to complete the march with the others, just to be sure?" T'Chaka asked.

"When you know, you know," N'Jobu said, winking at Bathandwa.

"Zinzi is a lovely woman. Smart and dedicated. Her work in the city is well respected. She just joined the board of the new wellness center in Birnin Djata."

"And she's fine," T'Chaka teased. Bathandwa poked him in his arm.

"Oh, my…" Bathandwa said, rubbing her belly, "T'Challa is really cutting up right now. Little boy, calm down," she said staring at her stomach.

T'Chaka reached over and touched her side.

"Ooh, he's strong!"

Bathandwa held out her hand towards N'Jobu.

"Come, meet your nephew," she said.

N'Jobu stepped up on the dais and knelt beside her, letting her soft fingers guide his hand.

"There. Feel him?"

His hand curved around her side, N'Jobu felt the consistent pummeling of T'Challa's little hands or feet.

"Wow! He is really doing a lot in there!"

N'Jobu laughed, leaned his face closer to her belly.

"Hello nephew, this Uncle N'Jobu. I want to apologize in advance that you will have a huge head like your father—"

"Hey, siwuyeke!" T'Chaka said.

"My apologies nephew, I meant ginormous melon head!"

"Eh, stop teasing my baby!" Bathandwa said play slapping N'Jobu's cheek.

"Are you feeling well, my love?" T'Chaka said.

"Ewe, I can hang a little longer," Bathandwa said, stroking T'Chaka's cheek.

"Be well, T'Challa. And calm down. Your Umama is now the Queen, don't give her any trouble," N'Jobu said.

His eyes gazed at her belly with his hand still cradled around it. His mind flitted to Califia. If things could've been different, he wondered what a child with her would look like. He felt his gut tighten and he pushed her away from his mind again.

"Are you alright, Brother?" Bathandwa asked.

N'Jobu took her hand in his and kissed the underside of her wrist.
"I am fine. I better go show my face to Umama and Baba."

He stepped down from the dais and made his way through guests who were dancing to the live music. Yejide and Ometeko tracked his movements from nearby, giving him space to mingle.

He met up with his parents, greeted honored guests and went out of his way to speak to ordinary citizens with his mother by his side.

He chaperoned his mother throughout the space, stopping to dance with her when the band played an old song she liked, much to the delight of all the guests.

"Umama," he said, as they moved around other dancers on the floor.

"Yes, my son."

"There is a woman in San Francisco, her name is Cebisi Mvaba, and she is caretaker for our museum loan."

"Hmmm, I am not familiar with her, but I know the pieces are supposed to return next summer."

"She said some wonderful things about you."

"She did?"

"Yes. She said the people love you because you love them. You don't put yourself above them."

"She said that?"

"Yes."

His mother gave a shy grin.

"Before your father and I married, I told him I wanted to be the people's Queen, not just some figurehead separated from where I come from. People weren't very happy when he chose me, you know."

"The other woman he was engaged to…"

"For years they would not let me live that down. Your father chose me. I was not thinking about marriage. Did you know I wanted to be a botanist growing up?"

"I thought it was a vet so you could raise battle rhinos."

"That too! But plants were my first love. I thought maybe I could develop new medicines, or maybe create farm seeds that could use less water to grow. But, to be a daughter of a noble, that means your life is really not your own."

N'Jobu felt his eyes flutter a bit.
"You understand me," she said.

"I do."

"When your father came after me, I fought it off as long as I could. I wanted to have my own life first."

"What happened?"
"He wore me down!"

His mother laughed, and N'Jobu chuckled hard. He could imagine his father pestering her until she gave in.

"Now, I don't mean he wore me down in a negative way. He loved me so much. And I did love him. I was so devastated when word went out that he was engaged to that other woman. I was inconsolable. My father had to send me to Niganda for a vacation to calm my nerves. Oh, if you children could've seen your Baba back in the day. He had this way about him. The way he walked. The way he dressed. And dear Sekmet, he could sweet talk the moon away from the stars. Sound like anyone we know?"

N'Jobu shook his head and his mother playfully slapped his shoulder.

"Even though we loved each other, your father had in his head the ideal way to rule. Which was much different than my own. So, I had to wear him down. I love our people. And I love showing them that love. There is no need to put on airs. We act with dignity and respect towards everyone. I never try to act better than anyone. This is a position I have only because of a random act of birth to a particular family. And I use it to the best of my ability. That is all."

"When Cebisi returns, I would like to see her rewarded for her kind words towards you."

"I will see that she is looked after on her return."

"Thank you, Umama."

"Prince N'Jobu, please come to the dais!"

N'Jobu and his mother turned to see T'Chaka calling to him from the dais, a mic in his hand. N'Jobu walked with his mother through the crowd and stood before his brother.

"Queen Bathandwa is about to turn in for the evening to rest, but I would like us to sing her a song."

N'Jobu groaned, but his mother patted him on the back.

"Band, play Lullaby Little One for us!" T'Chaka commanded.

A mic was handed to N'Jobu and T'Chaka pulled him up on the dais. Bathandwa was standing and looking a bit embarrassed by the attention.

"Don't mess this up, N'Jobu," Sekani called out.

The band tuned up some instruments, and the drummer gave a few practice beats to get the tone right. T'Chaka started moving his hips playfully with the drumbeat, nudging N'Jobu and winking. He whispered in N'Jobu's ear and they both held up their mics and looked at their mother singing,

"We cook, we clean, we fight-!"

"HAYI!" their mother hollered, slapping both their knees from the dancefloor.

The entire crowd burst out laughing, and Bathandwa covered her mouth with her hands.

"Okay, okay Umama, we are just playing. We will not sing the Vodoo song," T'Chaka said, and then he burst out laughing again, grabbing onto N'Jobu's shoulder. They could hear their cousin Sekani screaming with laughter in the audience, his comm tab held up to tape them. Their father had joined their mother. King Azzuri was laughing himself, but their mother was cutting her eyes at
"I guess you all know about that," N'Jobu said to the crowd.

When the laughter died down, T'Chaka turned to Bathandwa.

"My love, I thank you for carrying our child. I hope this shows you just a little bit of how much I love both of you."

"Sekani, Jax, Paki, Odwa…all of you get over here, we need back up!" N'Jobu yelled out.

His cousin and friends climbed onto the large dais and gathered around them. N'Jobu saw a few small metallic drone cameras hovering above them to project their images on big screens that were hanging above them all. Part of the Ball was being broadcast live throughout the country. Standing on the dais, bright lights in his eyes, N'Jobu could feel thousands of eyes on him. And the millions more watching from their homes. Somewhere out in the audience was Zinzi. He needed to speak with her soon.

The band kicked into the music, and it was a full-bodied sound, almost on an orchestra level. Sekani and his friends joined him in stomping their feet in time to the drum beat. Bathandwa moved her shoulders in time to the rhythm as she watched them.

Sekani and N'Jobu's friends started singing the chorus, and then T'Chaka harmonized with N'Jobu to sing the lullaby that told the story of how Mother Moon would cradle the new little baby, and how everything in the child's life would work to help bring the child joy. Parts of the song had dance steps and hand movements that went with it that created a layered sound that built up as the song progressed.

But partway through, T'Chaka stopped singing, his eyes pricked with water. Bathandwa stepped near him and held his arm as N'Jobu took over and sang lead alone, his voice echoing along with his friends, keeping on beat with the dance steps too.

He directed the lyrics to her belly as he and his friends carried on the tune. Soon the entire audience joined in with the chorus and moved in time to the feet and hand movements. The band stopped playing, and only the thunderous sound of feet and hands kept the rhythm. N'Jobu kept singing and looked out into the crowd. His parents were singing and moving too, everyone focused on Bathandwa and T'Challa resting inside of her.

N'Jobu raised up his hand in a fist, then slowly lowered it to direct the audience to sing softer and softer until only the sound of hands and feet were heard.

When he looked back at his brother, T'Chaka's chest was heaving, and he was hugging Bathandwa's shoulder.

"Goodnight, Little One," N'Jobu sang, ending the song.

For a single solitary moment, no one made a sound. The song and everyone's participation in it had transcended what was only meant to be a short and cute sing-along. The moment the entire room joined in with the lyrics, adding the strength of their feet, hands, and voices, a connection to their essence as a people had been made. It was a profound moment, and N'Jobu didn't want the tranquil feeling to end. It finally did when his mother threw back her head and let fly an ululation from her throat and mouth that caused the room to erupt in applause, call and response, and more foot stomping.

Bathandwa threw her arms around N'Jobu's shoulders, and T'Chaka kissed his cheek and held him in
a solid embrace,

"Thank you….thank you, Baby Brother."

N'Jobu felt the wetness from his brother's eyes and a soft tremor. His own eyes dropped tears.

"N'Jobu…N'Jobu…" Bathandwa whispered, patting his chest.

"Is he kicking still?" he asked.

She touched her side, smiling through her tears.

"No, you made him stop. Thank you, Brother."

The crowd was still clapping and whooping it up as T'Chaka and Bathandwa waved to everyone as their Doras escorted them towards their suite inside the East Palace.

N'Jobu slapped hands and high-fived his buddies as Zinzi ran up to him and threw her arms around him in a big hug.

"You…you were incredible, Prince N'Jobu," she said.

N'Jobu grabbed her hand.

"Come with me. We need to talk," he said. Zinzi intertwined her fingers with his.

His comm tab vibrated.

It was Califia.
Don't Wish Me Well

Chapter Summary

Uh oh...

Chapter Notes

Cranking them out!

Heading back to write more.

Thanks for staying along for the ride!

I went away
This concrete don't have love for me
I took a day
Too much talk and not much to see
I know you always speak on something
So I'll leave on the mic for you
And I'm going all the way
But I'll leave on the lights for you
I'm going all the way
And now you're almost out of view
'Cause when I say what I mean you ought to know
You got to know
I don't let it go…

Solange— "Don't Wish Me Well"

N'Jobu pulled Zinzi into an empty vestibule.

Yejide and Ometeko guarded their privacy.

He felt his comm tab vibrate again. He took a deep breath and calmly swiped a message for Califia to sit tight. He turned his attention back to Zinzi. Her eyes were glued to his face like she was seeing him for the first time.

"Have you spoken to Gcuma?" he asked.

"Yesterday—"

"And…anything?"

"No. He has been asking about you. Not outright, but I can tell he is doing his research."

His comm tab buzzed again.
"Do you need to get that?"

"Actually, I do. But first I need to tell you this. I will be approaching your parents formally before I leave Wakanda. I will ask for your hand."

Zinzi's eyes took in his words. Her lips pressed together.

"I am not going to rush the marriage if that's what you are worried about. I still have to finish school and my military training. You will have about three years. Your man needs to kick it in motion during that time before I become Ambassador. For now, we can go into the preliminary courting stage."

She nodded.

"I will speak with my family first, so do not let anyone know what I have told you. Deal?" he said.

"Deal."

"That's it then," he said.

Zinzi stared at him.

"I didn't know you could sing like that," she said.

"It's a well-known lullaby, anyone can sing it—"

"No, Your Highness. Not like that. It was powerful…overwhelming. I have never seen anything like that before. You controlled that whole entire room with your voice. I get chills on my arms now just thinking of it. The entire nation saw that."

He shrugged and pulled out his comm tab.

"If you will excuse me, please," he said.

Zinzi nodded and left him alone in the vestibule. He waited a few minutes then left the space and headed across the bridge, his Dora a few feet behind him to give him privacy. His skin was overly warm as he slapped on the earbuds for his comm tab.

He dialed her number. She answered on the fourth ring.

He couldn't even speak, so unsure of how he wanted to respond.

"N'Jobu."

Her voice halted him in his tracks. He took a step against the bridge wall, his eyes looking over the bright lights of the city below.

"Make me understand," he finally said to her. He felt a flash of anger steep inside his chest and the sour taste was back in his mouth.

"I didn't know he was there. He came with his new girlfriend…we were just dancing…and Bakari and Shavonne and I were having a good time…and Moises was really chill….and—"

"I don't care about any of that!"

He closed his eyes. His raised voice startled his Doras. He turned his head away from them.
"Why was he kissing you? Huh? That's all I want to hear, okay? I want to hear you explain to me how I can be gone for only two weeks and you were already in that man's arms?"

"He kissed me, I didn't kiss him! He got caught up in the countdown, but I let him know it wasn't cool. You didn't see that part, did you? I walked away from him right after."

"He had his tongue in your mouth. He was touching my fucking beads, Califia! You don't let other men touch those. That's why I gave them to you. That means something. How do you think this makes me feel?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't do this on purpose. We were just dancing Salsa because… I mean… I shouldn't have danced with him. It was just for old times—"

"I don't care about your old times. I don't care! Got it? I'm way over here trying to deal with family stuff. I don't hear from you except for short messages and brief chat clips in three weeks. What am I supposed to think? Why didn't you tell me this happened yourself?"

She was quiet.

"Califia, I am talking to you."

"I didn't think it would be a big deal if you didn't know about it. I handled it on my own and I didn't want you getting upset over nothing."

"You can't hide shit like that, Califia. Someone's always going to see and say something."

"Baby… I'm sorry."

N'Jobu rubbed his forehead.

"I really miss you," he said.

"I miss you too."

"There's just a lot going on over here, and I just needed to hear your voice. Not recorded or anything. I thought the worst… just the fucking worst. I need to be there with you. I'm sorry for yelling at you on my messages. I would have loved to have rung in the New Year with you."

"We can do it when you come back."

"It's already passed."

"Well, I'm sure there's some planet in outer space that's having a new year cycle somewhere. We'll ring in that one."

He smiled. There was an easing in his chest. The bitter taste was leaving his mouth.

"I love you, N'Jobu. I didn't mean to hurt you."

He closed his eyes and tried to stifle the shakiness from his throat.

"I love you too. Watch yourself out there."

"I will."

"Hey, who was coming over to the apartment on your face chat?"
"Coming over?"

"That video you sent me. The nasty one."

"What?"

"On that last chat you sent me where you were doing all that carrying on, you didn't even cum…"

He looked over his shoulder to make sure Yejide and Ometeko didn't hear him.

"The landline rang and you said someone was there—"

"Oh, the pizza guy. I had ordered a pizza and he was buzzing from the gate."

"Oh."

More relief.

"Did you like the video?"

"I got off on it."

"Did you now?"

"Made a mess all over the computer."

"Ohmigod, N'Jobu!" She laughed. He wished he could see her face while she laughed.

"I am not ashamed."

"Can we do a live session right now. I'd love to see you do that again."

The sultriness of her voice caressed his skin thousands of miles away.

"I would love to, baby, but I am in the middle of something at the moment, and I need to get back to my family. Let me save up all that for when I see you again."

"Okay, if you say so."

"You better be ready for me."

"Always."

"Talk soon."

He let her go and once she had disconnected, he let out a long exhale. He was struck by how nervous he had been throughout the entire call. Standing on eggshells. Worried.

But she loved him. And he loved her.

The world was made whole again.

###

Califia spent the entire day cooking up a special meal for N'Jobu's return. Everything from scratch. Red rice with crumbled bacon. Fresh okra fried with onions and olive oil and coarse sea salt. The good cold-pressed virgin olive oil too. Smothered chicken and gravy. Five cheese macaroni baked to
perfection. She even called up her grandmother to get the recipe on how to make southern butter rolls. She bought N'Jobu's favorite ice cream from an artisanal shop near her favorite bookstore, Borderland Books, that she had to ride over into San Francisco for. How the hell he found vanilla and lavender ice cream with macadamia nuts tasty, she had no idea. Shit looked and tasted bland to her. But her man loved it, and that was all that mattered. Especially after standing in the rain for it when the line was so dang long. Without an umbrella. The 'fro was back.

Food prepared, she spent a little time deciding what type of wine would go with everything. But since she was anticipating mind-blowing sex afterward, she went with a lightweight chardonnay that would go well with chicken.

When his flight was due to arrive within two hours, she quickly ran through the outfits she had picked out to wear, both to the airport, and what she wanted him to see her wearing in bed.

Bakari was now staying with Shavonne, although he technically hadn't officially moved out, so she didn't have access to his car to pick N'Jobu up. And N'Jobu didn't let anyone drive his car, even her. She was going to catch a Lyft to the airport and they would ride the BART system on the way back together.

She settled on wearing a long taupe zip-up sweater dress with ankle boots. The weather was chilly and rainy, but she thought she would look cute in her green North Face winter coat and dress together. There was something romantic about the cold weather on the outside, but good hot food waiting on the inside.

Plus, she was climbing-the-walls-horny. With her period cycle complete, and all the training she had been doing with her capoeira for a month, her body was ready for him. The anticipation over him felt like Christmas to her when she was a child.

Her cell phone chirped and when she checked it, there was a flight alert. N'Jobu's arrival time had changed. He was due to arrive an hour later because of bad weather in Atlanta that delayed his original take-off there. She wasn't upset. She kind of expected it because of the storms happening around the south.

She called for her ride early.

###

N'Jobu actually slept on the Royal Talon Fighter on the way back to Giza.

By the time Yejide was waking him to let him know they were back in the desert, he was stretching and feeling relaxed. His return was the reversal of his coming there. He was able to rest in the same hotel suite as before, have a decent lunch and dinner before heading to the airport.

Once he arrived in Atlanta, he noticed a lot of travelers having flights rebooked, delayed, and some even canceled. He had called Califia to let her know he would text her when he was actually on the plane about to leave. The moment he got the delay notice on his cell, he forwarded her the text.

He relaxed in a Starbucks coffee shop and checked messages and voicemails. The only one that was left that he ignored while in Wakanda was Moises. If Bakari and Califia could forgive him for being an ass, then perhaps he could be cool too. He dialed Moises' number.

"N'Jobu!"

"Hey man, w'sup?"
"Are you back?"

"Not yet. I'm over in Atlanta. These storms are crazy right now. My flight was delayed. I might get stuck down here for a minute. I heard your message. If Califia and Bakari are cool, then I think you and I are straight."

"Good to hear, and thank you. You like the picture I sent of them? They had a good time. You should've been there, bruv. Best New Year's party ever. The club wants me to put on another one for next year. You won't miss it then!"

"Okay, it's a date."

"Your girl was the life of the party. They all had a good time."

"That's what I saw."

"Ah, you checked out some of the videos?"

"Yeah."

"Hey, Danso wants to talk to you."

N'Jobu heard Moises hand the cell to Danso. He kept his eye on the flight board near his Starbucks seat. He didn't want to get caught up in a conversation and miss his flight. Califia said she had prepared something special for him tonight and he could not wait to get her in his arms.

###

Califia was glad that she caught her Lyft early. The rain made traffic a nightmare, so leaving when she did was a wise move. She would be there way before N'Jobu arrived. She wanted her face to be the first thing he saw the moment he walked through the International exit.

Checking the flight boards when she arrived at the Oakland airport, his time hadn't changed, so she bought herself an espresso and waited at the bottom of the stairs where he would come down near baggage claims.

The closer it got to his time to arrive, the more nervous she was. Her left leg kept bouncing while she sat, and she found herself wringing her hands and twisting the small amber ring she wore on her pinky finger.

A wave of people started coming down the escalators and steps.

Califia stood up, shoving her hands into the pockets of her coat.

So many faces and bodies. Other people who were waiting below like her were already finding their loved ones and giving excited shouts and whoops of joy. Califia could feel a crazy smile plastering itself on her face as she moved a little closer to the escalator so he could see her when he came down.

At last, she made out his frame. Dark glasses. Dark bomber jacket. Dark jeans.

She found herself hopping in place waving at him. She wasn't sure if he saw her yet because of the glasses.

When he stepped off the escalator and she ran up to him, she knew immediately something was off.

She threw her arms around him and his body was stiff, not receptive at all. He didn't take off his dark
glasses. She kissed his mouth, and even though his lips were warm and soft, there was a coldness there.

"Baby, welcome back," she said, feeling her stomach flip-flop with discomfort.

"I need to get my bag," he said.

"Okay."

She grabbed his hand, and even though he held it, she was not comforted by it. Maybe he was tired. Jet lag was slowing him down. Perhaps this is what exhaustion looked like for him.

"N'Jobu, are you alright? Was the flight bad?"

Her mind reached for all the scenarios that could have him being this lackluster.
"Flight was fine." Curt. To the point.

They waited by the luggage conveyor that would bring him his carry on. She interlaced her fingers in his and squeezed his hand a little. There was no reciprocation.

Being first class, his bag was one of the first to come tumbling onto the conveyor, and N'Jobu lifted it with one hand, pulled up the handle and began walking towards the exit with her.

Outside he hailed a cab. No BART for him.

Calafia plopped inside the cab and waited for N'Jobu to join her. When he did, she scooted closer to him and pulled off his glasses.

"What's wrong? C'mon, you're scaring me."

His eyes looked like they could burn holes in her.

"Are you tired? I know the flight was long."

She caressed his face, and when he seemed to lean into her touch, she thought she had him back. Poor baby. Tired, probably a lot of turbulence on the flight over, and she was coming at him a little too hard, maybe.

She raised up her mouth and kissed him. His warm lips were still frigid, but when her tongue slid along the seam of his mouth, he opened up, and she sighed so heavily when he kissed her back.

"I missed you so much, baby…I missed you," she said.

The moment she spoke, he pulled away from her. The abruptness startled her.

"What is it?"

"We'll talk about it when we get home," he said.

The rest of the ride in the cab was a solemn trip of dread.

This was not the reunion she imagined.

###

The apartment was toasty warm from the perfect temperature she left on the thermostat, and the entire
space still smelled delicious from all the food she cooked. She immediately began heating things up in the oven.

N'Jobu went into the bedroom and put his carry on away, then went and took a shower while she set up the kitchen table for their meal. She let the wine breathe on the sink counter as she placed wine glasses on the table.

N'Jobu walked in tying the strings to some linen drawstring pants. He wore a thin university t-shirt. Looking around at the food and the wine, his eyes finally settled on her. She smoothed down the front of her dress and gave him a smile.

"Hungry?" she asked.

He glanced at her dress, then looked back at her face.

"Come here," he said.

The sound of his voice was low, calculated. It turned her on. She moved to be in front of him.

He reached out and touched her dress, his eyes dropping to her breasts. She brought her hands up and wrapped them around his neck. His hands moved up her stomach and gently rested on her breasts. She felt his breath when he exhaled a little loud.

He reached up and snagged a hold of the zipper on her dress and pulled it down. She felt herself breathing harder, her eyes on his full lips. She wanted his hands back on her breasts. The slight brush of his fingers on her nipples had her lower parts waking up.

He unzipped the dress to her knees, then stood back to look at her. See-through black bra. Cute lace boy shorts that were purposely a size too small. And his beads.

She saw his nostrils flare when he saw the beads.

"Go get on the chair," he said.

She felt her pulse quicken.

The chair.

In his bedroom.

Yes, Lord.

She let her dress drop to the floor and wasted no time sauntering to his room.

The back of the wing-backed chair faced his mirrored closet doors. She placed her knees on the seat and gripped the top of the chair. When he walked into the bedroom, she could see his dick swinging in his pants. She bit her lower lip. A small whimper escaped from her.

"N'Jobu," she said, and her voice already sounded needy, and she didn't care.

"Don't talk," he said.

She pursed her lips and let her thighs widen for him. He took off his shirt. Mercy. Whatever they were feeding him in Wakanda was making her man look extra fit. Her eyes swept over his pecs, his abs, and back down to that pipe she knew was thickening in his pants because of the way he was looking at her ass. She wiggled her hips and the beads hugging her jingled around her.
"N'Jobu, baby…come here," she whined, leaning her chest forward on the chair, popping her ass out.

He settled behind her and regarded her face in the mirror.

"Shut your mouth," he said. His right hand came down so hard and fast, Califia gasped and thought she was going to fall off the chair. Her fingers gripped the chair for support.

"Damn," she uttered, her mouth flying open. It hurt so good.

He didn't give her time to adjust at all, working up his spanking prowess. The stinging hurt soon turned into the dull subtle pain that opened her up.

"Keep your fucking eyes open," he commanded her. She did her best, staring at him from the mirror as she saw his hand strike her, blow after blow, flesh on flesh, the hard smacks making her backside jiggle and take the sharp imprints of the brutal marks he was leaving. He switched up often, slapping under her thighs too. She knew her slit was dripping. The pain had already blossomed into pleasure. Her skin was electrified and the nerves in her ass were tingling and hot.

He rubbed her cheeks for a bit to soothe the stinging sensation and prepare her for more. He moved around the side of the chair to play with her tits, and she saw his hard dick poking out. She stuck her tongue out to suck on the head through the linen pants. He let her wet it up, her whole mouth engulfing it and sucking on the cloth until he then proceeded to rain down more slaps on her ass.

"Did I tell you to suck my dick?"

She shook her head, she couldn't get the breath out to say no because he was hitting her so hard and precise. In her headspace, she was still gaging her pain threshold.

He pulled her beads and kept slapping her. Her pussy was a sloppy wet mess.

"Let me rub this big ass," he said, finally slowing down and palming her backside with both hands. He stood behind her, rubbing, and lifting, and separating her cheeks, pulling her boy shorts to the side to stare at her pussy the way he always did.

His hands comforted her ass. She reached back with one hand and pulled on the beads. Their eyes met in the mirror. Why were his so dark and brooding?

He yanked the beads out of her hand and held them himself as he continued sharp slaps. He was totally ignoring her gaping pink that was so frothy for him.

"My pussy, Jobu…"

He ignored her, his hands no longer soothing her as he went off.

The strikes from his hand were even more ferocious. She tried to make eye contact with him, but his eyes were on her ass, and his face had gone hard. He was gruntling when he escalated.

"N'Jobu…ow…baby…"

It was hurting now. She tried to push herself, push a little further into her pain threshold. Hold out a little more.

"Fuck!" he shouted, yanking her boy shorts with one hand, wedging them into her ass so they were like a thong. His hands struck down on her, each stinging blow augmented to harsh perfection.
She couldn't take it anymore.

"N'Jobu! Summer! Summer! Summer!" she shouted. Their safe word tumbled out of her mouth for the first time ever.

N'Jobu's head snapped up to look at her, his one hand still yanking her boy shorts, his other hand in mid-strike.

She was trembling, the adrenaline in her body racing through her. Her eyes were watery from the intensity and the pain. Her backside felt scorched and bruised. She didn't need to look to know her ass was red from his hands.

He released her boy shorts and stepped back. He was still jutting out of his pants. He walked over to their nightstand and pulled out a bottle of cooling gel. He drizzled the blue gel on both her cheeks and gently rubbed it into her skin, working it into the muscles. She gritted her teeth as he massaged her, the gel slowly working its dense cooling magic, dulling the pain.

When he was done, he looked at her in the mirror.

"Go ahead and fix the food. Do not put any clothes on."

He threw the gel on the bed and walked out of the bedroom. She heard him go into the bathroom, closing the door behind him. What was happening?

###

She fixed him a big plate.

He poured the wine for both of them.

Sitting across from him, eating in silence, Califia watched N'Jobu eat with a hearty appetite. He was shirtless still and she was just wearing her underwear and beads. He barely looked at her. She picked at her food but drank down the wine.

Her backside ached, and she shifted in her seat a lot. His cell phone vibrated several times next to his plate, but he ignored it.

"I thought we agreed on no cell phones at the table," she quipped, gulping down her second glass of wine.

He paused in his eating and glared at her. She shifted in her seat and grimaced a bit from her spanking.

N'Jobu stood up and took his cell phone out of the kitchen. When he came back, he sat down and resumed eating. She scooted in her seat again.

"I hurt you that bad?" he asked, watching her.

"I took some ibuprofen. It should kick in."

"You're mixing drugs with wine?"

"It's not a problem, N'Jobu."

She stabbed her fork into the red rice. He regarded her for a moment, then walked over to her side of the table.
"I made it sting?"

She ignored him until he lifted her chin up with his hand.

"I finally reached my limit," she said.

He stroked her face, the first real sign of affection he had shown her the entire evening.

"I push you too far?"

"I'll learn from it."

His touch coaxed her to rub her face in his hand.

"Let me see," he said.

She shifted forward in her chair and he reached down and stroked her ass. She hissed a little when he touched it. Her head was near his waist, and she saw his dick jump when she hissed. He liked her being in pain like that.

"I marked that ass up," he said.

"Yes, you did," she said, her breath growing heavy as she watched his dick extend in his pants. He patted her left ass cheek, and she squirmed. He pulled on her beads, then rubbed her right ass cheek. She hissed again, but from the pleasure of her discomfort.

"You like your ass being touched, don't you?" he asked.

She looked up at him.

"Yes," she said. His voice sounded so gentle and yet so seductive. She scrambled to hold on to his mood.

"Touch me," she said, leaning forward so he could see her backside more.

He grabbed a handful of her ass and squeezed it.

"It's so red. I really did spank the hell out of you."

"I deserved it," she said.

His eyes grew narrow when she said that.

"Yes, you deserved it," he said.

"Make it better," she said.

"I'll make it better," he said.

He untied the drawstring on his pants and lowered them enough to free his cock. He grabbed it and shoved it in her face.

"Open your mouth," he said.

She opened her mouth and reached up to stroke his dick.

"Put your hands on your knees and keep them there."
She did as she was told. He stuck his dick in her mouth.

"Look at me," he said.

She kept her eyes on his as he thrust his hips forward, her mouth now full of a very engorged cock. Her tongue stroked the veins protruding from his dick.

"This will make you feel real good," he whispered, looking down at her.

She started humming and his jaw went lax as she heard him fight back a moan.

"I know you like dick a lot. Especially on that fat ass of yours."

She swallowed more of his shaft, trying to keep up with his thrusts. He was starting to hit the back of her throat and she gagged.

"Yes…gag on it…you like dick…"

Eyes gone watery, her right hand went up to push on his waist, trying to shove him back a bit.

"Too much dick? Is that too much dick, Califia?"

He pulled out from her throat with an overflow of saliva dripping from her lips. He grabbed her hair and stroked himself.

"N'Jobu," she said, bewildered by his tone and behavior. It all felt so wrong even though her body was responding hungrily to his touch. It was all so…off.

His dick, shiny and swollen, and missed dearly by her, sat in front of her face being stroked hard by his hand. His slit was seeping and her pussy was throbbing.

"N'Jobu—"

Hot semen shot onto her face, and her eyes blinked shut from the suddenness of it. He held the head of his cock against her cheek and pumped out the rest. Then he shoved her face away from him, hard, like she was trash.

"What the fuck is wrong with you, N'Jobu?!

He re-tied his pants and stormed out of the kitchen, returning a minute later with an Ipad in his hand.

"You tell me!" he yelled.

He swiped the pad, and a weirdly lit video played. She couldn't figure out what it was until she recognized the alley.

Her face went slack.

"N'Jobu…"

"I told you. Someone's always going to see and say something. You lied. Look at him! He's practically fucking your ass."

Xavier had her in his arms. His fingers were on her hips and he was dry humping her, kissing the back of her neck. And she was letting him. She remembered him holding her, his lips on her neck, his groin pressed into her, but it didn't feel like it looked. The optics were so fucking bad. She
watched herself turn around and face him, her hands going up to his face, then they fell away into the doorway. She remembered him crying. She remembered hugging him. But looking at the cell phone footage, it looked like a betrayal.

"Did Moises send you this?"

"No, someone else."

N'Jobu threw the Ipad on the table and it landed on her plate, shattering the dish, shards landing on her leg. She jumped up. She wasn't about to let any man throw shit at her like that. She shoved the Ipad on the floor towards his bare feet.

She stormed into the bathroom, grabbing a hand towel and wetting it to wipe his cum off her face. When she had cleaned herself, she stalked back into the kitchen, but he had moved into the livingroom.

"Let me guess, you're going to claim you were too high and too drunk?"

She glared at him. Everything he had done to her tonight was to humiliate her.

"I am not going to be your rebound guy, Califia. Give me my beads."

"I don't want him. I want you!"

"Give me my fucking beads!"

"I know that video looks bad—"

"Stop talking! Just give me the beads!"

"He was upset that he was having a hard time getting over me. Moises had walked me outside to get some air because I did drink too much tequila, and Xavier came to check on me because he probably thought Moises was going to take advantage…N'Jobu listen to me…let me explain!"

N'Jobu's hands were on his hips, his chest was heaving and his face was seething.

"Let me tell you what really happened…please—"

"First it was just an accidental New Year's kiss, now what? A New Year's nut for him, just for old times' sake?"

"Fuck you!" she yelled, unfastening each strand of beads. She threw them at him and ran into his bedroom searching for clothes. She threw on her ratty SFSU sweatshirt and shimmied her legs and sore ass into a pair of heavy sweatpants she had worn earlier in the day.

N'Jobu stormed into the bedroom.

"You might as well pack up the rest of your clothes too," he said, tossing her a small duffle bag.

She grabbed it and tossed a few things she had inside one of his drawers.

She wanted to cry, but she was so angry that he wouldn't listen to her, she refused to let him see her bawl. Yes, the video was ugly. But she deserved a chance to be heard. And he wasn't having it.

She shoved past him moving out of the bedroom and looking for her cell phone. It was on his desk near the balcony.
"I hate you so much right now!" she screamed at him.

"This is on you."

"You're acting like I did this on purpose, I—"

N'Jobu threw his hands up and glared at her.

"I guess I should've expected this from someone who was so eager to jump on my dick while she still had a boyfriend."

Califia's eyes grew wide. She dropped the duffle bag and flew at him.

###

N'Jobu watched Califia drop into a capoeira rolê move, her body bent forward and spinning to one side. He underestimated her speed and she swept her leg into the side of his jaw. N'Jobu took the hit, he knew he deserved it for implying that she was a slut, but when she raised up to strike him again, she was shocked to see him deflect her moves. His hands took on a grappling stance in a more defensive style of fighting. Brazil had its capoeira. Wakanda had ulwa. And N'Jobu was a master of it.

Califia's eyes became angry slits and her speed would get the best of him if he didn't get a hold of her arms to stop her. He didn't want a physical altercation with her, but he was reaping the whirlwind. She was low on the floor twisting her legs up between his. He fought her back as gentle as he could, using his weight advantage over her. He took several leaps back as she flipped backward, twisting her torso. Her left foot connected with his chest and knocked him into the bookshelf where an entire shelf fell down raining books on the floor. He had enough. He rushed her before she could do any harm to herself or him.

N'Jobu threw his arms around her and lifted her up off her feet.

"Let go of me!" she yelled, squirming in his arms. He flexed his biceps and squeezed her a bit, trying to wind her down. He started laughing at her.

"You're like the Tasmanian Devil cartoon right now."

She didn't find it funny.

He had made a terrible mistake. The way she was reacting, his assumptions, thoughts, and fears were all wrong. So wrong.

"Listen…Califia…stop moving!"

"Let me go."

"Stop moving."

"If you don't put me down——"

"Stop moving then——"

THWACK!

The pain shot through him. She head-butted him, but he didn't let her go. He shook his head, with his eyes closed. When he looked back up at her, she had calmed down.
"You're bleeding," she said.
Giving Up

Chapter Summary

The aftermath...

Chapter Notes

Hi All!

Whew, some of you have let me know how upset you are with N'Jobu! I apologize! That last chapter did go a hard left.

As I told some of you, I wanted to see if I could dig these two out of an ugly situation, and it was a way to challenge myself to make N'Jobu less than perfect.

Now, I told myself I was not going to write this first book past 30 or so chapters, but I'm already at 25. So I may have to cheat and make the chapters really long, or just go ahead and make 4 books and have this first one end when Erik is on his way, and then get to the hiding of N'Jobu's family in the second book. What do y'all think? Or maybe just write as many chapters as it takes to finish Califia and N'Jobu's story and then get to Erik? Let me know what you think. I guess if it's fanfiction I can do whatever the heck I want, lol!

As always on every update, I thank you for staying with these two. If you are still angry with N'Jobu and want to leave him, I totally understand and hope you'll come back when Erik’s story begins.

Giving up
Is hard to do
When you really
Love someone
Giving up
So hard to do
When you still depend upon
Her warm and tender touch
Her kiss and her caress
Ooh, they used to
Mean so much
And bring you happiness…

Donny Hathaway – "Giving Up"

N'Jobu sat on a kitchen chair holding an icepack made from a plastic sandwich bag filled with ice on the left side of his forehead. He was able to get the bleeding from the small tear in his skin to stop some time ago. Califia walked into the kitchen carrying a bottle of ibuprofen. She shook out four tabs
and handed them to him and poured him a glass of water. He gulped down the medicine and took the
glass from her.

"Let me see," she said, pulling back his hand that held the icepack.

She touched the butterfly bandage she had put on him.

"Swelling's not too bad now," she said pushing his hand back with the ice pack. She placed the
ibuprofen on the counter and held up three fingers in front of his face.

"How many do you see?"

"Three," he said.

She switched up to seven fingers.

"Seven," he said.

"You should probably stay up for a few hours, just to see if your vision gets blurry or anything."

She walked out of the kitchen and he followed her.

She picked up the duffle bag she had dropped on the floor and grabbed her motorcycle jacket from
the back of the front door.

"Don't leave. Please. I don't want you to leave," he said moving close behind her. He took the ice
pack from his forehead.

"Let's talk," he said sitting on the couch and watching her.

"Now you want to talk? We nearly tore up this apartment, and now your ass wants to talk. Fuck
outta here-"

"I was angry and I lashed out, and I'm sorry—"

"You basically called me a slut! You made me feel cheap and small…"

Her bottom lip quivered.

"You told me to get my shit and leave—"

"I was wrong…I was hurt…upset…I didn't mean any of that—"

"Yes, you did! I saw it in your eyes—"

"I was wrong…I was wrong…sit down, Califia…please…"

She dropped the duffle bag again and sat on the far side of the couch away from him. Her eyes were
welling up. His own throat was closing up.

"I am sorry that I made you feel less than what you really are. I saw that video and I couldn't believe
what I was seeing. I was excited to come back here and be with you again, and then…I received the
video in Atlanta…my head just filled up with so much…I was livid. Confused. Mainly I was hurt.
To see the woman that I love, who I have been separated from for a month…to see you in an
embrace like that. What was I to think? What if you saw me in a compromising position like that?
With Bridgette? Or Andrea? How would you react?"
A loose tear spilled down Califia’s face and she wiped it.

"I would be upset…but I would let you tell me your side of it! No matter how horrible things looked, I would’ve given you that chance first!” she yelled.

Her raised voice made him feel so much shame.

"Please. Tell me what happened. I will listen."

Califia wiped her other eye and she folded her hands in her lap.

"I went to the club with Bakari and Shavonne. Xavier was there with his girlfriend. Everything was cool. He introduced me to her. We're all dancing together, no big deal. Moises started counting down the time…everyone's hugging when it struck midnight. Xavier put his hand in my back pocket and pulled me into him and kissed me. I pushed away from him and wiped my mouth. I drank some tequila shots to get the taste out of my mouth…"

N'Jobu intently watched her face. She was looking off into the distance as she spoke, her eyes moving as if she were reliving the event in front of her.

"The tequila was a little too strong, and didn't mix well with my edible and I needed air. Moises helped me walk it off outside and Xavier came out to check on me. Moises left, and Xavier started talking about how he was struggling with our break up. He said he missed me and I told him it was difficult for both of us, but that we would be okay. I went to leave and he hugged me. Then he started crying and said he wanted me to be happy. He started falling apart and I just hugged him and patted his back until he calmed down. Moises came back out to check on me and I walked back inside the club with him. That's all that happened, N'Jobu. I swear. I was high, and the liquor had me f-ed up, so whatever he was doing…rubbing up on me…that's not what I planned when I went outside to clear my head. He was in a bad place and all I did was comfort him. I was just thinking about you that night. I had that book of poetry you gave me in my head the whole time. I felt so good inside. I got to dance my heart out for fun. I got to think about what I wanted to do when you came back to me—"

N'Jobu slid over to her and pulled her into his chest.

"Califia…shit…forgive me for being an ass tonight."

"You don't trust me."

"It's not about trust."

"Then what is it? Why couldn't you tell me about the video before you came back?"

"I was scared."

She pulled back from him and looked at his face.

"Scared of what?"

"I feel very insecure with you and my life. My country and my family are experiencing some major transitions, and I am under a lot of stress back home. You are the only constant and special thing…person…in my life. You give me peace. I was scared to say that I am terrified that you'll leave me. I often think that maybe I should’ve waited a little longer to get with you because it hasn't been that long since your break-up. I'm scared you still have feelings for him and that you'll wake up one day and just go back to him. I think of this a lot. When I saw that video…I thought my worst fear was
confirmed. It had come true…”

"You could've talked to me about this."

"You would think I was weak."

She held his hand.

"No, I wouldn't. I would think you were human. Had I known you felt that way, I would never have danced with Xavier or allowed him in my space."

She touched the butterfly bandage.

"I have made a mess of the entire evening. I just wanted to come home and be with you in our quiet apartment. I didn't even comfort you after our session," he said.

"You stopped checking in with me. I should've ended it when you started doing that. We can't do that if we don't check in with each other."

She curled up into his side and he wrapped his arms around her.

"We can't work if you keep things that scare you away from me, N'Jobu. You let your anger into a space that is supposed to be safe for us," she said.

He nodded.

"I have been through a lot of shit, so nothing you can say to me would make me push you away or think less of you. You have to be straight up. You can't just react and have me out here guessing what you're feeling. Just talk to me. N'Jobu, you are not a rebound. You are not a rebound." she said.

"Okay."

His chest trembled, and he exhaled hard. She placed her hand on his chest and he held it tight.

"You still love, me?" he asked.

She looked up at him and kissed him.

"I still love you. But don't ever do me like this again. I will walk and never look back."

She kissed him again. He felt a tear slide down his face.

"I'm sorry, baby…" he said.

She wiped his cheek.

"I know you are. I promise to tell you about things that happen in the future too."

She looked at his forehead again.

"Does it still hurt?"

"A dull ache."

"You'll have to stay up then. I could've given you a concussion. Are you sure you don't want to get checked out?"
"You can check me out."

She glanced over at the bookshelf. There were books still strewn all over the floor.

"We should put those back-"

"Just leave them. Sit here with me."

He stroked her hair that always defied gravity and rubbed her back. She relaxed more into him and he kissed her forehead.

"I messed up your special evening. The food was exceptional."

"I even bought you that nasty ice cream you like. But you are on punishment. You get none for a week."

He lifted up her chin.

"Whatever punishments you want to give me, I will take."

He pressed his lips on hers and she opened her mouth willingly and he felt such relief. His tongue swept hers and he kept stroking her back. He pulled back to hold her face and look at it. She was his most precious thing. Her eyes were still shiny with unshed tears, and he kissed her again. He then gazed at all her freckles to reacquaint himself with them. He then glanced down at her soft lush mouth. Her nose ring tickled his nose when he rubbed it against hers. But it was her eyes that held him at this moment. Those passionate, unpredictable, and so very arresting eyes…

"Ah, don't…please…don't cry girl…"

Tiny drops cascaded down her face, and nothing wounded him more than seeing her so hurt, especially by his own actions.

He held her close and rocked her until she fell asleep.

He laid her out comfortably and left the couch to fix the shelf and place all the fallen books back. He put away the leftovers and cleaned up the kitchen too. He picked up the duffel bag and unpacked her things in the bedroom.

Returning to the living room, he watched her as she slept on the couch. He still felt horrible.

He picked her up and carried her into the bedroom.

Lying in bed with her, he held her in his arms and listened to her breathing as she slept until his own eyes drifted and closed.

When N'Jobu woke up the next morning, Califia was gone.

In a panic, he checked his drawer. Her things were still there.

###

"I think we should talk to someone…"

Her text message popped up out of the blue after they had been separated for about three weeks.

When Califia disappeared from their bed the day after his return from Wakanda, he accepted that she needed space after what they had been through. Whatever she needed to do he was in full support of.
She came back two days later after staying at her grandmother's, and they resumed a bit of normalcy, except there was no physical intimacy. He tried to initiate sexual contact a week after his return, but she told him no, she wasn't ready yet. And he accepted that. He thought she would come to him when she was ready. She never did.

He had an extra full course load that term and Califia was preparing to graduate, so they had very little time together anyway, but it was difficult to be gone all day five days a week and lay next to her at night without touching her, or she touching him. Not even kisses or hugs.

He soon started sleeping on the pullout bed at first so she wouldn't feel uncomfortable wondering if he was going to pester her at night. When Bakari officially moved in with Shavonne, N'Jobu took over his room. He and Califia started living as roommates.

He beat himself up mentally every day for engaging in their sex play while he was in a state of anger. Although he talked to her every night and let her take the lead in any physical contact since then, she had closed herself off to him. He thought about letting her go. He was on edge thinking of all the things he could do or say to her to gain back her trust in him, and the only solution he could come up with was to accept that it was over. Give her permanent space.

Maybe it was time to let her walk away. He would take the pain now and accept that he fucked up, finish up his studies and just go home. Learn from his mistake. Marry Zinzi. Start pumping out royal babies. Maybe then Califia would fade from his heart and he could get rid of the gaping wound that sat deep in his chest.

"I feel stuck…"

One night when she returned home from partying with Rolita and Soliel, he asked her to move out. Go back to her grandmother's.

The look on her face cut him to the bone. It wasn't anger. It was hurt. And surprise.

"We can't live like this. I don't want a roommate. I hurt you and I can't figure out how to fix it. You look so unhappy when you come here at night, and you won't talk to me about it," he said.

He had pressed his index and ring finger into his palm hard, his fingernails causing pain to distract himself so that he wouldn't cry. He needed to get those words out. Needed her to hear them without any shakiness in his voice.

But that damn look on her face. He wished he had just fallen out of love with her. Then he wouldn't have to feel anything. The indifference would've been freeing. So much easier than looking at her at that moment.

She didn't say anything, just allowed her face to convey her pain. He went into his room and buried his face under a pillow.

She was gone the next day. But she left her things there. He pretended not to see them and just went on about his business, filling his days with schoolwork, going to the gym, jogging, and pretending like things were okay when he hung out with Bakari.

"I have a lot of anger in me…"

Occasionally he would drop her a text to check in. Simple things like, "How are you?", "Getting close to finishing, I'm proud of you.", "I miss you a lot." At first, she answered him back, short simple replies that came off cordial like, "I'm doing ok.", "Can't wait 'til I'm done.", and "I miss you too."
But as time went on, she stopped answering his texts. She didn't respond to his emails.

Serah had cussed him out in a series of text messages, so Bakari was his only buddy to help keep his mind off of things, and he was terrified that Califia would tell him about their situation, but thus far, Bakari was oblivious, too busy with Shavonne to notice anything out of order. Bakari was also applying to law school, so he really had his plate full.

Three weeks, and not a word from her. A numbness settled into him, but he kept telling himself that he did the right thing by asking her to leave. But then he wondered if that had been too soon, could he have waited longer to live like the walking dead around her, fearful that everything he said or did would cause her more pain. He had his own feelings to think about too. Walking around feeling worthless wasn't healthy for him, especially if she wasn't talking to him openly about her own feelings.

"Can we meet up and talk about this?"

He called her on her cell.

"Where are you?" he asked.

"Nana's."

"I'm on my way."

The appointment was for ten in the morning. He arrived at the office thirty minutes early. The receptionist offered him coffee or tea, and he accepted a cup of mint tea with honey. After filling out some paperwork that had him give personal info and answer a few questions, he thumbed through a running magazine as he waited to see the woman that Califia said would help them.

A therapist named Dr. Davis.

N'Jobu glanced at his watch. It was almost time for their appointment and Califia hadn't arrived yet. He started to feel anxious. Was she going to stand them up?

He had met with Califia several times in person at her grandmother's talking about seeking professional help. Dr. Davis was Califia's regular therapist, and when she mentioned utilizing couples' therapy, N'Jobu readily agreed to go. He was willing to try anything if it helped Califia talk to him.

Now she wasn't even going to show up.

"N'Jobu?"

A tall Black woman with a gorgeous mane of salt and pepper twists stood in front of him. N'Jobu put down the magazine he was reading and stood up.

"I'm Dr. Davis."

He shook her hand, mesmerized by her warm brown face and inquisitive eyes behind a pair of horn-rimmed glasses.

"Hi," he said.

"I asked Califia to come in a little later with us. I wanted to have a little one on one with you before
she arrived. Is that alright?"

"Yes," he said.

"This way then."

He followed Dr. Davis into an office that looked like a cozy livingroom inside a Better Homes and Gardens magazine.

"Please, have a seat," she said.

N'Jobu sat on a comfortable L-shaped couch while Dr. Davis sat in a plush chair that sat adjacent to him. There was an end table next to the couch with a box of tissue on it, a bowl of peppermints, and two bottled waters.

"How are you feeling right now, N'Jobu?"

"Nervous. But glad to be here."

"Nervous is normal. And I'm glad that you want to be here. Califia has given me permission to discuss certain things openly with you before she comes in. Do you need anything before we get started? The restroom or anything?"

"No."

"If you haven't already, I'd like to remind you to make sure your cell phone is off."

He nodded.

They made a little bit of small talk, and N'Jobu found himself relaxing quite easily with her.

"I have been Califia's therapist for many years. When her father went to prison, she had a difficult time adjusting to life without him, as I'm sure you are aware. Those were rough times for her and her mother. She only sees me maybe three or four times a year now. Our last session was right after the police incident in front of your apartment. She's a strong young woman, but her trauma triggers come back from time to time. The incident you two had at your apartment, after the spanking, it brought back some things to her that she'd like to talk about when she comes in."

N'Jobu felt his face flame up, and his eyes blinked back surprise. Dr. Davis chuckled.

"Don't feel embarrassed, N'Jobu. BDSM and kink are acceptable lifestyle choices for consenting adults. I have patients in all types of communities. I'm trained to help with issues that come up in those communities too."

He visibly relaxed after that. There was a knock at the door.

"Come on in," Dr. Davis said.

Califia walked in, her head covered in a beanie, her body looking sleek in her riding jacket and boots.

"Hey," she said, looking at N'Jobu, "Hi, Dr. Davis."

"Hello, Califia. Go ahead and take a seat," Dr. Davis said.

Califia sat on the couch next to N'Jobu, two feet of space between them.
Dr. Davis set up the parameters of their session and also the rules of how they should both communicate. Using "I" statements instead of "You". Listening without judgment. Breathing correctly. Making eye contact if possible.

Dr. Davis came off to N'Jobu as a wise old soul. She reminded him of a loving Aunt that wanted to bring a family back together and would walk them through the hurt as far as they needed her to go.

At first, N'Jobu thought their spanking session and the fact that Califia had to use their safe word was a fundamental cause of her disengagement from their relationship. But in their talk with Dr. Davis, he learned that she had to use her safe words in previous relationships and that having to use a safe word was not a deal breaker for her. Using her safe words allowed her to understand her tolerance for pain and to see how far she could go before having to pump the breaks.

He then thought that it was his lack of aftercare for her coming down from their session that rankled her. It bothered her in the sense that it was rude and insensitive, but she could get over that by reminding him of her needs. What broke her on top of all of those things was that she had attacked him when his words hurt her. She had gone straight to physical violence on him instead of talking out her pain.

"My mother and father used to argue all the time. Over finances, how they were raising me, where we lived…and my Mom used to get so mad that she would attack my Dad. Throw things at him, straight fight his ass like a rough neck. He would try to hold her off, and it would just be so…so ugly. And when you told me that I would just hop on your dick like I was just some random jump-off…I just…I just turned into my mom, and….and…"

"Keep going, Califia. This is a safe space. Tell him," Dr. Davis said.

"I wanted to hurt you so bad, and I don't want to be like that, I don't want us to turn into them. I knew my parents loved each other…but they would just go at it, and I don't want us to have that type of dynamic. I don't want to hit you when I get mad. I thought when we talked afterward I could get over that, and it just ate at me. I shut you out. I want to talk, but then I get overwhelmed and I just want to ignore the problem. I didn't want you to touch me. I didn't want to touch you. I beat on you, N'Jobu. And you let me. You didn't raise your hand to hit me back in defense at all, and when you did that, I saw my Dad in you…I just couldn't handle that like I thought I could. My Mom is a good person, she just didn't know how to communicate with him without fighting him when she got that angry. I don't want that. I don't want that for us. I feel like I may be falling into a pattern I can't break."

N'Jobu didn't know how to respond. He just listened. Let her get it all out.

Dr. Davis talked to them both about generational trauma, and how children often experienced and reenacted that trauma in their adult lives.

N'Jobu found it difficult to hear about Califia's parents on top of the trauma and PTSD she often suffered from later in life. It made him feel inadequate to help her the way he really wanted to.

"What can I do?" he asked. That was all he could think to say. For the first time in a long time, Califia reached out and touched his hand. He felt his hand shake, and then he opened his palm. She placed her hand in his and he held it. They both looked over at Dr. Davis.

"We need to work on you two building back up the trust you have lost with one another. You both have to create new boundaries in your physical relationship, especially with the spanking. And you also need to find more effective ways of communicating that won't trigger either of you. We can do that here," Dr. Davis said.
Dr. Davis handed Califia some tissue and N'Jobu watched her wipe her eyes with her free hand.

"Let's get started," Dr. Davis said.

N'Jobu felt Califia squeeze his hand.

He mouthed the words "I love you," to her and she squeezed his hand again.

###

The two-foot bamboo sticks in Califia's hands vibrated when they clashed with the sticks in Bakari's hands.

The storefront studio where they practiced was well lit and only contained the two of them this early as Bakari helped her train. She wanted Bakari to come at her with as many different offensive moves as he could before they switched out and practiced with the real machetes sitting on a table not too far from them.

Bakari was really going all out with his hits, so she was really feeling his energy.

When she was younger, she first trained under the style of Capoeira Angola. It was a slower, smoother form, and played very low to the ground. But the first time she saw Soliel's father demonstrate the Capoeira Regional style at an open roda in Oakland as a kid, she switched over to the faster and more acrobatic style. It was also more aggressive and fit her energy. It got her in trouble a lot in school when she would kick the shit out of boys on the playground who got out of pocket with her.

Her father, who was still a follower of the Angola style, had to have a chat with her about boundaries and using her martial arts skills in appropriate places. By then, word got around the school and the neighborhood about her: don't start none, won't be none.

Califia and Bakari worked the room and then switched out to the real machetes. The clashing of metal on metal made Califia push herself harder.

"Slow down…keep your focus…good…watch your feet…Califia watch your feet…good…keep at it," Bakari said.

The three little bells attached to the front door jingled.

From the corner of her eyes, Califia saw N'Jobu slip into the storefront with dark sweatpants and a dark hoodie. Bakari stopped when he saw him. N'Jobu slipped off his sneakers and stuck them against the mirrored wall.

"W'sup?" Bakari said, giving N'Jobu a wide smile.

"Chillin'," N'Jobu responded.

Bakari put down the machetes he was using and walked over to N'Jobu, gave him dap, and small talk.

Califia put away her blades and stretched her arms.

She didn't tell Bakari about anything that happened between her and N'Jobu.

She had snuck out of bed early while N'Jobu still slept. She wanted to make love to him; her body tingled just thinking about it. But her mind and spirit were still catching up. Getting to sweat and
work out the sinews and muscles felt good. Her on-going therapy sessions with N'Jobu and Dr. Davis made her feel stronger and more capable of handling her feelings, especially her anger.

Seeing N'Jobu now felt a lot better. He looked really happy to see her too. She had moved back in with him and they were sleeping in the same bed together again. There was cuddling and hugging, and now a bit of kissing, but still no sex. She felt she would be ready soon and they were following the guidance of Dr. Davis and not rushing into physical intimacy on that level yet. It was nice to feel that slow burn again with him. Kissing N'Jobu again was a nice treat, and those long lip-locked sessions in bed made them both happy.

"What brings you to the 'hood, son?" Bakari asked.

"Came to see my girl," N'Jobu said.

She was sure Bakari didn't pick up on it, but Califia clearly heard the subtext in N'Jobu's words. He was looking dead at her when he said it. Are we okay today? Is what he meant. She gave him a smile.

What she was really spinning about in the recesses of her mind often was the way he moved defensively against her that night. Not one time did he allow himself to hurt her, even as she was giving him that work. It was that grappling shit that had her fired up. What the hell type of fighting was he doing that awful night? She always wanted to ask but didn't want to make him feel bad again re-living that pain. Enough time had passed. One way to find out…

"Come out here and show Bakari that shit you do," she said.

N'Jobu begged off.

"Bakari, did you know N'Jobu fights?"

Bakari looked at N'Jobu.

"What's it called?" she pushed.

"Tell it," Bakari said.

"I learned it as a teenager back home. It's called ulwa."

Califia held out her hand like her childhood hero Donnie Yen and beckoned N'Jobu to come to the floor. She wanted to spar with him. See what else he could do.

N'Jobu took off his hoodie and placed it on the table with the machetes. His white tank top hugged his pecs. He stretched his arms and flexed his biceps.

Califia tightened her workout pants. Her own tank top stretched over her sports bra.

They both met in the middle of the studio hardwood floor and crouched down in front of each other. They slapped hands out of respect, and then Califia began an offensive that N'Jobu easily deflected. While Califia did a lot more acrobatics, N'Jobu's stance was a sly offensive that looked like defensive moves but were really calculated blows toward her center. She got into trouble when he started using those grappling moves with his hands and then used his legs to slide on the ground and keep her off balance.

"Oh, shit!" Bakari yelled.
Unlike that night, when Califia was moving out of blind passion and anger, her clear head now started to pick up on how powerful ulwa was. The best way she could describe it was like holding the midsection of a rattlesnake while it was constantly snapping its poisonous jaws at the face, chest and inner thighs. He kept her off balance, and soon he had her pinned to the floor. Her speed didn't help her this time.

"Shit," she said, untangling her legs from his strong thighs.

"Ulwa goes for the center. It forces the opponent to fight blindly to control the big arm and leg movements," N'Jobu said.

"Man, you've been holding out all this time?" Bakari said.

"It's similar to capoeira in a lot of ways," N'Jobu said.

"Can you fight with blades? Sticks?"

He nodded.

"Give him the sticks, Bakari," Califia said, jumping back up on her feet.

Califia picked up her sticks while N'Jobu took Bakari's.

"Let's see what you got, baby," she said, circling him. His height and weight advantage could overpower her if she wasn't careful. He had a longer arm reach too. Her speed was her only real power with him. N'Jobu was fast. But she was faster. She let him come for her first.

Mistake.

As he told them both, ulwa came for the center, and Califia found herself unable to get out of a defensive stance the moment he charged her.

Their sticks clashed, and she tried everything, spinning, distracting him with backhand flips and lower leg attacks, but all that did was make him lunge for her midsection.

"Lower your arms!" he yelled, coaching her as he moved, "get in here tight…there you go…okay…you got it…don't be afraid to move in closer. You've got the speed girl. Use it!"

She spun and gave high kicks, low kicks, and tried to use his blind spots to get the advantage. She got frustrated.

"Don't quit…come here and get it…come on…" he said.

She could hear the front door bells ring again, and she heard some of her young Saturday students filtering in the studio, but she kept her eyes on N'Jobu. She was making progress, getting a little closer to his center until finally, she slid up close enough to tap her sticks on his thighs. He swiped her sticks away, but she spun on him and aimed her sticks under his throat.

"Gotcha!" she said with a smirk on her face.

"That's my girl!" he said and picked her up, lavishing her cheeks with kisses. She found herself laughing and so thrilled to have finally gotten that close to him in battle. When he put her down, she heard her students saying "Ooh, Miss Califia!"

Turning around, she saw all twelve of her little ones sitting around the room watching them. The girls and boys ranged in age from five to twelve. Two different mothers of her younger ones sat on
chairs by the front door watching her with gossipy eyes and also checking out N'Jobu.

"That's her boyfriend," Bakari teased, getting his berimbau ready.

"Do you mind if I stay and watch?" N'Jobu asked.

"Be my guest. Class runs an hour and fifteen minutes. Then we give the students snacks. The older kids get here after that."

"I'll hang out then," he said.

Califia went to the sound system locked inside a wooden case and turned on the warm-up music. She always started her charges with a quick twenty minute warm-up and stretching session. The music was mellow R&B. She grabbed her water bottle and chugged down the whole thing.

"Alright little ones, let's get to it," she said.

All the children scrambled up on their feet and spread out behind her.

She glanced over at N'Jobu who had put his hoodie back on. Looking at his face she felt at ease once more.

They were going to be okay.

###

N'Jobu watched Califia work with her young charges. They were so adorable trying to do the swaying and various leg moves. She was so patient with them, especially the youngest one who was still mastering basic balance.

She played a game with them called dragon tails at the end, where two children stood in the middle of a circle with a bandanna hanging out of their pocket and they each had to try and snatch away the bandanna from their opponent. The other children sat cross-legged around them and would try to snatch the bandanna of either player, seeking a chance to step into the circle. It was fun to watch, and the children got so excited playing it.

"Come try, N'Jobu," Califia said, waving a bandanna at him.

He stepped into the circle and attached the bandanna inside the waistband of his sweats. His opponent was a little boy of seven who was eager to challenge an adult. The moment Califia gave the signal to start, N'Jobu already lost when he felt his bandanna get snatched by a five-year-old girl. N'Jobu gave her the most shocked expression he could muster, and the little girl burst into giggles waving the bandanna at him.

N'Jobu really saw Califia's teaching talent when the older kids came in, surly teenagers, mainly boys who weren't novices to the art, but thought they were very good when they weren't. Califia had a way of putting them in their place and re-focused their surliness into strategic moves. They respected her, and N'Jobu knew for sure one had a big crush on her and it was awkward to watch a gangly teen trying to mack so hard on his girlfriend when she was way out of his league and age-range. Bast bless him for having the audacity to dream big.

When her teaching block was over, she walked out with N'Jobu. Bakari had to stay longer to help teach an adult class.

"That was fun to watch," N'Jobu said.
"They're good kids," she said.

He held her hand as he walked her to her bike.

"I got a call from my brother. My sister-in-law is in labor. My nephew is on his way!"

"How exciting!"

"I know. It's my parent's first grandchild, and they are thrilled."

"Uncle N'Jobu!" she said.

"Hey, I have prepared my spicy plantains and rice you like," he said.

"Yummy!" she said.

She raised up and kissed him on his lips.

"Thank you!"

"You are very welcome," he said.

"Can we re-schedule Dr. Davis this week?" she asked.

"Why?"

"Soleil's parents are coming out to visit and they are doing brunch that day and I want to go with them."

"No problem. I'll call Dr. Davis. Do you want later next week or the following week?"

"The following."

"I'll take care of it."

She was looking at him funny.

"What?"

"Nothing. I can't just look at you?"

"You can, but the look you're giving is weird."

"No, it's not!" she said jabbing his arm.

"I'm telling Dr. Davis!" he joked.

She jabbed him again, and when he pretended to be hurt, she kissed him.

He held her close and let her use her tongue to explore his mouth. He rubbed her lower back and she let her tongue surge more forcefully around his and he gave into her. She was taking him away.

When she released his lips, he couldn't even think straight.

"I have to run some errands, so I'll be home later. Maybe we can continue this when I get back?" she said.
Her breathing was a bit erratic and she had that look on her face. That look of wanting to do more than just kiss.

"Whatever you want," he said.

"I want you," she said pressing her forehead against his. He closed his eyes, fighting off a groan. He gave a deep sigh instead.

"We'll take it slow," he said.

She nodded.

"Are you sure that's what you want, Califia? I can wait."

"We can do more," she said.

"At your pace, baby. Okay?"

She nodded and kissed him again. He held on to her bottom lip a little longer with his lips. His mouth soon found its way to her neck.

"Hmmm, my spot, baby…my spot…" she crooned in his ear.

He pulled away from her.

"Go run your errands. I'll see you later," he said.

He watched her strap on her helmet and take off on her bike.

###

Califia texted him and said she would be back a little later, and that she had gotten caught up with her grandmother working on a project. He told her to take her time, and if it got too late, she should just spend the night there. N'Jobu placed the rice and plantains in the fridge and started reading a book for class. There was no word from his family yet about Bathandwa and T'Challa. Babies always took their sweet time coming into the world.

He watched a little tv and played a few video games.

He was dozing off when the hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. He leaped up from the couch. A low-frequency vibration.

Only one thing gave him that kind of feeling.

N'Jobu ran out to his balcony and looked up into the sky. He couldn't see anything up there, but he felt it. And it scared him.

His kimoyo beads lit up with his father's signature.

"Baba!"

His father's image shimmered above his wrist.

"My son," his father said.

N'Jobu could hear his mother wailing in the background.
"Baba, what's wrong?"

His father couldn't even speak, his face was filled with so much anguish. His mother came into view, her eyes wet and wild-looking.

"N'Jobu! N'Jobu! We lost her! We lost her!"

His mother collapsed in his father's arms.
Keep Tryin'

Chapter Summary

N'Jobu goes home to face a family tragedy. Califia fears the end is very near.

Chapter Notes

Hi all!
I'm back at work, so it looks like Fridays/Saturdays will have to be my update days.

Decided to make the last few chapters longer, which means there will be a 4th book in the series. I realize now I want to see Califia, N'Jobu, and Erik together a little longer before we break off into Eriklandia. Which simply means I can't let these two go. #SorryNotSorry Plus I need the extra book to go into the complications of Klaue and the transition of N'Jobu defying his trifling brother. Lol.

Off to write the next update. If I get lucky this weekend, I may be able to get something up Sunday or Monday night.

Thanks for reading!

You've been
Missin'
Out on all the chances you've been given
Is it something
Within
Holding you back instead of living

Your day is coming though it seems far
Things will be clear when you love who you are
Nothin' can stop you as long as you listen to your heart

Lift your head to the sky
And keep tryin'
Believe in you
And it will take you higher…

Groove Theory – "Keep Tryin'"

N'Jobu couldn't breathe.

His father was telling him the unthinkable.

"Where is T'Chaka?"

"N'Jobu—"
"Baba, where is he?"

"He is in his quarters."

"And the baby? T'Challa, is he…?"

"Bast has blessed us with his life."

"I don't understand. How can she be dead?"

Dear sweet Bathwandwa, who waited her whole life to have this child with his brother. His loving sister who he had just sung to before his return to the States. How could she die giving birth?

"My son, we have sent the Royal Scorpion Fighter to bring you home. It should be there by now."

"I feel it outside, Baba."

"Come home. Your family needs you."

"I will, Baba."

Their communication ended, N’Jobu didn’t bother to pack anything. He changed into a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt with his sneakers. Grabbing his cell phone, he called Califia.

"Hey," she said.

"I have to go home—"

"What? Did the baby come?"

"My sister-in-law…she didn't make it. She died while having the baby."

"Oh my God, N’Jobu! Wait…let me take you to the airport—"

"No, you stay with your grandmother. I'll get a ride to the airport. I don't know how long I'll be gone…a week maybe…I'll call you when I get there. I just got the call, my brother—"

"You don't have to explain. Just go, okay? Call me when you can. I'm so sorry, N’Jobu…"

N’Jobu felt his body shaking. He wished she was there with him, or that he could take her. He drew in a deep inhale, and when he exhaled he tried to think of all the tips he learned from Dr. Davis on how to bring down high stress. Breathing deep was the main one. Breathe deep and focus on one positive thing.

He thought of Califia’s face, the look she had earlier when she was able to beat him with the stick fighting. The joy on her face when he picked her up and kissed her cheeks. Her joy. He concentrated on that and then he was able to bring down his heart rate. He was able to stop the shaking.

"N’Jobu?"

"Yes?"

"I'll pray for your family. Please give them my condolences, especially your brother. This is so awful, baby. I'm so sorry."

"Keep up with your practice and don't forget to get your paper done before Friday. You know how
you procrastinate when I'm not looking at you—"

"Don't worry about me. Go to your family. I love you, and be safe."

"Tell me that again," he said, his voice finally cracking, his chest heaving.

"I'm coming over there—"

"No, don't. It's late. Just...I need to hear you say that to me again, please."

"I love you...so much. I'd give you a giant hug and kiss if I were there right now."

He closed his eyes and let his cell hang by his cheek. She was his touchstone. He needed her strength more than ever. He moved the phone back up to his ear.

"I'm heading out now. I can catch a red-eye. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Be there for your family. I'm not going anywhere. Hear me?"

"Yes."

"Talk soon, yeah?"

"Yes."

When he finally let her go, he felt that he was able to walk out onto the balcony with a clear head. He felt the multi-spectral camouflage shield surround him, and once he was encapsulated within it, he was able to see the Royal Scorpion Fighter hovering above his apartment, and the entrance ramp waiting for him on the edge of the balcony itself. A young lieutenant was standing at the entrance. When the young man saw N'Jobu's face, he bowed his head.

"A comfort for your loss, your Highness. We all mourn with you."

N'Jobu nodded. Inside the Royal Scorpion, three officers from the Special Forces Unit bowed to him. N'Jobu threw himself on the wide passenger couch and wept quietly like he was a child again.

###

It was night when he arrived at the palace. His father and council elder Kholiwe met him at the Grand Entrance after he departed from the Royal Scorpion Fighter.

He hugged his father long and hard. The older King's eyes were red, and the bags under his eyes were heavy. There was no sleep for this family. Not tonight.

"This will be one of your brother's greatest challenges, N'Jobu. Besides Bathwandwa, you are his light, my son. He is inconsolable. Your mother is with the baby," King Azzuri said.

"Can I see Bathwandwa first, Baba?"

"Son, you don't want to do that right now—"

"I need to see her. Baba, please."

Kholiwe leaned on her ornate cane.

"Come this way, your Highness," she said. N'Jobu held the older woman's arm as she led him inside
and down a long corridor into a North wing where they were joined by Ometeko and Yejide. They took an elevator up several floors to the sunroom, one of Bathwandwa's favorite places.

Kholiwe sat on a divan that was sitting near the entrance. King Azzuri sat next to Kholiwe.

"We will wait for you here," his father said.

"No need. I will go up to see Umama and T'Chaka when I am done," N'Jobu said.

Ometeko and Yejide placed themselves in front of the entrance.

When his father and Kholiwe left, N'Jobu braced himself and walked into the room.

Bathwandwa was laid to rest out in the open, not inside a casket, but lying on a bed of soft blue flower petals. She was wearing the lovely dress that she wore for T'Chaka's coronation. Her hair was braided and twisted into a soft bun on top of her head with loose strands draping her shoulders.

A deep slumber. That's how she looked. She was simply taking a short nap to rest before feeding her baby. N'Jobu stepped closer and when his hips hit the table she was on, he touched her hand. Cold. Winter cold. Her puffy round belly was gone, her hands crossed over her stomach as if she had never carried a child for nine months.

"Bathwandwa..." he whispered.

His shoulders shook a little and then he was laying his face on her hands, kissing her fingers.

"How is our T'Chaka going to live without you, Sister?" he whispered, "We will take good care of T'Challa. No need for you to worry."

"Baby Brother—"

N'Jobu turned his head and saw T'Chaka in pale mourning robes.

N'Jobu stood up and both brothers raced toward each other, their embrace a thunderous clap in the room.

"She is gone. She left us. What am I to do? I cannot live without her. How am I supposed to live?" T'Chaka cried into N'Jobu's ear.

"You have to live for your son. And you have to live for our people." N'Jobu said, pulling his brother away from him and staring him directly in his face.

"You shall weep and gnash your teeth, but you will not wallow in pity. Bathwandwa expects her man to be the King she knows he can be, and also the father she expects for her son."

T'Chaka's face was wet from continuous tears, but he was shaking his head. N'Jobu knew his brother could spiral into despair easily, he did so a lot when they were growing up. The best way to snap him out of staying down for too long was to remind him of his calling. He could cry, weep and moan for days and years to come, but he still had to raise a child and hold up a nation.

"I am so glad you are here," T'Chaka said, his tears slowing down, "this has been hell. This has been hell."

N'Jobu hugged him again, and then they both turned to look back at Bathwandwa.

"Look at my beautiful wife. My Queen. The mother of my son. Bast has not been kind to me."
"What happened?" N'Jobu finally asked.

"They tell me she hemorrhaged. They were unable to catch it in time after T'Challa came out. I was holding her hand and she slipped away from me."

"I am sorry, Brother."

"She loved you so much, N'Jobu. She said you were her favorite royal because you did not take yourself so seriously. When her labor started, she said she could not wait for you to see how regular T'Challa's head was going to be. She could not wait to tease you about your own children someday."

"Silly girl. I bet his head is big, isn't it?" N'Jobu teased. T'Chaka burst out laughing and then his tears flowed again. He looked down at his wife.

"My love, I am going to show this scoundrel our beautiful child."

T'Chaka's tears rolled off of him and landed on Bathwandwa's dress.

"I feel so lost!"

N'Jobu threw his arm around his brother's shoulder.

"She is still with us. In our hearts. Come, introduce me to my nephew. Let her rest for now. We can come back later. Yes?"

T'Chaka wiped his face and leaned into N'Jobu.

N'Jobu guided his brother out of the sunroom.

Ometeko and Yejide followed a polite distance behind them.

###

His Umama, Queen Mother Niyilolawa, sat in a richly brocaded rocking chair. Her royal robes were a rich saffron, her favorite color. It brightened up the room in such a gloomy time. In her arms she cuddled a tiny body wrapped in yellow swaddling cloth, a little brown bald head peeked out. His mother pulled a bottle from T'Challa's mouth and handed it to one of her two attendants standing nearby.

"N'Jobu, come see him," she said holding out her hand. He clasped his mother's fingers in his own and got down on one knee. He kissed her cheek. Her face looked weary, the whites of her eyes pink from crying, but she gave him the warmest smile.

"He is perfect. Here. T'Challa, look...it is your Uncle N'Jobu."

T'Challa's tiny brown fists pumped in the air, and N'Jobu was a bit nervous handling something so small. He stood up with the baby in his hands. He pressed him closer to his chest supporting the newborn's neck. T'Challa's eyes were closed, but his small lips were wide open and making sucking motions. He squirmed in N'Jobu's arms until his Uncle spoke to him.

"Hello there, Nephew. We meet again. This time outside. What a way to come into the world, eh little one? You will have so much love around you. I promise."

N'Jobu stuck his nose close to T'Challa's face.

"He has that sweet baby smell, Umama."
His mother beamed. He was pleased to see a proud smile on her face.

N'Jobu walked around the nursery room a bit with T'Challa, rocking him gently. T'Chaka moved to stand next to him.

"Mother Moon comes down from the heavens to see the new little one…"

N'Jobu's singing voice was sweet-sounding in the room. The acoustics were good. His mother clutched at her chest, and her eyes welled up, but N'Jobu smiled at her and kept singing to T'Challa.

T'Chaka leaned in, his shoulder touching N'Jobu's as he joined in with the singing, his voice strong and clear.

T'Challa's balled up fists relaxed and his tiny eyes opened up. His mouth still gaped open and closed like a fish out of water, but his hazy eyes tried to focus on where the voices were coming from.

"Lullaby, little one, the world is at your feet…"

They only sang a few stanzas before their mother rose from the rocker and took the baby from them.

"Go rest, both of you. We will take care of T'Challa," she said.

N'Jobu kissed her forehead, and T'Chaka kissed her cheek, and they both walked out of the nursery. N'Jobu held his brother's hand as they made their way towards their respective suites. When N'Jobu was frightened as a child, he used to clasp his brother's hand, and T'Chaka would guide him to check that there were no monsters in his closet or strange beings under his bed. It would calm his fears about what could be up ahead of them in the dark spooky corners of the palace. Holding T'Chaka's hand now, it was he, N'Jobu, who would chase away the scary things that frightened T'Chaka.

"Thank you for getting here so quickly," T'Chaka said.

"Luckily the Scorpion had reconnaissance flights not too far from me."

They made their way to a private elevator that would take T'Chaka to his new King's Quarters.

"She was my everything."

"I know."

N'Jobu could feel his brother struggling. He was a wreck.

N'Jobu focused on being a mountain for his brother. A solid large rock that could block winds, wild animals, raiders, and all things that could tear him down. Bathwandwa said that is what he was to T'Chaka. His father said that he was his brother's light. N'Jobu had to do whatever it took to heal his family and protect his nephew. His poor motherless nephew.

"I will see you in the morning," N'Jobu said.

T'Chaka looked as if he was struggling to find words to say, but N'Jobu waved him off.

"Go rest. We will talk tomorrow. Your son needs you at your best. Bathwandwa needs you at your best."

T'Chaka nodded and stepped into his elevator.

When the doors closed, N'Jobu felt his shoulders slump. He would have to bear the weight of the
entire family. He could feel that already.

###

It was the small things that N'Jobu noticed first.

T'Chaka stopped taking his meals with the family. All food was brought to his quarters. When N'Jobu did run into his brother in various rooms, T'Chaka stunk of wine or plum liquor.

Less time was spent holding T'Challa or even being in the same room with him.

N'Jobu gave his brother as much space as he could, but when he found himself entertaining Bathwandwa's parents and sisters in the South wing with T'Challa, he felt that his sister-in-law's family were upset with his brother. Bathwandwa's mother tried to infer that perhaps their family should care for T'Challa, or at least one of Bathwandwa's unmarried sisters should move into the palace and become the child's nanny.

Always the dutiful brother and ever protective of the Udaku reputation, N'Jobu softened the hard eyes that Bathwandwa's family were giving his own. They wanted to stay in the palace with T'Challa for at least a year. T'Chaka gave them two months and a firm deadline to be away from all interference. They could visit often, but they would not be granted unlimited access to the young Prince. T'Challa was to be raised as an Udaku.

"My sister should have held out and married you instead," said Osefa, Bathwandwa's middle sister as she watched N'Jobu cuddle his nephew.

"Osefa!" Bathwandwa's father lowered his eyes when he yelled at his middle daughter.

"Baba, Osefa can speak freely in front of me," N'Jobu said.

Bathwandwa's father had a satisfied smile on his face when N'Jobu called him Baba. N'Jobu addressed both of Bathwandwa's parents using an informal tongue that made them feel like real family.

Osefa's face perked up when N'Jobu said her name.

"Forgive her poor choice of words, Prince N'Jobu," Bathwandwa's mother, Amma said.

"Since you have proclaimed that I can speak freely, Prince N'Jobu, why has your brother not come to visit with us? My sister gave up her life for your family's next heir, and yet only you and your parents have spent time with us. Why is that?" Osefa said.

"His pain runs deep—"

"No deeper than ours," Osefa said.

Amma stood up from her seat and she hissed Osefa's name under her breath. Osefa stormed out of the quarters.

"Please, forgive her your Highness. Her disrespect toward you is unforgiveable—"

"No need to ask for forgiveness. I will go speak to her."

N'Jobu handed T'Challa to Amma. Two royal attendants and Yejide were with them to keep an eye on how T'Challa was treated. These people may be related to the Udaku's by marriage and the blood
that ran in T'Challa's veins, but N'Jobu's Umama was not above having safety nets in place to protect a future King.

N'Jobu sauntered out of the guest quarters in search of Osefa. He found her huddled against a large glass window overlooking a small corner of Birnin Zana.

"Osefa," he said, touching her shoulder.

"Your brother blames T'Challa for my sister's death."

"Don't say that."

"I know you have seen how he acts. I have seen your face watching him too. Why else would he distance himself?"

It was true. N'Jobu couldn't deny his concerns. He saw with his own eyes too. But N'Jobu wanted to believe that it was just the sorrow and shock that had T'Chaka becoming something unknowable right before everyone's eyes.

"He will get better. After he works through his grief, he will never leave T'Challa's side," N'Jobu said.

Osefa stared at him like he had two heads.

"You really believe that rhino shit you are trying to feed me, your Highness? You are the one who never leaves that child's side. Would you like to wager a bet that T'Challa calls you Baba first?"

"Watch your mouth, Osefa," he said.

"I am no longer free, I see," she said, "See you around the palace, Baba," she sneered, leaving him by the window.

###

N'Jobu sat in the royal motorcade as they made their way to the national memorial for Bathwandwa's internment. Her body lay in state inside the East palace for all the public to come to pay their respects before they left to take her to Necropolis City where she would be entombed among previous Queens and Kings. In all the major cities on public jumbotrons, they played tributes to the young Queen. A popular vid was N'Jobu and his friends singing to her at the coronation. The nation seemed to have that on loop.

Although he was in mourning, N'Jobu was also agitated. T'Chaka was still being selfish and closed off from the family. It was like he expected his poor dead wife to be the only caregiver of his child. All official palace duties had been suspended, and T'Chaka was free to do nothing but be with his son. Instead, he stayed holed up in his quarters drinking. Any tears he had left for Bathwandwa were already spent.

The Queen Mother stepped in to oversee T'Challa's well-being, but it bugged the hell out of N'Jobu that his brother didn't seem grateful for their mother's support. Their father did attempt to convince T'Chaka to be more present in his son's life, but his talks were ignored. Mourning was one thing, but neglecting your baby?

Now N'Jobu sat in the royal motorcade seething. This was not the type of behavior he would've displayed. If he had a wife...shit, if Califia were his wife and this happened to her, he would have their child wrapped around his side at all times, making sure his baby knew that he or she was loved.
by their father. King or no King, T'Chaka needed to nurture his own child. Not the royal attendants or servants who worked in the palace. A man could grieve and love their son at the same time.

The Queen Mother held the baby in her arms as she sat next to Baba and N'Jobu. T'Chaka wanted to use the Royal Talon Fighter to take them all to the final destination, but Umama insisted that they drive Bathwandwa through the city so her people could say farewell to her in person. At that very moment, he could see citizens taking pictures of the hearse car in front of them and crying over her. Some were waving at their car because they knew the newborn Prince was inside. Many were wearing some form of blue which was Bathwandwa's favorite color. Their people deserved to see her. It would be a long drive, but it was worth bringing the country together.

When they finally reached the cut-off point, where the citizens could no longer follow in person but could watch on the global or on vid, N'Jobu began to feel the true magnitude of the moment.

The public viewing was difficult for him. To see Bathwandwa lying on open display made him feel ill, but he knew the citizens loved her and wanted to pay their respects to her and the family.

The royal family agreed to keep T'Challa out of the limelight for a few weeks. No official pictures or sightings of him were allowed in any capacity.

N'Jobu glanced over at his mother. She was rubbing T'Challa's back as she held him against her chest.

"Umama, give him to me," N'Jobu said.

His mother handed over T'Challa and tried to straighten out his little blue jumper and matching cap.

"I have it, Umama," he said fixing T'Challa's clothes.

His parents had been silent for most of the ride. T'Chaka chose to fly ahead of them all, while the rest of the Udaku clan and Bathwandwa's family rode in the motorcade.

Upon arriving at the family tombs, an attendant approached N'Jobu to take the baby.

"I have him," N'Jobu said.

N'Jobu could see T'Chaka waiting for the family at the top of the steps that led to Bathwandwa's final resting place. Walking up the steps, N'Jobu stood next to his brother.

"Would you like to hold him?" N'Jobu asked.

T'Chaka took the baby, and N'Jobu felt pleased. But the feeling lasted the few minutes it took for T'Chaka to hand off the child to an attendant that stood behind him. N'Jobu said nothing in response and waited for his parents to meet them at the top with the rest of the family.

###

It had been ten long days.

N'Jobu kept up with his studies online and spoke to Califia every day. He watched her model her cap and gown for him. She also asked him if he would go visit her Dad with her, and he agreed. Her mid-term grades had been stellar, and she went out to party with Rolita and Soliel. She shared pictures of their night out.

One evening she began to ask him questions about the erotic book of Wakandan poems.
"Okay, so there's this one passage that I don't understand. I need you to clarify for me," she said as he watched her on face chat.

"Give it to me," he said.

She was sitting on their bed wearing one of his sweatshirts, a glass of wine in her hand.

"Don't spill any of that on the duvet," he said.

"I'm not going to spill anything on the blanket."

"It's a duvet—"

"Shut up, no one cares…now listen to me…"

She was tipsy and cute at the same time. His nightly convos with her had saved him while he was in Birnin Zana.

"How much did you drink before you logged on?"

"I had one glass…two glasses…you know what, it doesn't matter, I'm grown, nigga! I'm grown!" she said toasting her glass to him.

"What's your question silly girl?"

"What are…." She held up the book and flipped the page.

"Calafia, watch the wine—"

"Here it is. What are the 'ring and seed of the beloved'? Okay, your eyebrow just went up. Is that some freak nasty Wakanda shit? Do tell Black man, do tell."

N'Jobu reached for his own glass of wine and took a few sips.

"Okay. Listen closely—"

"Watchu think I've been doing? I'm sitting here waiting on you.""

"Stop talking, then. Okay, a lot of societies have piercings as part of their culture, right?"

"Yeah."

"Well in Wakanda we have all sorts of piercing and augmentations. As part of the tradition, the royal couples or nobles would get piercings on their private parts as a testament of their love. A way of marking themselves as taken."

"Like the beads."

"Well, the beads can be given between unmarried lovers of any status, but the piercings were considered marks for the married upper echelon. A woman would get a specially designed clit piercing that matched her husbands."

"So y'all doing that Prince Albert cock ring shit, where it goes through the head…oh my God that shit looks like it hurts so bad!"

"The women get the clit ring, but the men get a small flat jewel inserted at the base of the penis. It's
no bigger than an apple seed. The two become the beloved when the man inserts his penis in the woman, and the piercings kind of meet up when the couple makes love in the missionary position…"

Califia had gotten very quiet when she was listening to him talk.

"So only the upper crust gets those piercings?"

"Yes. Nowadays layman get them for fashion and being trendy, but for the as you say, the upper crust, there are special versions made just for them."

"Will you get one?"

"Eventually."

"But it's just for your wife, right?"

Her face looked so expectant. He still hated talking about stuff like that with her. It just reminded him of their expiration date in the future. He wanted to change the topic.

"I think that's cool. The poem makes more sense now. I bet it looks really pretty to see the jewels meet up."

She drank her wine. He drank his.

"How is the baby?"

N'Jobu's face perked up and he held up his cell phone. He had taken so many pictures of T'Challa that he had to create a separate file to contain all the photos.

"Oh! He's starting to have a face now!" she said.

They both laughed.

"You know newborns always looked like dried apples, their faces all scrunched up. He looks like a little person now. Like a little Black Charlie Brown with those little sprigs of hair! He's so cute. Is your brother doing better?"

"No. Not really."

"Is he at least spending more time with T'Challa?"

"The way my brother ignores him, T'Challa probably thinks I'm his father now."

"Give him time N'Jobu. He's probably paralyzed in his grief. Probably can't even think straight."

"But that's his baby. How hard is it just to hold your son? Kiss him? Sing to him? Let him know that you are there for him? It doesn't make sense to me."

"Everyone reacts their own way to death and loss, N'Jobu. Give him some slack. You are doing the best thing for him right now. Being that father figure for T'Challa until his father is strong enough to take over. It'll work out."

"I hope you are right. My mother has not had a single night of rest because she is handling most of T'Challa's care when I'm not doing it."

"You are a compassionate man and a good brother."
"I don't know what is to become of my family once I leave. I hope they can hold it together."

"They will."

"I'm ready to come home to you."

"I'm ready for you to return…"

She lifted up his large sweatshirt so he could see his beads back on her waist. Her white cotton panties were sheer. She slid two fingers down onto her mound then scissored her clit with them through the panties.

"Maybe I should get a clit ring," she said. The tips of her two fingers rotated around the nub that was now visibly swollen. N'Jobu's hands went to his thighs where he just rested them there. He could feel his breath quicken. He let her control the situation.

"Would you like that, N'Jobu? Put your ring on me here?"

She started patting her clit. His hands balled into fists, but he just kept watching her. For three months they hadn't had sex of any kind. He hadn't seen her pussy in so long he forgot how pretty it was, even hidden behind sheer white panties. He could see a stain on the crotch now. She was wet. She dragged her two fingers up and down spreading the moisture, then slid them down inside the front of her panties.

"I want you to come home and eat my pussy, N'Jobu," she whispered, opening her thighs wide, her fingers working her slit. He saw her fingers sink deep inside of herself.

"Califia…" he finally groaned out, "my dick is so hard right now."

Her eyes drifted down to his lap.

"I don't see anything," she said.

He pushed back from his desk in his chair. He could carve his name in stone with his dick if he had to in that state.

"Damn, I forgot how big you are, baby."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Watch me play with my pussy," she said.

"Okay."

"I want you to stroke yourself, but you can't cum—"

"I won't be able to do that. I feel like I'm ready to bust now—"

"Don't you want to see me happy?"

"I do but—"

"But what?"

"It's been so long. I could probably get two good strokes in before I'm done."
She laughed.

"Hold on a minute…" he said, dashing to his bathroom. He grabbed his cock rings and went back to his chair. He lowered his lounge pants and put on his silver glans ring and a thicker red band that cinched his balls.

"Oh shit, you use cock rings?"

He smiled at her.

"You are full of surprises," she said, her eyes filled with intense excitement from looking at him.

"How come you never used those here?"

He shrugged.

"I play with them on occasion."

"Bring those back when you come home," she said.

"I will," he said.

"They look so pretty on you, baby…making that thick dick so pretty…"

Her head fell back and her fingers were going to town inside her panties.

"N'Jobu, it's been too long…it's been too long…stroke your dick for me…please."

He gripped his dick in his hand by the base and just stood it up. Her lips slid open as she stared at his cock. The glans ring making the head extra fat. He stroked himself once.

"Oohhh…" Califia groaned.

"Califia, can I be with you when I come home?"

He stroked himself again, and her eyes closed, her fingers a feverish blur inside her panties.

"Can I get inside you again, baby?" he asked.

"Yes," she gasped, opening her eyes staring at his cock.

A bit of pre-cum slid out of him, he pushed open the slit in his tip and showed it to her. She was moaning.

"I'll do whatever you want me to," he said, "you just tell me what you want."

"I want to sit on your dick," she panted.

That caught him off guard and he found his own voice becoming a low growl.

"You want to sit on my dick?"

"Yes! I want to sit on Daddy's dick!"

Well, damn. She was already calling him Daddy again.

She lifted up from the bed so that she was sitting up. She slid her panties down to her knees, then
rested on one arm as her other hand worked her clit.

"I can't wait for you to come home baby…"

Her voice was straining. N'Jobu started working his shaft, his eyes glued to her pussy.

"Cum in my pussy…I need you in here…deep…oh shit…!"

"That's a good girl," he said working his swollen head, and then he was coating his own fingers with long thick spurts.

"Jobu..." she whimpered, and collapsed on his bed, her legs tangled up in her panties, giggling like crazy.

He looked down at his lap.

"Look at the mess you made, girl."

She sat up and stared at him through the screen.

"Get home so I can clean you up."

"Soon, girl. Soon," he said.

###

N'Jobu rose early enough to have the royal gardens to himself as he made his morning run. Shirtless and in long shorts, he made good time through his mother's prized African Violets and sage. He needed to sweat out the stress his brother was putting him under.

After Bathwandwa was laid to rest, T'Chaka informed N'Jobu that he would have to return home sooner than N'Jobu wanted. N'Jobu argued that his studies were important, and T'Chaka conceded that he could finish out the term and see how much he could complete in the summer. N'Jobu tried to hide his rising temper, but his parents argued in favor of the return too. They wanted him finishing military duty and marrying Zinzi right away.

The sun beat down his back, and his lungs felt on fire as he ran hard, stretching his leg muscles, breathing in the rich aroma of flowers and fruit trees.

When he was through running he dressed quickly and had a chauffeured car drive him to a piercing specialist that only catered to royal bloodlines and nobles.

An older woman with hypnotic light brown eyes greeted him through a private entrance. N'Jobu's Doras waited for him outside. The woman, Sade, escorted him to a viewing room where she laid out various body rings on a black velvet cloth. He wanted a silver half ring with emerald stones on the ends. The rich green looked amazing on Califia's skin whenever she wore it as clothing. He thought it would look good as a seed jewel on his skin too. He wasn't looking forward to getting pierced, but the process was quick and healed fast. It was probably a stupid idea, but N'Jobu thought at the spur of the moment that if he and Califia were pierced, they could somehow still be together even if they were separated for the rest of their lives. The expression on her face when he explained what the ring and seed meant from the erotic poem appeared to intrigue her. Maybe she would be open to getting the ring. If she didn't want to, he was going to still keep his.

"See any that you fancy, your Highness?" Sade asked. She pulled out more choices.

"Do you have greens more vivid than this?"
Sade nodded, and when she pulled out another selection, he saw one that was blended with a vibranium base. This was the one. He selected three of varying sizes. He knew Califia's body very well, but he had to make sure he had the right fit as he had to consider swelling after a piercing.

"This way, your Highness," Sade said, guiding him to another room where he would be having his jewel inserted into his penis.

Sade didn't bat an eye when he lowered his pants. She showed him the areas where she could place the jewel. He tended to go deep when he was inside Califia, so he showed Sade where his jewel should go.

She cleaned him, coated him with a greenish liquid that would prevent infection, and when she lifted up his flaccid penis in her gloved hand, he started laughing.

"I am sorry, Sade. But you are so calm and cool when you do this. You must see all types of bodies in here."

"I have been doing this for a long time and nothing surprises me when people sit on my table. I will say that you are blessed, your Highness."

N'Jobu nearly fell out from laughing even harder. Sade just smiled.

"I will begin now, your Highness. Be still, please."

It didn't hurt as much as he thought, the cut and insertion were done quickly. Sade attached a small device over the jewel that heated up, speeding up the healing process. When she was done, he stood in front of a mirror and looked at it. It was striking to look at against his rich skin color.

"Will your beloved be coming in soon to get herself done?"

"I'm going to take the rings and show them to her first, in case she wants to change it," he said, not making eye contact. She wrapped up the rings in a satin bag and handed them to him.

"Thank you, Sade."

"Your Highness, I am so very sorry about the Queen. She was a lovely woman. I give you comfort for your loss. All of Wakanda will miss her."

"Thank you, Sade."

"Is the young Prince well?"

"He is doing very well, thank you."

He saw Sade's eyes well up.

"With the country's love and support, we will get through this. Don't worry, Sade."

She nodded and wiped her eyes.

Once N'Jobu was back in the royal car and heading back to the palace, he took out his cell and sent Califia a text message.

"I may have done something really cool or very foolish, but promise me you will have an open mind when I get home."
He put away his cell and stared out of the window.

"Kofi, could you just drive around the city for a bit? I'd like to see the streets," N'Jobu said.

Ometeko and Yejide said nothing and rode quietly with him, Yejide in the front seat, and Ometeko on his right.

For ninety minutes he did nothing but watch Birnin Zana go past him.

###

Despite the pain of losing Bathwandwa, despite the uncertainty of his life in the states and how much time he had left with Califia, it would be T'Challa's sweet baby smell that calmed N'Jobu down from his worries inside the palace.

N'Jobu carried T'Challa wrapped around his chest as they took a nephew and uncle walk through the royal garden. T'Chaka was meeting with the council of elders, and N'Jobu wanted to spend his last few hours in Wakanda with his nephew.

He watched his mother clip thorns from her hybrid roses.

"You like being in America?" his mother asked.

"I do. I enjoy the people, and I enjoy my studies. I am learning a lot."

His mother stopped cutting thorns and turned to look at him, her large floppy sun hat and gardening gloves making her look less royal and more matronly.

"Why do you want to stay longer? You could finish your courses online here and be back with the family. Look how good you are with, T'Challa. You would be a great help to your brother now."

"Umama, the point of leaving Wakanda is for me to learn how to deal with Americans. If I am to become the great Ambassador you all wish me to be, then I must be around the people I will be working with in the future. Part of that is finishing school in person and not online sitting inside the palace."

"Have you visited with Zinzi since you have been back?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I did not feel like socializing—"

"Socializing? N'Jobu…Zinzi is going to be your wife! Part of the betrothal march is spending time with her, getting to know her, building a stable partnership. You should let her comfort you, allow her to start becoming a part of this family."

N'Jobu cradled T'Challa's head and looked at his nephew's face.

"N'Jobu, are you listening to me?"

"Yes, Umama, I hear you—"

"I said are you listening to me?"
"Yes. Listen, I have to go back inside. T'Challa has soiled himself. I need to change his diaper."

"You are going to spoil T'Challa carrying him around with you all day," his mother said as she lightly touched T'Challa's foot.

"He deserves it," he said.

N'Jobu walked back to his mother's garden shuttle where an attendant drove him back to the palace with the baby.

He cleaned his nephew in the nursery, slathered a cooling salve on T'Challa's little bottom and then took him for a feeding inside the sunroom. Sitting in a nice high-back chair and looking down upon the royal garden, N'Jobu fed T'Challa.

"Bathwandwa, please watch over your baby and T'Chaka. Please watch over me too," he whispered.

His kimoyo beads lit up. Zinzi.

He ignored the call.

When T'Challa was done eating, N'Jobu held him up on his shoulder to burp him, trying to rub the baby's back the way his mother showed him.

When a healthy sound came out of T'Challa's mouth, N'Jobu smiled and called for an attendant to take the baby for his nap. He tapped a kimoyo bead to locate his brother. T'Chaka was in the King's quarters.

A doe-eyed attendant no older than twenty arrived. N'Jobu kissed T'Challa on the cheek and handed him over.

"Be very careful with him," he said.

"Yes, your Highness," she said.

N'Jobu strode out of the sunroom and headed for the elevators. It was time to have a little chat with the King.

###

T'Chaka didn't look too pleased to see N'Jobu.

Wearing a casual lounging robe and slippers, T'Chaka looked like a man of leisure. A shot of plum liquor was in his hand.

"You want one?" he asked looking at N'Jobu with a hint of petulance. Their last meeting together was a bit acrimonious, and at that point, N'Jobu didn't care too much for how T'Chaka was treating him. Like he was a personal pawn to be played as T'Chaka saw fit.

N'Jobu walked over to the private bar sitting in the corner of a wide open living room that faced out upon the city. He poured himself an extra shot of the plum liquor and drank it right away.

"You are leaving soon?"

"Yes," N'Jobu said.

"Your studies await you," T'Chaka said.
"Brother, when I leave here, will you start to care about your son?"

"What are you talking about? I love my son—"

"When was the last time you held him, eh? Changed a diaper? Bathed him?"

"What is your point?"

"What kind of father will you be?"

T'Chaka pointed his index finger at him.

"You do not speak to your King that way—"

"I will speak to my brother any way I see fit!" N'Jobu retorted, his nostrils flaring and his eyes not backing down from the red-hot glare T'Chaka gave him.

T'Chaka stomped over to him, his face mere inches from N'Jobu's, his breath reeking of too much plum liquor.

"From now on you will address me as your King until I say you can come at me as my brother."

N'Jobu cocked his head to the side, a sly smile easing across his face.

"That is how it will be then?" he asked.

"Yes."

N'Jobu nodded his head a bit and pressed his lips together. He gave T'Chaka a cruel smile.

"Then my King, I shall leave you in peace," N'Jobu said, bowing his head and heading toward the door.

"Tick tock, tick tock, Baby Brother. Your time in California will be ending soon…” T'Chaka said sipping on his plum liquor.

N'Jobu slammed the door behind him.

###

The Royal Scorpion Fighter hovered above his apartment building for a few hours as they waited for it to become night. It was easier for N'Jobu to slip out from under the cloak of the multi-spectral camouflage shield in darkness rather than broad daylight. When it was dark enough and quiet enough, N'Jobu slinked away from the ship and walked himself up the stairs to his unit carrying a large box.

The apartment was dark when he entered it. He took off his sneakers and left them by the front door. He placed the box on the couch.

Entering his bedroom, he saw Califia's form under the covers in the bed. Removing his clothes, he eased himself next to her and she woke up.

"N'Jobu?"

Her sleepy voice was a balm to his ears. She reached out for him and he took her hand and kissed it, then eased his head onto her stomach. She rubbed his scalp and her touch broke him.
"It's okay…" she whispered to him.

All the grief and stress and fear flowed out of him as he cried in her arms. The pain he held inside for so long, having to lie to her about his identity, having to see the end of their beginning as a couple so soon on the horizon, having a life that truly wasn't his own. And to now lose his sister-in-law. It was too much. It all came flooding out in ragged sobs with him clutching onto Califia's arms.

"Let it all out, baby. I got you. Release all that shit."

He wanted to escape his responsibilities. He wanted to run away with her.

It felt like hours had passed crying in her arms, but soon he felt spent, and the pain in his chest had subsided enough so that all he did was shudder every now and then. She kept kissing the top of his head and stroking his back. He shifted himself so that his face was pressed against her breasts. She was topless. He couldn't really see her face in the poorly lit room, but he sensed that she knew what he was thinking.

"Go ahead," she whispered, stroking one of her nipples, and he fastened his lips onto it and sucked like he would die without it. His fingers found their way to her other nipple and plucked at it. He heard her breath hitch in her throat. Three months was too long not to taste her. He could feel his dick growing heavy and jutting against her leg.

He used his teeth to graze both her nipples and moved himself up higher so he could grasp her breasts in both his hands, squeezing and fondling their heft. He raised his head up and found her lips with his own and kissed her as he continued playing with her tits.

This was where he was supposed to be. With her.

His lips sucked on her tongue then moved to her neck and the tender places on her shoulder. He felt himself heating up and he didn't want to overwhelm her; they were still healing from a fragile place.

His hands trailed down her body and he felt his beads on her hips. He pulled on them, trying to focus himself, slow down the greedy lust he felt taking over his emotions.

"I need to taste you," he breathed out, circling his thumb around her plump nipple, "Can I eat your pussy, Califia? Please…"

He felt her hands rest on his head and then they were pushing him down. He slid down her body as she widened her legs.

He allowed his nose to graze her clit, and then he was pressing his face against her, breathing in her scent. He flattened his tongue and dragged it up and down her vulva. She had waxed, and he missed the hair down there. She only waxed or shaved to near hairlessness when she was about to perform, and her final spring dance concert was upon her. He missed her pubic hairs tickling his nose and tongue, but he would always eat whatever came out of her panties, so it was not a problem.

Soft sighs emanated above him, so he knew he hadn't lost his touch with her.

He twisted his tongue and circled her clit, using soft and hard licks to nudge the hood. He felt it swell with his ministrations, and he kept at it until she was lifting her legs up higher.

"Bay-bee…" she said.

He moaned so loud when she said that, the lilt in her voice letting him know he was doing it, and doing it well for her. He groaned into her center so she could feel his voice vibrate her tender flesh,
and she whimpered the way he liked her to.

His tongue lapped up the juices that were beginning to flow from her, and he twisted and pinched her nipples with his fingers. Her pants began in earnest and he finally slid his tongue inside of her, gripping her thighs with his fingers. Her hips lifted a bit, and he felt her arching her back. Her fingers found their way to his scalp.

"Shit…" she said pressing on his head harder. His tongue worked her center with gentle thrusts and she wrapped her legs around his neck.

"Damn, boy, you eat pussy so good, oh muh gawd…" she groaned, her words smashing together, barely coherent.

He hummed to vibrate her skin more, and then fixed his lips on her clit, sucking it gently as if it were a succulent fruit to be savored and not gobbled up.

Her pants increased and he felt her raise up onto her elbows.

"Bay-bee, I'm…I'm cumming…"

He kept sucking her gently, keeping the same rhythm as she rocked her hips, her orgasm stealing her voice as her wetness coated his tongue. When she stopped shuddering, he released her and made his way back up her body and held her.

"Damn, N'Jobu…damn baby…" she panted clutching his arms.

He kissed her, sharing her taste, pulling her closer to his body.

"Let me just hold you," he said, listening to her hurried breath, feeling her body still tremble against him.

His brother had lost his wife, the love of his life.

Califia was in his arms, and he knew without any doubt that he would never find a woman like her ever again in his natural born life. She was his great love and he felt so much terror in his heart knowing that he would lose her. Not to death like his brother, but to a life he couldn't have with her.

Lying with her next to him, he vowed once more to do all that he could to make her happy with the months he had left. He was going to live several lifetimes with her in the small window of time still granted to him.

"I love you…" she said as she drifted off to sleep.

"I adore you," he answered back.

It took him a long time to fall asleep. The cobwebs of his fears had him tangled. He was trying not to choke on them while he held his woman in his arms.

###

N'Jobu slept for several hours.

When he woke up, he could hear Califia puttering around the kitchen, and he could smell food cooking. It felt late in the day. The clock on the nightstand read two in the afternoon. He threw on some boxers and sauntered out of the bedroom.

"Hey, look who's among the living," she said, pouring orange juice into a glass. He glanced at the
stove and saw that she was frying up Italian sausage.

"Nothing fancy, just sausage and some brown rice in the cooker. You hungry?"

"Yes," he said plopping himself on a chair.

"My poor baby. You should go back to bed. I'll save you some food."

"I'll eat with you now."

She scooped out rice from the cooker and piled it on a plate, then smothered it with the Italian sausage. The sweet peppers in the sausage made his mouth water. She poured another glass of orange juice.

They ate together, and Califia kept watching his face.

"What's the crazy thing you did?" she asked.

He stopped eating and regarded her with caution.

"Remember when you were asking me about the ring and seed?"

"Yeah?"

"I got pierced."

"Down there?"

"Yes."

"Let me see it!"

She scrambled off her chair and stood in front of him. He rose up from his seat and lowered his boxers.

"Oh, wow. Can I touch it?"

He nodded, and she took her index finger and gently felt it.

"How bad did it hurt?"

"Not too bad. Hey, wait a second…"

He rushed back into the bedroom and came back to the kitchen holding the satin bag that Sade gave him.

"Open it."

She took the bag and pulled out the rings wrapped in delicate pink tissue paper. Her eyes looked at the jewelry, then back up at him.

"If you want…and only if you want to…these are the rings that match my piercing," he said

"You want me to get pierced?"

"It's up to you. If you don't want to, it's cool. You seemed like you enjoyed the story of the ring and the seed when we face chatted. I could get them turned into a necklace if you want…or if you don't want that—"
"I thought…I thought you only got this when you um, y'know…had your wife…"

"I can't imagine getting these unless it was with you. We can't…I have to be with—"

"Don't say it…please…"

"I wish our paths could be different."

She sat back down and so did he. They ate their meal in silence, and N'Jobu helped himself to seconds.

"You really did that for me?" she asked, breaking the solemn mood.

He nodded.

"What does having that on you mean exactly for us?"

"What do you want it to mean?"

"That you're mine, no matter what."

"I will always be yours. Wherever we may end up in life that will always be true."

He took their dishes and washed them.

"There's still enough rice in here for dinner if you want," he said closing the rice cooker back up.

He poured himself another glass of orange juice.

"I brought you something back from Wakanda," he said sipping on his drink.

"Where is it?"

"In a box on the couch."

Califia jumped up and ran into the living room.

"N'Jobu!"

He walked into the living room.

She held up an exquisite Border Tribe blanket.

"This is gorgeous!"

She wrapped it around herself, the vivid blues and aquamarine accents highlighting the ancient silver and vibranium blue symbols that decorated the cloth.

"I love it. Thank you!" she said. She kissed him and he watched her twirl around with it.

"It's so warm!"

"There's more in the box," he said.

She folded the thick blanket carefully and sat it on the couch. She pulled out a thin-strapped saffron nightgown that matched his lounging robes, and also a richly textured sapphire-colored silk robe.
"Think of them as early graduation presents," he said, feeling thrilled that she liked them all so much.

She walked up to him and hugged him tightly. He kissed her forehead. He wanted to give her more, but she seemed pleased with what he gave her. She held up the silk bag with the rings.

"Let's go do the piercing now," she said, staring up into his face.

"Right now?"

"Yeah. You already missed your classes for the day, and I'm free. Let's go do it. We can go to the place where I got my nose done years ago."

"You're serious? You really want to do this?" He couldn't hide the excitement in his voice.

"I want it."

"Okay. Okay," he said going for his car keys.

###

"You don't have a woman back there who can do this?"

Califia watched N'Jobu hound Paul, the piercer who did her nose back in the day.

Paul sat behind his counter with Califia's rings in his hand.

"N'Jobu, Paul is the best. Do you want to come in and watch him do it? A woman did yours, what's the big deal?"

N'Jobu backed down when Paul started laughing at him.

"Give me some time to sterilize these, and you can come on back with us," Paul said.

Califia watched N'Jobu's face and he seemed to find coming to the back room with her acceptable.

"I'll get these fixed up, and when we get you on the table we can figure out which size will fit you best."

"Cool," Califia said grabbing N'Jobu's hand and making him sit with her in the waiting area.

"Why are you trippin'?"

"Why do you have to have a dude touch you down there? There should be women in here to handle women."

"There are, but like I said, Paul is the best. I'd rather have him than any woman. His work is impeccable."

"He is too damn good-looking. He probably flirts with women while he's touching them."

"Shut up," she said.

"I don't think you've had a good look at your private area to appreciate my concern," he said.

She just rolled her eyes at him.

"Can you handle wearing a condom for the next four weeks?" she asked.
"You'll be wearing my private ring. I can sacrifice for it," he joked. She wouldn't be able to have any bodily fluids on her because of possible infection. Healing took four to six weeks.

"And you're wearing mine," she said, leaning in towards him and kissing his lips. She slipped her tongue into his mouth and he pulled away.

"You can change your mind if you want," he said.

"Too late. I'm here. I want this."

N'Jobu stared into her eyes. He was unable to tell her how special this was. It was more than a piercing. In his culture, this was pretty much proclaiming them as husband and wife. His people would never recognize it because she was a foreigner, an outsider, and hers most certainly would scoff at the idea, but for him, this was final. It would not matter to him that he would marry Zinzi one day, because in his mind, Califia would always be the one true wife.

"Calafia, come on back," Paul said.

She squeezed his hand and they both walked into the back.

"You can take off your shoes, and put your pants and underwear in this bag. Then I need you to hop up on this table and place your feet in these stirrups.

"This turned into a gynecological exam fast," Califia said slipping out of her clothes.

She climbed onto the table and slipped her feet into the silver stirrups. N'Jobu was already feeling a tightness in his chest seeing her vagina on display for another man.

Paul slipped on surgical gloves and pulled a rolling tray near him as he sat between Califia's legs. N'Jobu could see the three rings and several needles on the tray.

"N'Jobu," Califia said, holding out her hand to him. He stood by her side and held her hand, his eyes never leaving Paul.

"Okay, let's see what size we'll need. I'm going to touch you now, okay, Califia?"

"Go ahead," she said.

Paul touched Califia's clitoral hood, prodding it to see how much skin was there that he could put a ring through. He held each ring against her clit.

"These are really amazing pieces, where did you get them?" Paul asked.

"He brought them from Wakanda," Califia said.

"Wakanda? Where is that?"

"East Africa," N'Jobu said, so ready for this whole event to be over so that this man could remove his fingers from his woman. Everything was open. Her vulva, her labia, that good pink that belonged to him and only him. He was getting a tension headache.

"Is everything sterile?" N'Jobu asked.

"Yes, and just so you know, I am a registered nurse," Paul said, glancing up at N'Jobu after he cleaned and prepped Califia's clitoral hood.
"Baby, relax. You're making me tense," Califia said. Her fingers were squeezing his harder.

"Ready?" Paul asked.

Califia nodded her head, but N'Jobu could see she was really nervous. He bent his face close to hers.

"Kiss me," he said. He glanced down at Paul and then turned back to Califia where he lowered his lips and met hers. He suckled her tongue and when he felt her gasp, he knew Paul had done his job. Califia's eyes closed and she sucked in her breath.

"All in," Paul said.

He handed Califia a mirror and they both looked between her legs.

"It's beautiful," she said.

N'Jobu felt so pleased. Paul removed himself from between her legs when N'Jobu glared at him.

"Give her some privacy now," N'Jobu demanded.

Paul left them alone quickly.

"Stop being so mean. This is his job."

She slipped her legs from the stirrups.

"Wait, hold your legs up," he said.

She did as he asked and he moved to stand in front of her. He gripped her legs and stared down at his ring.

"Fuck," he said looking back into her eyes.

"You like it?"

"Wait until you heal, girl," he said.

His mind was reeling. She wore his beads, and now she had his ring. She had no idea the power she had over him now. No one would come before her.

She must've seen it in his eyes. He was ready to fuck her on the table.

"We better get out of here," she said scrambling down from the table. She put on her clothes and shoes.

"I'm not fucking you with any condoms. Once you heal, it's on," he said.

"Can you last that long?"

"Watch me."

###

Califia adjusted her cap on her head as she looked around the sprawling crowd searching for her family and N'Jobu. Nana had flat-ironed her hair again because she didn't want Califia wearing her graduation cap tilted to the side because her hair was too big for the cap to sit on.
Of course, her mother was pleased to see her hair in such a respectable straightened state. And it was her mother she was worried about sitting in the stands with N'Jobu. Probably asking him every damn nosy question under the sun. And of course, Junie was probably going to show out and yell obscenities when she got her university diploma. Her Dad's side of the family had never had a college graduate before. She would be their first.

Several rows behind her, Soliel and Aunjanue sat. She wished Rolita had started when they did so she could graduate with them, but she took a gap year to travel and had one more year left until she graduated. Because she was summa cum laude, Califia was in the very front, her robe and tassel denoting her academic distinction.

The ceremony seemed to drag, and by the time her section stood up to get their official graduate applause, Califia was ready to kick off her heels and toss back celebratory shots with her friends and family. She was done. Finished with the first part of her education.

When it was all over and she could finally find her family amidst the other graduates and their families, Califia felt she could relax for a bit. It would be several months before she had to start her credential program, so she could officially goof off and not worry about books and tests, and dance classes. Yes, Lordt.

Soliel's father picked her up and spun her after he had spun Soliel. Rolita and Aunjanue's family shared hugs with everyone too. Califia's mother, Melissa, gave her a warm embrace.

"You didn't throw your cap," Melissa said.

"I went through too much to get this diploma, Mama. I'm not throwing it nowhere!" Califia joked. It felt nice to have her mother holding her, to see her mother's dark brown skin embracing her with love. Their visits together the last few years had been short and often strained to the point of discomfort. Maybe graduating with honors made Melissa more loving towards her. Or maybe Califia was learning to accept that she and her mother would always be oil and water. Nana and Junie hugged her next, then Bakari and Shavonne congratulated her, and then finally, her eyes found N'Jobu, and she jumped into his arms and wrapped her legs around his waist.

She gave him a long and intimate kiss.

"Alright now, you and Dayclean can knock it off in public," Nana said.

Califia laughed out loud. Ever since she got with N'Jobu, Nana had nicknamed him after the Geechee word for early morning, because he was always sneaking out of her house at inappropriate times according to her.

N'Jobu put her down, but Califia kept her arms wrapped around him.

"Shall we head off for the restaurant?" N'Jobu suggested and everyone agreed they were starving.

N'Jobu had rented out half a Brazilian restaurant just for Califia's family and friends. She didn't ask how much it was costing him, but the restaurant was a Michelin starred place and there would be an open bar and several courses for all of Soliel's, Aunjanue's and even Rolita's family. N'Jobu included Rolita as a graduate so that she could celebrate with her friends since she would've been in their class had she not traveled.

At the restaurant, Califia wanted to cry because she wished her father could see everyone. Soliel's Dad, Andres, was one of his best friends, and before they went into the restaurant. Andres pulled Califia aside and gave her a speech about how proud he was of her, and how proud her father was of
"I am telling you all the things a proud father would say to his daughter. Your father would be thrilled and he is thrilled that you made it," Andres said, "I consider you my daughter also, so this day is doubly special to me."

Califia watched her mother interact with N'Jobu, and it was strange to see Melissa up against a man who was not intimidated by her or backed down from her opinions. She could tell her mother was testing him by asking him questions that she thought would rattle him, but N'Jobu wasn't a young punk, and it was throwing her mother off her nitpick game.

Califia made sure that she and N'Jobu sat next to Soliel's older sister, Lianna, who they all called Negra Lia because of her work in the favelas in their hometown of São Paulo. Lia was a mentor for Soliel and Califia. She was what Califia wanted to be when she grew up, a combination of Angela Davis and Fannie Lou Hamer. If Black Girl Magic was real, Lia was the personification.

Sitting with her as she talked about writing grants and seeking funding for building spaces for young people in poverty, Califia was reminded of why she wanted to be a teacher and work in her own community. She and Soliel wanted to build sister community centers, one in Oakland and one in São Paulo. Lia was their inspiration.

"Cali, you and Soliel are so grown up now," Lia said, "I'm proud of you both. How soon can you come down to see us?"

Califia sipped on water, aware that her mother was watching her. She had the biggest girl-crush on Lia, and even after all these years, whenever Lia's voice was directed at her, Califia always wanted to make the best impression.

"I'll be down a week before I go up for my final cord. Y'know, to get acclimated and stuff. Will you be able to come see me?"

"I will do my best. N'Jobu, will you be joining her?" Lia asked.

"Working my schedule for it. I have a summer session that I am doing."

"Nice. You two really are a nice fit for one another. Auntie Melissa, is this your first time meeting, N'Jobu?"

Califia felt her face flush a bit. She felt her stomach flip too worried about what her mother would say in front of everyone.

"I don't really get a chance to meet too many of her boyfriend's. That last one…what was his name? Xavier? He was a nice young man. N'Jobu seems to be a nice young man too."

Califia sipped more water and kept her focus on Lia.

Andres tapped his knife on his wine glass, then stood up looking at the twenty-seven people sitting at two long tables.

"We are gathered to celebrate our beautiful daughters and their academic achievements. Soliel, Aunjanue, Rolita, and Califia, stand up please."

Califia and her friends stood up as their families beamed proud faces at them. Califia felt her heart beating fast. She thought this day would never come after the hard road she had taken for so many years.
"Everyone, look at these beautiful young women. They've known each other a long time, some as children, and Aunjanue, the beginning of college. All of these women have come from backgrounds that would astound so many people. See, when you come from hard places, people expect you to always be hard. They think you are not smart. Not worthy. Not acceptable. But look at our pearls…"

Califia saw Soliel's face dripping with tears. Rolita was wiping her face. Aunjanue's eyes were welling up. Califia already felt drops falling from her own eyes. Each one of them came from the wrong side of the tracks. Each had to endure so much in their families just to make it. None of them came from families with resources. Soliel would only be the second college graduate in her entire family, right after Lia. Aunjanue's parents never finished high school.

"All of these young women are what we call loud. Truth talkers and walkers. They envision a world that is better than what we imagine. I remember several years ago when my daughter Lia graduated and I was talking to my wife and I said, one day we will celebrate three more university graduates, and standing here now, I can proudly say four with my future daughter-in-law, Aunjanue!"

Soliel put her arm around Aunjanue who had broken down. Andres' eyes shimmered.

"I am a proud father and uncle today. Nana Jean, Melissa, Theresa, John…all of us parents here… look at what God has blessed us with. Look at our daughters. A toast to them!"

Califia wiped her eyes as the entire table held up their glasses to her and her friends. When her eyes sought N'Jobu's he reached out and held her hand as he toasted her.

Lia stood up.

"Can we also give a toast to N'Jobu, who set up this entire venue for us so we didn't have to worry about anything and could just be together?"

The entire table erupted into applause, and N'Jobu just bowed his head. Califia climbed onto his lap and hugged him.

"You did it," he whispered in her ear as he stroked her face.

"Thank you for doing this for us," she said.

They watched everyone hug one another, and as Brazilian music played suddenly, Andres grabbed Soliel's and Aunjanue's hands and pulled them out to the open patio to dance. Several others followed. Califia was surprised to see her mother go out and dance too.

Junie walked over to her and N'Jobu.

"Yo, bruh, this was dope as hell. I know it cost you a grip to reserve all this," Junie said.

"It's all for her," N'Jobu said rubbing Califia's back.

"For sho'. We're all proud of you Cali. You make a negro wanna finish his shit."

"Do it!" Califia said. She stood up and hugged Junie, then held out her hand toward N'Jobu.

She guided him to the patio where they joined the dancing, and for the first time, she realized she had never danced with N'Jobu before.

They spent most of their time studying, reading to each other in bed, working out, cooking meals together while debating politics or she was out teaching capoeira. They never went out dancing
together in clubs, and it felt strange to discover that about them as he moved in tandem with her as if they had always done it together.

When an old Gilberto Gil song came on, one that her Dad used to play for her mother, N'Jobu held her so close and tight that she felt enveloped in a love so thick that she never wanted to lose it.

It was not easy to love him.

As time passed, Califia knew the perfect love bubble they had created after he returned from his sister-in-law's funeral would burst.

Their lovemaking had even changed. They still had aggressive quickies and had recently resumed their spanking sessions, but when it was early morning or early evening and they had plenty of time to explore, the sex had reached an intensity she didn't think they could sustain for much longer.

She believed the piercings had a lot to do with the changes.

The first time N'Jobu entered her after she had healed, and his shaft slid to the hilt and they both could create their own ring and seed of the beloved like the book of poetry, she saw something in his eyes that frightened her. The moment he was seated deep inside of her and he saw their piercings near one another, his eyes watered and he spoke to her in Wakandan with the softest voice she had ever heard from him while they were ever intimate. He made those insanely erotic clicking sounds with his tongue, and then his eyes were on her with an intensity that fired up her loins as he rocked his hips into her.

"N'Jobu?" she had questioned, holding his biceps as they flexed.

"I love you…so much…" he said, and then he dropped his head into her neck, wrapped her legs around his waist and just kept up the most erotic rotation of his hips. She felt tears spring into her eyes as he kept saying he loved her over and over into her ear as his own tears dripped down her neck.

He started whispering things to her in Wakandan again, and she tried to listen, but the friction from his groin and the tugging of her clit ring had her panting and whimpering his name.

"Jobu!"

He sat up between her legs as she came on his dick, her walls clenching so tight she started crying from the pleasure it gave her.

"Look at me, Califia…look at me…" he said.

Her wet eyes raised up to look in his, and she felt him cumming inside her. The groan he let out was so staggering, she felt her pussy spasm again just from the sound of it and also from the look in his eyes. It felt and looked like heaven on earth, but also a farewell. His sack was slapping her ass in a satisfying rhythm, and she wanted more. He gave her more, filling up her mouth, covering her tits and ass, and spilling even more cum all over her clit ring.

The fear came in strong after that. The knowing it would all end one day. The knowing that he wouldn't be in her bed, the knowing that his ring and his beads, and his blanket, and his robes would be all that remained to her. He would become a painful memory. A ghost.

Dancing with him, pressed tight into him, feeling his arms surround her and support her, she had to live in the now for every second of the day, and it was hurting her.
Looking around the patio she saw that they were the only ones up dancing, the others stepping away to watch them as if they too knew that this would never be. She saw her mother wiping tears from her own eyes too.

Califia felt her tears flow again and she heard him murmur in her ear once more, "I love you, Califia."

Pushing her face into his shoulder, she knew love wouldn't be enough to keep them together.

Love sounded like goodbye.
Chapter Summary

Prison. Brazil. Letting go.
The end is nigh.

Chapter Notes

Only a few chapters left until the next book!
Thank you all were staying with this passion fanfic.
Things will be a little tricky and complicated for Califia in the next sections.
Again, I am back at work, so my time is a little restricted now, so really working on Fri or Sat updates.

I'm an orange moon
I'm brighter than before
Brighter than ever before
I'm an orange moon and I shine so bright
'cause I reflect the light of my sun
I praise the day, he turned my way
And smiled at me
He gets to smile and I get to be orange, that I love to be

How good it is, how good it is…

Erykah Badu – "Orange Moon"

Califia held N'Jobu's hand as they waited for her father in the prison waiting room. She was nervous on the drive up, and she was nervous as they were being processed to get inside. Her stomach felt queasy for the last few days. It was one thing to talk about her father being locked up, quite another to take her boyfriend to the prison itself.

When Dante Stevens walked out, his hair cut a little shorter, and his smile as vivid as ever, Califia for the first time in a long time didn't cry when she saw him. She stood and walked N'Jobu over to him. She hugged her father, then, like a teenager introducing her parent to her prom date, she pulled N'Jobu closer to her.

"Pleased to finally meet you in person, sir," N'Jobu said, sticking out his hand.

Dante shook N'Jobu's hand, and Califia noticed the impressed expression on her father's face by the firmness of N'Jobu's handshake.

"Well, N'Jobu, I can see you ain't no Hennessey and swisher sweets type brotha," Dante said.
Califia giggled, "Daddy! Stop it!"

N'Jobu didn't quite get the humor in the reference, she could tell, but he smiled because Dante was grinning.

"Sit down you two," Dante said.

They found a nice open spot near the snack machines.

"So, you are the man that's got my daughter's nose wide open—"

"Ohmigod, Daddy could you not!"

"What's the problem? Your Mama said she hasn't seen you in love like this since Melvin Clayton in the fifth grade."

N'Jobu laughed with Dante.

"Wait, did she come see you?"

"Yes. She didn't tell you?"

"No. She said she visited a few friends while she was out here. She didn't tell me she came here. How was it?"

"Good. She looks good. Sounds good. She's hella proud of you. And she kept talking about this young man right here."

"I'm glad I made a positive impression," N'Jobu said.

Dante eyed N'Jobu for a moment.

"Her mother told me that you are a good man, and good for my daughter."

Califia blinked in surprise. Her mother was polite and made a nice house guest when she stayed with Califia and N'Jobu, but she never said anything to Califia about how she felt about the relationship.

"I was able to see a lot of pictures from your graduation, babygirl."

"I have more to show you."

"Cool. N'Jobu, do you play chess?"

"Yes, sir," N'Jobu said.

Dante went to a corner and brought back a chess set.

Califia watched them play a long and contemplative game that Dante won before N'Jobu beat him in the second game. They then all decided to play monopoly where N'Jobu wiped up both their butts.

Soon N'Jobu was talking about his home and family, the death of his sister-in-law, and how proud he was to see Califia get her degree.

Dante talked to N'Jobu about Oakland and actually felt comfortable talking to him about how he got into prison. Califia was fascinated by how her father was so open with N'Jobu. After a while she felt like they had forgotten she was there because they were so deep into their own conversation. After
two hours she went to the restroom.

When she returned, their conversation had wound down. It began to rain outside and N'Jobu stood up.

"I'm going to warm up the car and make a quick phone call home," N'Jobu said.

"It was great to meet you, N'Jobu."

"Same here, sir. Califia take your time. I'll be in the car."

She kissed N'Jobu on his cheek and watched him exit the waiting room.

"It's getting late. Weather is acting up. You two should get going," Dante said, his eyes shining.

"You really like him, Daddy?"

"Heck yeah. He's good people. I can tell he's crazy about you. Hangs off every word you say, and always wants to look at you. He in love, babygirl."

Califia grinned from ear to ear. Dante stood up and held out his arms. Califia hugged and squeezed him tight.

"Cali, I'm going to tell you something. And I want you to understand that it's coming from a good place."

"Okay, Daddy."

Dante kissed her forehead, and when he spoke to her, the light faded from her eyes.

###

N'Jobu left messages for his parents and a short one for Zinzi. The summer rain was coming down harder fogging up his windows, so he turned on the defroster and all the windows cleared. He saw Califia's form waiting by the entrance and he honked the horn and pulled the car over to her so she wouldn't have to get so wet.

When she climbed into the car, he turned up the heat for her seat.

"Your father was really cool…Califia?"

N'Jobu stared at her face and noticed that most of the wetness on her face wasn't from the rain. She was crying.

"What's wrong? What happened?" he asked putting an arm around her shoulder.

"My father…he doesn't want me to come and visit him anymore. I don't understand…N'Jobu, I don't understand. Why wouldn't he want me to see him?"

"What exactly did he say?"

"He said it would be best if I stopped coming to the prison. He's up for parole and doesn't want me to see him in a cage anymore if the parole doesn't go through. He's my father. I would go to hell to see him."

N'Jobu held her and kissed her forehead.
"He loves you, Califia. He probably wants to spare you any pain."

"But he sees how happy I am with you. Doesn't he want to see me being happy?"

"Maybe that's why he wants you to stay away for now. He loves seeing you happy."

She crumbled in his arms and sobbed.

"They have to let him out," she whispered, her voice choppy and weak. When she looked up into his eyes, he felt his heart break.

"I miss him so much, N'Jobu."

"I know you do. I know you do. Come on, let's go home. We can talk about it later. Okay?"

She nodded and wiped her face.

The rain eased her into a fitful sleep as he drove. He was already aware that Dante was going to tell her what he did.

When Califia went to the restroom, Dante confided that he hadn't seen Califia on top of the world like this in a long time. He attributed it to her and N'Jobu's relationship. Dante told him what he was going to do and asked N'Jobu to comfort her. A cage was no place for a child to see their parent for that long was what he told N'Jobu.

N'Jobu hoped Dante would change his mind, and he also hoped the parole would be approved and they could restore their family. All he could do now was respect her father's wishes and be there for her.

She slept all the way back to Berkley, and N'Jobu carried her into the apartment.

When he undressed her and put her into her typical shorts and tank top. She felt really warm.

Too warm.

He went into the restroom and brought out an ear thermometer, and checked her temperature. She had a high fever. He brought her liquid fever medicine, woke her up and made her take it.

The next day her fever still hadn't broken. He gave her more medicine, but she began to sweat profusely and couldn't get warm. Harsh vomiting came next.

"Califia, I'm taking you to the hospital," he said.

###

N'Jobu stayed up all night watching Califia in her hospital bed. The doctor assigned to her was pumping her full of fluids. An I.V. drip hung above her bed, and N'Jobu watched the fluid go into her arm. She slept deeply, and he was relieved that it was just a minor stomach virus and dehydration.

He called her grandmother and her mother to let them know she would be fine. Nana Jean asked him to call her back if she had to stay in the hospital longer so she could come and sit with her.

Califia's face looked ashen, her lips cracked and dry. N'Jobu leaned over and rested his hand on her forehead. Her temperature felt normal. He stroked her cheek and her eyes fluttered open.
For a moment she looked up at the ceiling, confusion set in her eyes. When she lifted her chest and tried to move her arm, she noticed the I.V.

"What…?"

"You got sick. Really sick. I took you to the hospital. You'll be alright."

"Can we go home?"

"They want to keep you a little longer. Get some fluids in you and some medicine to fight your stomach virus."

He continued stroking her face, then held her hand.

"Can you raise my pillow up?"

N’Jobu lifted up the two pillows on her bed and helped her sit up.

"You should just rest, Califia."

"We have to talk," she said, her voice raspy and soft.

"Later, okay?"

She shook her head.

"I'm sick probably because I've been stressing out."

She squeezed his hand and he moved his chair closer to the bed.

"You've been training really hard. You should ease up a bit. You'll do well in Brazil—"

"No. About us. You've changed, and I know it's because you're hiding things from me. How you act around me, how we make love…it's not just because Thandie died…"

Her eyes welled up.

"Califia—"

"You won't be here for another year, will you? Tell me the truth, N’Jobu. My father doesn't want to see me, and I know you're leaving me too."

N’Jobu moved his head back and forth and then he pushed his face into her side and wept.

"The story of my life…" she whispered, "just when I think there's light at the end it gets snatched away. When do you have to go back?"

N’Jobu kept his face pressed into her side.

"Can we talk about this when you leave the hospital?" he said.

"You're a straight shooter, baby. Tell me now."

He raised up a stared at her with wet eyes.

"Probably the end of August. End of summer session."
Two months.

They wouldn't even make it to the month that he first saw her.

Her lip trembled, but a sad smile crossed her face.

"I feel like I've known you forever," she said.

He felt the same way. It seemed impossible that they could bond so tight in a short amount of time. Ten months ago, he had taken a chance and walked into a room full of Black university students as a favor for Bakari, and walked out meeting the love of his life.

"N'Jo-!"

She slammed her hand to her mouth and he reached for the garbage can and held her as she threw up.

A nurse came in and took over for N'Jobu, helping Califia out of the bed and into the restroom.

He waited in his seat as he heard her retching and the nurse soothing her. He felt so helpless. He wished he could talk to his mother, but she would have him flown home and married off immediately. He was not speaking to T'Chaka at the moment. And even though his own father had defied his elders and chose the woman he wanted, Baba would not have sympathy for a foreign woman. Wakandans for Wakandans. His father knew he was messing around with women outside of their culture. He expected it. But not falling in love. Not imagining a life with an American woman.

The nurse helped Califia return to her bed all cleaned up.

N'Jobu stood. Visiting hours were almost over and he wasn't a blood relative.

"She'll need to stay one more day," the nurse said.

"I'll bring your grandmother tomorrow," he said.

Califia nodded and sunk under the covers. He kissed her forehead and left her room.

Walking to his car, there was a weight lifted at last. Now she knew. The dread he had held inside since the funeral he could let go of. He wanted to tell her after she finished her trip. He wanted her mind focused on getting her brown cord and getting closer to the master status she dreamed of in her art. Instead, he most likely made her sick and would probably hamper her chance of success if she couldn't get well in another month. Fucking life.

He sat in his car in the hospital parking lot and tried to clear his head.

It was over. They were simply wringing out the last few drops at this point. He gripped his steering wheel and fought back tears. No more crying. He had to make these last two months as sweet as their first two months. Sweeter. He would not wallow in pity. He would not become his brother.

###

Nana Jean snuck in a carne asada burrito and Califia ate half of it. Her appetite did upset her stomach, but her body didn't toss back out the yummy goodness. She was on the mend.

N'Jobu was there too, his face looking better than it did the night before. Nana prattled on about family, the upcoming family reunion in Atlanta, and figuring out how to disinvite Junie's girlfriend.
from coming to Georgia with him.

"She's a damn disgrace," Nana said, fluffing Califia's pillows.

"Nana!" Califia said.

"Dayclean, pull down her covers on that side," Nana said putting N'Jobu to work.

"Why that boy want to bring her around our family I don't understand. She dresses like a streetwalker half the time—"

"Nana, she wore booty shorts one time to a barbecue. I wear the same kind of shorts!"

"I've never seen you wear stuff like that—"

"Yes, you have! Be real. Why don't you like her?"

"She's one of them Jack and Jill peoples that think they're better than regular Black folks."

"Okay, she is bougie, but she really likes Junie. She's a good influence on him to get back into school."

"I don't like her. Period."

"Okay, you don't have to like her. But Junie does. He's been staying outta trouble because of her. You have to admit that. Not hangin' with Doug and 'nem for a minute."

"Hmph."

That was the only concession Nana was willing to give up. Califia giggled. When she looked at N'Jobu, he seemed happy to see her smiling. They had a rough night. She didn't know about him, but she cried her eyes out for a long time. Then opted not to have a pity party. She knew they had limited time. It just came sooner than expected. She had to hold onto good things and only good things here on out, or else she would have a breakdown.

"I can get out later today," she said to N'Jobu, her voice cheery and confident.

"That's great," he said. His voice sounded hopeful.

"I have to take in more fluids, eat more balanced foods and get some rest. I should be one hundred in a couple of days or a week."

Nana went on with her neighborhood gossip with N'Jobu chiming in every now and then, and before she knew it, her doctor was releasing her to bedrest and a bottle of antibiotics.

Once she was in their bed, her Border Tribe blanket wrapped around them, Califia was able to talk her fears and sadness through with him. They held each other.

"I'm feeling all sorts of things, but you know the one thing I don't feel?" she said.

"What?"

"Regret."

Tears spilled down her face, and he wiped them for her.
"These aren't sad tears, baby. Just stress release. I'm grateful for every single moment, even all the
bad shit. I grew up a lot with you."

"Me too."

"I think every time we feel sad we should just fuck," she chuckled.

He laughed so hard and pulled her closer to him.

"I'm serious! If I get teary-eyed from looking at you and feeling sad, just bend me over. If I see you breaking apart, I'm dropping to my knees and sucking your dick. That's just the way it has to be from now on."

"You are insane, but I love it,' he said.

"Pinky promise?" she said holding out her finger.

"Pinky promise," he said, linking his finger with hers.

###

She grew stronger the next few days, taking in more vitamins and minerals and other natural supplements to help with her anxiety. While she worked out and practiced with Bakari less strenuously, N'Jobu began selling his watches and jewelry to accumulate cash. He knew he couldn't use too much of his discretionary funds and monthly allotments without raising suspicion back home, but he wanted to leave Califia resources to help her get through her credential program without financial worry.

He sold most of his clothes and some shoes and was able to amass enough money so that Califia wouldn't have to work for the next two years until she landed a teaching gig. He put the money in a cashier check and hid it for safe-keeping.

He transferred pictures and files he wanted to keep onto his kimoyo beads. He knew the moment he went home his computer and cell phone would be destroyed so no one could trace him. He mailed home books and artwork collected, and when Califia had a look on her face when she saw how the bookshelves were becoming bare, he pushed up on her and kissed her, leading her out on the balcony and onto Bakari's old couch. When he lifted her up and down on his erection, his heated eyes staring at her clit ring as her fingers opened her labia for him, she whispered in his ear.

"I never told you that I was hiding out here waiting for Bakari that day we all went to karaoke," she said as he gripped her ass and thrust up into her.

"Really?" he said staring in her eyes, his lips curling from her tightness.

"I saw you come out of the shower…hmmmph…you had on a white towel, and you looked so good…ooohh….huhnnn….and you started fucking Andrea. I heard you…and she was going wild…and I wanted to be in your bed…Jobu…baby…right there…right there…baby, I love you."

She gripped his shoulders and let him go to work. Books forgotten.

When she started packing her suitcase for São Paulo, he had a weak moment, and Califia walked over to where he stood by the bed and dropped to her knees. She unfastened his pants and let them down while she took his length in her mouth. Her gag reflex was so good at that point, she could take him in all the way up to his seed jewel.

"You suck that shit so good," he told her, holding her head. She slid her wet tongue on the sides of
his dick while she played with her tits for him. When she started juggling his balls in her mouth and licking the underside of his cock, he was about to lose his shit.

"I like how you let me hit the back of your throat…hmmmmm…such a good girl. Taking all this dick. Where do you want me to cum? Tell me where."

"Cum on my face, Daddy," she whispered, staring up at him like she had the most innocent face in the world. He let his pre-cum gloss her lips.
"You want…you want Daddy to paint your face for you?" he choked out, unable to get past the fact that this was his woman.
"Yes, please."

She tilted her head back, her eyes half slits, her lips slick. He held onto hair and gripped his fingers around his tip.

"Here it comes, baby. Let Daddy cum on you, okay? All over that pretty face…shitttt…you got my dick so hard…"

Jutting against her cheek and lips, the head of his cock released a flow of pre-cum.

"Baby…damn…Califia…look at what you're making me do—"

He pushed into her face and his dick sprayed cum onto her cheek and mouth, dripping down onto her tits and the floor.

"Let me lick Daddy clean," she said, her mouth back on his dick, his cum thick and wet on her body. All sad thoughts left him. There was just her and her eyes on him.

###

Califia held tight to N'Jobu's hand as they flew to São Paulo.

The turbulence was pretty bad, and Califia was not a comfortable flyer. She was lucky that N'Jobu was able to purchase a ticket on her flight due to some last-minute cancellations. Even luckier when a fellow passenger agreed to switch seats so N'Jobu could sit next to Califia.

"All this rocking and rolling doesn't bother you?" she whispered to him as she ducked her head into his shoulder.

"I'm used to it. Here, lay on me."

He loosened her belt a little to ease her closer to his chest. They spent time earlier discussing the different color belts a capoeirista could receive at the baptisado during the troca de cordas.

"Two years ago, I received my purple cord, and that meant I could be considered a Professor and teach. I went to a baptisado in San Diego for that one. But I always wanted to earn my next cord at a roda down in São Paulo. One of the masters I want to learn from will be at this one. His son was a badass that I always wanted to play with. I used to watch hours of video of them, just to learn some techniques. Aleixo is just so sexy when he sways, and he is always moving, and ah, man…I want to be as good as that. That smooth. He makes it look so easy. He's been doing it since he was two. I just want to do at least one advanced workshop with him and his father. Once I get my brown cord, I will probably train a few more years and go for my last belt. Then maybe one day I will be considered a master."

"Getting your last cord doesn't make you a master automatically?"
"Nah. That's a title earned from your conduct, not just because you received a cord. That will take some time for me."

She looked up at his face.

"Thank you for making the effort to go with me."

"I wasn't going to miss it."

The jet rolled a bit, and Califia's arm shot around his waist.

"It's okay," he said, holding her.

Califia's eyes eventually grew wide when she watched their plane pass over tall buildings to land at the airport. She was all nerves and excitement and ferocious energy when she stepped off the plane into the São Paulo-Guarulhos International Airport. Land of the paulistanos. Home of one of her besties, Soliel. Brazil's largest city.

Soliel and Negra Lia met them at the airport, and Califia hugged both women so hard. It had been four years since she had been to São Paulo. Four years too long.

"N'Jobu, welcome to our humble city," Lia said patting N'Jobu's back.

It took some time to collect Califia and N'Jobu's luggage and by the time they made it out of the airport, it was a fight to catch a taxi.

"We'll probably get stuck in rush hour traffic which is hell here," Soliel said.

Fortunately, that wasn't the case when N'Jobu was able to flag down a cab and they all jumped in.

So many new buildings had gone up in the city, and Califia marveled how so much had changed from what she remembered in four years. N'jobu was also wide-eyed as he looked around, the city crowded with people and so many cars.

When they eventually made it sometime later to the outskirts and started heading into the suburbs, Califia saw N'Jobu's eyes take in the drastic change in scenery. Even though she was used to it from her experience of going to Brazil, it was always a shock to newbies to encounter a favela.

Lia guided the taxi driver up through the easiest route to her home, and N'Jobu's countenance shifted minute by minute as he took in the dilapidated shacks dotting the hills. Flimsy corrugated roofs, unsanitary drainage in the streets, inappropriate materials twisted and shaped to make the best living situation possible. N'Jobu took it all in. It was day and night. To pass over an expressway and fancy buildings in the heart of the city and to come out to this.

Califia stroked his hand as Soliel and Lia talked about the plans they made for them before the baptisado.

"Babe?" Califia said as their taxi crawled up further into the place where Soliel and Lia came from, São Paulo's second biggest slum, Paraiopolis…Paradise City. The lie in the name was abhorrent and obscene to N'Jobu. But to Soliel and Lia, it was home. Their roots.

"I wasn't—" he said. He closed his mouth and just regarded their world.

"It's okay…," she whispered.

Soliel looked back at N'Jobu. She already knew by his eyes what his mouth couldn't say.
"A lot to take in?" Soliel said.

"Yes," he said.

"There's a lot of beauty here too," Soliel said.

They pulled in front of a multi-unit structure on a narrow street. N'Jobu carried their bags and followed the women up several flights of stairs to a rooftop dwelling that was colorful and a little better constructed than many of the cement flats they saw coming up the hills.

"Home sweet home," Lia said pulling on a chain that turned on lights that illuminated a neat and comfortable looking home.

"You two can have the back room near the rooftop patio," Soliel said.

"Nah, we can take the front room," Califia said.

"That's where I'm sleeping!"

Bakari came out of the bathroom wiping his face with a hand towel.

"Ohmigod! You made it down!" Califia squealed hugging him tightly.

"You think I was missing my homegirl's baptisado?" he said.

He and N'Jobu shared a pound and Califia's face was lit up. Her two favorite fellows with her in Brazil.

"Go unpack, get comfy, and I will have dinner ready for all of us," Lia said.

"Thank you, Lia!" Califia said hugging her.

After putting their things away, Soliel, Bakari, Califia, and N'Jobu sat outside on the rooftop patio and watched the lights all over the hillside. They drank calimochoes and snacked on peanuts around a white plastic patio table as Lia worked inside her small kitchen adamant that no one assist her. When dinner was ready, they sat in the open air eating Califia's favorite dish, feijoada, a thick black bean stew filled with salted dry beef and tender pork bits over rice. As they talked Lia brought out freshly fried coxinha, shredded chicken and cheese fried in dough along with cassava chips. Lia complained about the upswing in police activity in the neighborhood, and the problems they were having getting clean water throughout their district. The system they had currently lost over thirty percent of water in distribution and it was wasteful. Some families had to get water through thin cheap PVC pipes that often broke.

"Do you ever think about moving away from here?" N'Jobu asked Lia.

"These are my people. If I am to help them I should live among them. I know the issues we face from the ground up. In the past outsiders have tried to solve our problems, but they aren't from here, so what do they really know? I was born here. Raised here. I know this place. Yes, I could move to a nice apartment in the city and use my law degree to live a good life by being in debt and trying to keep my apartment and nice things. But I do my best here. I can stretch my resources."

"What about you, Soliel?" he asked.

"Here for life. My American degree will do well here, and my connection to Califia will help us build up Black women."
"Just Black women?" he asked.

"When Black women build for themselves, everyone else benefits," Lia said, opening a bottle of red wine and mixing it with the coca cola she had in her glass. She drank a bit then looked at N'Jobu.

"Black women are at the bottom of our society. Historically we have always been ignored in São Paulo and throughout Brazil. I have been connecting with other Black women in Rio and we are trying to create a collective that supports our needs in many cities. Part of our work is raising Black consciousness among our people. We have seen the work done in the states, but unfortunately, our country has lagged behind by decades to get to the level of our sisters and brothers in the north. Brazil doesn't see color you know…” Lia laughed when she finished talking, and Califia chuckled with her.

Calafia saw that N'Jobu didn't get the biting humor in their shared laughter.

"Brazil thinks it's a color-blind society just like America," Califia said.

"Our Black lives matter down here too," Lia said lifting up a still steaming hot coxinha and breaking it apart with a fork, "and our militarized police are killing us at an alarming rate. It's the death squads all over again. Here. Rio. Recife. They sweep through communities and kill our young people. They say it's because of gang turf wars, drugs, street kids prone to crime…we lost two cousins and an uncle back in the day. Street kids with rough lives who were gunned down as they slept in the street. Homeless people are exterminated too. My mother can tell you so many stories about when she was in Rio. Their lives were not valued and they were destroyed by the people who are here to protect the rich—"

"Pessoa branca…” Soliel interjected.

"White people," Califia told him.

"And also the non-white people who support the hierarchy so that they can be near the top," Lia said.

"All skinfolk ain't kinfolk," Bakari added, his quiet voice finally saying a few words.

"We're not just soccer and carnival, N'Jobu. Can't you tell? When you are a bug to certain people, what can they do but step on you." Soliel said sipping on her glass of wine.

"Ah, the world is filled with people who lack love, family,…a decent home. So, we Black women roll up our sleeves, get into the muck and do the work," Lia said.

"Saúde!" Califia said clinking her glass with Soleil and Lia.

They ate and drank more, and Califia could see that N'Jobu was getting quite an education. His experience with poverty and violence in Oakland only came through what Califia showed him. But to see it on another larger scale among another population of Black people was getting to him. The look on his face was contemplative, but at least he wasn't doing what he used to do which was try to find fault in the people themselves. He was finally understanding the issue of systemic racism, something they used to argue over when N'Jobu used to say headass things about Black Americans not doing better. Califia made him read and watch documentaries about her history. They spent nights in bed together discussing her worldview and how it was so vastly different from N'Jobu's uninformed opinion. For someone who was supposed to be so worldly, it took N'Jobu time to understand the true meaning of the intersections of race, class, gender, and geography. She tried to have compassion for his ignorance, but she finally put her foot down early in their relationship when
he questioned why she had to be the one to do the work of bucking the system. He started to sound like Xavier back then when he wanted her time to be his and not shared with other people. Being an activist was too much for their comfort.

Watching him take in the struggles of Soleil and Lia, Califia felt that N'Jobu was coming to terms with global systemic injustice in the African diaspora. The states may be able to fake out those who thought like N'Jobu, but São Paulo couldn't.

When it was time for them to sleep, the jet lag tugging on them both, N'Jobu was restless in her arms. The bed they shared was really cozy, it didn't give them much space to move around, so their bodies were wrapped into each other. But N'Jobu shifted many times, and whatever dreams he had kept him pulling on her arms and hips as he slept.

He woke up to use the restroom late into the night, and when he returned to bed, she cradled his head.

"You're having a hard time sleeping," she said.

"I'm sorry I'm keeping you up," he said.

She kissed him and for some reason, she shifted up and unfastened her nightgown. It was winter there and she couldn't get away with shorts and a tank top. She released her breasts from her gown and pulled his head toward her chest.

"Let me calm you down," she said popping her nipple in his mouth.

He sucked on her tits as she pulled down his sweatpants and fingered his cock. His hand slid down and pulled up her gown, finding its way between her legs.

His fingers were soon slick with her and she climbed on top of him and rode him gently.

N'Jobu's hands played with her breasts as she raised up and down on him.

"…fucking me so good, Califia…keep going…keep going…" he whispered.

She pulled the nightgown all the way off, and he removed his shirt and slid his sweatpants off his feet, opening his thighs wider. She circled her hips keeping the gentle pace. She saw his eyes drift down to stare at the beads on her waist and her clit, her ring capturing his heightened passion. She leaned forward and placed her elbows at the sides of his head so that her breasts rested in his face. He suckled her as she continued to fuck him, raising herself up and down on his cock slowly.

"Gawd, I love this fat dick," she whispered in his ear.

His hands went to her waist then slid down to grab hold of her ass cheeks, his fingers twisted inside her beads.

"Keep fucking me," he gritted out, holding onto her.

She lifted back up and ground down onto him. She closed her eyes and threw her head back.

"Fuck me…yes baby, fuck me…just like that…just like that…," he gasped trying to swallow the volume of his voice.

She looked back into his eyes and he was so far gone.

At that moment, they both saw the flash of light from outside.
"Whoa!" she said turning her head toward the large window facing the patio.

N'Jobu lifted up onto his elbows staring in the same direction.

A massive lightning bolt streaked across the sky again.

"Shit," he said.

"I think it's either Oyá/Iansá or Xangô watching us," she said.

N'Jobu's eyes were heavy with lust, his chest still heaving from her sublime lovemaking.

"The orixás of Candomblé," she said turning her face back to him.

Another streak illuminated the room.

"Xangô, the God of thunder and lightning. He is fire. Justice. Regal. Virile. A warrior…"

She glanced back out the window again.

"Oyá/Iansã, the Goddess of storms and the winds. Authoritative. Sensual. Courageous. Wages war with weapons in her hands…"

N'Jobu lifted her waist to make her move again, thrusting his hips at the same time.

"Which one do you think it is?" she asked rocking her hips in slow measured circles, her beads tinkling and glinting.

"Why can't it be both?"

"Hmmmm," she said as he gripped her hips tight.

"Why can't it be us?" he said, looking over at the window.

Another flash and the sound of distant thunder rattled the window.

"Here. Right now. You will be my Oyá/Iansã," he said.

She allowed her fingers to caress his chest.

"And you…you'll be my Xangô?" she said.

He lifted up and held her waist, his lips next to hers.

"I'll be whoever you want me to be," he said.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and he wasted no time flipping her over and snapping his hips into her. He was balls deep inside of her when she whispered in his ear, "Fill my pussy up."

He did more than fill it; he flooded it with the rumble of thunder backing him.

###

The room was massive.

Being with Califia had afforded N'Jobu the opportunity to witness various capoeira gatherings, but this roda was larger and more intimidating.
N’Jobu had watched Bakari, Soliel, and Califia participate in several workshops for a few days. He even got to witness Califia fangirl over Axiel whom everyone called Besouro, the beetle. Deep dark sepia skin, dark brown dreds with reddish tips that hung to his neck, and a torso cut like fine marble, Axiel was a force of nature to be reckoned with. Every time he entered a circle to play, his opponent learned how not to move ever again if they wanted to be on his level. If Brazil's Xangô was real, then N'Jobu thought Axiel was the orixá made flesh.

Axiel was a few years older than N'Jobu, and as he watched Califia interact with him, he did feel some pangs of jealousy. She could very well come back here months from now and be with this man once N'Jobu was gone. Any man in that room for that matter. It was something he was slowly coming to terms with during his stay in São Paulo.

Watching the room now, N'Jobu could feel the spikey kinetic energy flowing through the space. It was the day of troca de cordas, the changing of the cords. Califia would either graduate to her next level or learn skills to help her make it some other time.

Califia stood inside around a circle wearing her white abadá pants, her purple cord wrapped around her waist. Her snug white t-shirt had her club's yellow logo on it, and her hair was painstakingly cornrowed by Soliel with bright yellow beads strung on her ends.

N'Jobu watched her sing warrior songs in Portuguese along with the other capoeiristas, and at one point she had to play the berimbau as she watched initiates try for their next levels. He felt nervous for her. From what he had witnessed so far, these people were on whole other levels. He remembered how she had waged her battle prowess on him in their apartment, but he wasn't sure if that would be enough to surpass the expertise he was watching before him.

Soliel, Bakari, and Lia sat with him on folding chairs that surrounded the room. Lia and Soliel's parents were out on the floor too, Andres playing a berimbau and their mother playing the agogo, her rhythmic hand striking the two hollow iron cones with a small stick.

Bakari had his hands clasped and held up to his mouth. His nerves were rattled more than N'Jobu's.

"Man, she's gotta throw down. These mofos down here are not with the bullshit," Bakari said to N'Jobu. Lia and Soliel looked more confident than them, singing along with the songs and clapping their hands. Lia glanced over at N'Jobu.

"Relax. She has had the best teachers. My father. Her father, and a great master from San Diego. She will do well. Watch and see," Lia said.

The sweet confidence in Lia's voice eased N'Jobu a bit.

"The question is, who will play with her," Soliel said.

"I know she wants Axiel," Bakari said.

"Everyone wants Besouro, he won't just fight anyone," Soleil said.

"True, but he likes Califia," Lia said, her eyes regarding Califia's face.

N'Jobu's ears itched a bit when he heard that Axiel liked Califia. She may have meant as a fighter, but N'Jobu was aware of how Axiel was hovering around her during the workshops Q & A sessions.

"But he can be brutal. Just because he likes you doesn't mean he will be gentle. He often does the opposite," Soleil said.
"We shall see," Lia said.

"Oh, God, here we go," Bakari huffed out, putting his hands in his lap and leaning forward.

Lia and Soleil laughed at him.

They all watched Andres call to Califia again, and she did the small cartwheel move they all did to enter the roda. One of the older mestres stepped in with her, and he led Califia through basics moves to warm her up. Her execution was smooth, her dancer flair coming out at times as she pulled out some impressive acrobatic moves. But then the master switched up on her and moved faster. She used a lot of negativa moves to deflect the attacks coming her way, her feet hopping into various troca de pé stances before she could really get into her groove.

Andres called in another mestre, and this one came for Califia full force.

"Here we go," Lia whispered.

The new mestre was all for trying to take Califia down, his leg sweeps and kicks aimed to make Califia lose her balance. N'Jobu felt his body go tense.

"She has to go offensive…," Soleil said.

"C'mon, Cali," Lia whispered.

The mestre caught Califia's foot as she tried to execute an inside leg sweep, and she flipped onto the floor hard. The crowd gave an enormous "Oh!", but Califia leaped back up, her eyes narrow, the fire in them evident. She did a side flip and scooted her self on the floor, using her legs to tangle up the mestre's feet. When he tumbled she went into a cartwheel handstand and twisted her legs in mid-air, smacking the man in his chest and face.

"Aye! Helicóptero!" Lia screeched.

"Damn!" Bakari yelled jumping up on his feet, his fist balled in his mouth.

Andres quickly called in another mestre.

"Oh shit," Bakari said.

Axiel. Besouro. The beetle.

The music reached a fever pitch and Axiel's ginga was fluid like river water cascading over rocks, his smile misleading as he really began to put Califia to the test. He was merciless, taking her down hard several times, laughing at the frustrated look on her face.

N'Jobu stood up, his face tight.

"Get him," he whispered.

Axiel tended to go for the dramatic, so his moves were the acrobatic types Califia enjoyed. And he was super fast. His locs bounced around his head and Califia's hair beads jangled as she kicked, swiped, did back somersaults, and front flips. They soon got in tight with one another, Axiel actually grabbing Califia with his hands to try and throw her. They grappled with one another and Axiel spun around her, wrapped his arm around her head from behind, lifted her off the ground and threw her.

N'Jobu stepped forward and Lia pushed him back.

"She's okay," Lia said.
Califia landed on her feet, but when she turned around she struck him in the head with her instep catching Axiel by surprise with her speed. She gave a forward knee raise and Axiel moved to protect his head, but she bait and switched the move with a scorpion kick to Axiel's lower extremities.

"She's reading him well," Soliel said.

"This is why she is here at this level," Lia said.

Andres called out to Califia and her time was over. Her friends cheered and N'Jobu felt relief. She had stood her ground. Proved her worth.

Califia faced Axiel and he held up his hands. She matched his stance and they danced to the berimbau in a rocking motion. He was smiling wide at her, and Califia was grinning looking up into his eyes…until Axiel stood back and swiped both her legs, knocking her down to the floor with a loud thud.

N'Jobu lunged forward and Bakari grabbed his arm.

"Naw man, it's all good. He's supposed to do that. It's a rasteira move. It's meant to keep the initiate humble. It's cool. She knew it was coming."

Axiel bent down and helped Califia get up. She was all smiles and did a handstand with one hand and poised for her friends.

Andres and another Capoeira elder approached Califia, and Andres held her brown cord. Califia hugged Andres, then untied her old purple cord as he tied on her new brown one. She shook Axiel's hand and he bent low and whispered something in her ear. Her eyes looked surprised, but she smiled and nodded to him.

When the baptisado was officially over, Califia stepped out of the roda and ran up to N'Jobu.

"I got it!" she said, jumping into his arms.

He kissed her and soon she was hugging her friends, letting them touch the new cord. She gave Bakari a super long hug.

"You kept me on point," she told him, her face lit up with gratitude.

"We're going to speak with Papai," Lia said. She and Soliel, followed by Bakari moved through the crowd towards the mestres.

N'Jobu picked her up and kissed her.

"Another milestone," he said.

"He was beating my ass in there for a minute,’ she said, catching her breath.

"What did Axiel say to you?"

"Huh? Oh, he said he wants to spar again before I leave and that when I go up for my final cord, he wants to be there. I can't believe I got to play with him. It feels so surreal right now. All these years watching him in videos, and he's the mestre I go against!"

"How's your leg? He kicked you really hard at the end."

"It's good. I landed hard as fuck though. Might get a bruise."
N'Jobu's face went stern.

"I may need to talk to him about that," he said.

"Don't! It's part of the ceremony to do that."

She rubbed his cheek to soften his expression.
"I'm okay, baby. Really. You can kiss it and make it better later," she teased.

"I will do that," he said.

She clasped his hand and they went around to meet people, Califia translating for those who didn't speak English or were too shy to speak in English to N'Jobu. She was very fluent and by the time they made to the other side of the room to get refreshments, Axiel was sauntering over to her, completely acting like N'Jobu didn't exist. Califia caught on to his arrogance and wrapped her arm around N'Jobu's waist.

"This is my boyfriend, N'Jobu. N'Jobu, Axiel."

N'Jobu shook Axiel's hand. They were both of similar height and similar confidence. Axiel cocked his head to the side.

"Do you practice capoeira?" Axiel said.


"I told Califia that when she is ready to get her final belt, I want to be the one to test her again. She is really, really, good," Axiel said.

"Yes, she is."

Axiel's eyes dropped back to Califia's.

"See you at Lia's later?"

'Yeah, we'll all be there," she said.

Axiel stepped away and N'Jobu looked at Califia.

"Lia says he likes you."

"He likes my fighting style."

"I think he likes more than just that," he teased.

"I don't care what he likes. He's just a teacher. You're my Xangô," she said raising her lips to his.

###

Lia's home was full of good food, good wine, and good company.

The small celebration she put together for Califia and her father Andres was a wonderful end to Califia's trip to Brazil. She had her brown cord at last, and Andres was celebrating thirty years of teaching capoeira.

The party was a wonderful distraction for Califia. N'Jobu was leaving to return to the states a few
days before her to resume his summer session. His leaving São Paulo felt like a dry run of his final departure.

She spent most of the night seated on his lap, rarely leaving his side to mingle with people. She could mingle when he left.

She stroked his scalp, kissed him often, and he seemed pleased with her attention to him. They had been having really gentle sex every night while they were there, and N'Jobu acted like all he wanted to do was keep his mouth between her legs. They were overly stimulated by one another, and it was all because they only had a month left.

She lied to herself a lot.

She pretended that he would do his military time, and write her letters. Or email her. Face chat. She pretended that some deus ex machina would happen and they could live happily ever after because of divine intervention.

But no. None of that would happen.

The lies were a comfort.

She started imagining what she would do the day after he was finally gone from her life.

What would she do after months? A whole year?

What would sex be like with someone new?

Would she ever fall in love hard like this again?

The one consolation she had, was that she had gone through this same scenario with Xavier, who she thought she loved way back when. And N'Jobu had appeared. So it was possible that this thick love could happen to her again. She would die just a little, and then life would go on.

Axiel showed up later in the evening with some of the mestres from the baptisado. N'Jobu was a bit tired and retired early, but insisted that she stay up with her friends.

She spent a bit of time talking to Axiel who was a really interesting guy. He worked for a bank in the city and spent his weekends in the favelas. As the party died down, she found herself alone with him on the patio, the few others now inside talking quietly of politics and food. She talked to him of capoeira, of the mestres he had worked with. He asked about her dreams and goals, wondered how soon she would be coming back to Brazil.

Truth be told, he was the type of dude she would go for. He was smart, educated, and came from humble impoverished roots, so he understood the struggle to make do with what was available around him. He practiced the same art form she loved, and he had that sexy confidence that she found appealing. He was good looking too. Real easy on the eyes.

Listening to Axiel talk, he made her feel that life was still to be had, even if your greatest love was moving on without you. It was a bittersweet evening.

###

N'Jobu watched the two of them quietly from the back room. Thin pale curtains were drawn on the window, but in the dark of the room, he could see Axiel and Califia speaking. He didn't understand a word of what they said, but the tone was cordial, their dialogue going back and forth, Califia making
Axiel smile and laugh often. At one point he watched Axiel show Califia how to do that flip move he used on her in the baptisado. The man was gentle when he touched her, showing her the proper stance and technique. He allowed her to flip him over, and then he showed her other leg moves, and her face looked excited to learn from a true master.

It was hard.

To watch her like this. To know that she may very well find someone soon after he left her. He wanted to see her happy. Wanted her to thrive and do all the things she wanted. She had great friends, and a powerful mind. Like him, she would carry on with her life. Fall in love again. Bakari joined them on the patio, and he watched the three of them practice techniques that Axiel showed them.

Watching Bakari, N'Jobu knew there was no way he could keep in contact with him ever again either. It was because he would want to know how Califia was and would ask Bakari, and then his heart would never heal. They could pretend to just keep their friendship surface level, but he would always want to know. How is she? Where is she? Who is she with? Does she have a family now?

He would lose all of them. These people he grew to love and respect.

He would have to forsake them all.
Forever Don't Last

Chapter Summary

Uh Oh, Part 2

Chapter Notes

Getting down to the last two chapters in this 1st Volume. Thought I'd post this up early to keep my momentum going to get into the next book.

Thanks for traveling this journey with me!

Back to typing.....

"Lord knows I gave it my all
I couldn't save us from falling
Cause some people aren't meant to be together forever forever

'Cause forever, doesn't last too long forever
Doesn't last too long forever
Doesn't last too long forever these days
And I try to believe that we could make it
But trying don't work, so I just have to face that forever
Doesn't last too long forever these days…"

Jazmine Sullivan- "Forever Don't Last"

He couldn't take it.

N'Jobu and Califia took a taxi together to the Sáo Paulo airport alone when it was time for him to return to the states. The night before he had made love to Califia, and that morning they had a lovely breakfast with Soleil, Lia, and Bakari out on the patio. Things were going well until they approached the airport and Califia began bawling uncontrollably.

He held her in his arms and felt his throat constrict and his own eyes waver with tears, but he held it together as they arrived at the terminal. When he dropped off his luggage and they had a few minutes to spare before he had to board, he realized at that moment that he would not be able to leave her again in Oakland like this. He was going to have to slip away from her. The pain on her face and the anguish heaving from her chest crushed his spirit.

He found an empty seat and literally cradled her like a baby in his lap, cooing to her, trying to kiss away her tears.

"Califia, I don't want you to be like this when I leave. I'll see you in two days."

Her breathing calmed and she wiped her eyes with her hands. Her face, nose, and eyes were red, and
her cheeks were damp. He stroked her chin.

"We still have time left together," he said rocking her on his lap.

"I don't want to see you go," she stammered.

"Let's do this. You go to the bathroom and wipe your face with water, and I'll just go, and we won't have to say goodbye. It'll be more like, 'See you soon'. How about that?"

She swiped her hands across her eyes again and nodded her head.

"Give me a kiss," he said.

She sat up in his lap and pressed her lips to his. Her softness and the damp tears on her face unnerved him. His tongue probed her mouth and she held onto his neck. He pulled back from her.

"Go to the Ladies room. I'll see you in two days," he said.

She slipped down from his lap and he watched her walk to the nearest restroom. He made swift work of his legs to get through the checkpoint without looking back.

When he was in a section she couldn't get to and one where she couldn't see him, he felt his chest ache.

"Bast, give me strength," he said clutching his passport.

His flight into Oakland was uneventful, and his Lyft ride to the apartment was quiet. When he stepped into the unit, it was all so clear how he was already gone from the space. The apartment looked sterile, more like a bland motel space without his books and art and personal touches. He texted Califia to let her know he made it back safe.

The next two days were spent writing and sketching in his journal, coming to terms with his final departure and readying his spirit for all the work that stood before him back home. T'Chaka sent messages on his kimoyo beads that he was to meet with the current Ambassador of Wakanda to begin a short internship right before his military service. His new military uniform was already in his suite waiting for him in the palace. His mother sent him new pictures of T'Challa, and Zinzi was ready for his return.

N'Jobu spent time jogging, and a few hours soaking in the apartment jacuzzi. He tried to keep his mind off Califia, but no matter how hard he tried, his thoughts drifted to her. There were already videos up on the net showing the baptisado, and he re-watched her with Axiel.

When her flight was due back, he took a long nap to prepare for her return home.

###

Her arrival down the escalator in the Oakland airport was much different than when she first went to meet N'Jobu after his return from Wakanda.

She saw N'Jobu standing at the bottom waiting for her, a huge grin on his face and a large bouquet of flowers in his hand. Gardenias.

She jumped on him and he carried her to the luggage carousel.

"I missed you so much," she said peppering his face with kisses and cheek rubbings.
"Welcome back," he said, holding her tight.

He grabbed her bag for her when it came around the carousel and they rode the BART home. She told him about sparing with Axiel, and spending time with Soliel trying to come up with a name for their future sister community centers.

When they reached the apartment, Califia was pleasantly surprised to see that N'Jobu had filled the apartment with candles and made her a romantic dinner. He lit the candles and turned off the lights, and it felt like they were back in São Paulo on the rooftop patio.

He had cooked her short ribs with garlic mashed potatoes and fresh sautéed spinach. He mixed pomegranate martinis and spoiled her with chocolate truffles for dessert.

She fell asleep after dinner, but when she woke up in the morning he gave her a foot massage, rubbing her heels, her soles, and her calves with peppermint oil. He checked her thigh and did see a fading bruise from where Axiel knocked her down.

"The next time I see him, I'm punching him," N'Jobu said, stroking her legs, helping the circulation from her long flight.

They went running together after breakfast, then shared a long casual walk home where they didn't talk, just held hands and took in the scenery of the neighborhood.

Their time together was now soft, words spoken in quiet tones, more time spent looking into one another's eyes rather than long conversations as in the past.

They thought about having a going away party for him, but Califia decided that she didn't want to share him. Only their closest friends knew he had to return home, and they all had said their goodbyes by then.

Califia had N'Jobu spend one last dinner with her grandmother, Junie, and Bakari over at the house. Nana cooked creole fried shrimp and a big pot of gumbo with saltwater cornbread, and they sat in her kitchen stuffing their faces and drinking rum and cokes. When Nana went to sleep, they broke out the Hennessey and weed. N'Jobu still just passed the weed without partaking. Square.

N'Jobu worked hard finishing up his summer session. He was able to get the university to set up online classes to finish his final year at home. His last weeks were spent testing and then pleasuring her.

The day before he was to go home they sat in the apartment all day watching old Black seventies movies and snacking on finger foods. He ate that disgusting ice cream he liked too. His bags were by the front door. The flight home was late afternoon the next day.

They were watching the final scene of one of Califia's favorite 70s flicks. A family drama called "Claudine". From a purely cultural anthropology standpoint, N'Jobu found the hair, clothes, and music fascinating. The final scene showed a Black family running to hop onto a police paddy wagon in the middle of a wedding and an activist protest.

"What is it about this movie that you like so much?" he asked her when it was over.

"It just reminds of my maternal grandmother. She was married twice and had kids by two different men, and raised all her kids as a single parent until my Granpa Torry came along and they made this amazing blended family. I imagine that they went through this type of drama trying to come together. It just makes me happy to see a family make it work despite the odds. It's just a classic."
"And 'Superfly'?"

"That's strictly music and fashion. One of my Dad's favorites. I watch them both and it just reminds me of when my family was together."

He held her hand and she ran her fingers along his thumb and index finger as they lay curled up on the couch together. Her eyes seemed to study every groove, fingertip, and nail on his hand. She interlaced her fingers in his and held his hand tight. He nuzzled his face into her neck and breathed in the scent of her hair balm, and the faint aroma of lavender soap on her skin. The credits on the film rolled and when they were over, they stayed still on the couch, listening to the sound of each other's breathing.

He could tell she was trying to keep it together.

"I would like to see that movie with the Black women in New Orleans again," he said. It would be good to watch something where they could laugh and keep the mood light.

She found the film on their DVR and as they watched it, N'Jobu kept touching her hair, stroking the back of her neck with his fingers and kissing her cheek. The moment he nuzzled her ear, she turned to face him on the couch and threw her arms around his neck. He pulled her in tight and the kisses he gave her were delicate as if he were discovering her lips for the very first time again. And like that first time, she gave him complete control of the pace. Twice he had to stop and take deep breaths because kissing her made him feel light-headed like he was being swept into a riptide of intense pleasure. Kissing was always a means to an end with his other relationships, but with Califia, it could become the main event, and on his last night with her, he had to make it into a Rosetta stone to last his lifetime.

Every inch of her lips and tongue he held onto. The taste of her. The soft humming in her throat. How she touched the sensitive skin on the back of his neck with her nails he committed to eternal memory. She had his blood thrumming in his veins. The sunburst of her hair called to him and his fingers found their way to her tresses. He pulled back on her hair so that her neck was accessible to him, and he was soon licking and sucking on her shoulder, his finger reaching up to feel on her breasts.

He heard her gasp when his fingers twisted each of her nipples through her top. He couldn't wait for her, so he pulled off her shirt, and the velour shorts she wore.

She wore the sexiest lingerie she could find and N'Jobu seemed happy to see the sheer purple bra and pantie set. She wore his beads.

Seeing the beads, he traced his fingers around them and then stared down at her panties. He could see his ring on her. He touched it through the panties and felt her sigh into his ear, her legs falling open for him. She looked down to watch his index finger trace around her clit. Her eyes took on a heavy look of arousal and he could already hear himself panting as he touched her.

He unfastened his jeans and slid his boxers down. He wanted her to see his own arousal unfurl before her. Let her see for one last time how she could make him be ready for her without any hesitation. Just looking at her through sheer panties was enough to set him off.

He stroked his length slowly for her, watched it raise up and thicken until he was gripping the head with his fingers. His tip was already leaking with his own natural lubricant, and his breath quickened as he saw her panties begin to stick in her folds. He groaned and tugged on his dick harder, letting her see how weak he could get because of her. Hard, slick, and weak for her body.
"Look what you're doing to me," he moaned, squeezing the head, wiping the dripping pre-cum onto her panties, making them damp and even more sticky.

He yanked her panties off and her fingers went to her labia and opened herself up for him.

"You nasty girl, goddamit," he blurted, twisting his fingers around his frenulum and staring at her pussy.

When he couldn't take it anymore, he picked her up and carried her to their bedroom.

###

They had a rousing spanking session on the bed, her body draped across his knees, his belt striking her with the perfect control that he had.

When he had her creaming, he made her get on her hands and knees facing the closet mirror on the bed. He eased behind her, coating his dick with lubricant, then pushed inside of her, holding her ass cheeks wide open.

He watched her face as he thrust into her. She felt so much love for him, throwing her ass back on him, keeping direct eye contact with him, drinking in every detail of his body and his face. He fucked her hard and fast, his hands gripping her shoulders, reminding her of what made him so exciting in bed. She knew they would have a couple of more trysts before he left, so she indulged him with this quickie. All was well until she gasped out,

"This will always be your pussy, baby."

He stopped thrusting into her, his eyes seeking hers in the mirror. His eyelids shut and he pulled out of her.

"What's wrong…?" she said.

He pulled her up further on the bed and pushed her onto her back. His lips found her lips and his kisses were butter soft, his tongue gentle and tasting of licorice. He threw her legs over his arms and pressed into her, watching her face.

"I know you'll fuck other people, Califia," he said, his thick shaft spreading her open.

"Jobu…," she said, worried that she had hurt his feelings.

He looked down at her clit piercing and his face went slack, his lips parting, his eyes narrow with lust as his seed jewel became coated with her slick.

"Don't forget me…Califia…don't forget me…"

His head dropped into her neck and his body smashed into hers.

"Baby…," she panted, holding him tight, her fingers clutching his back and scalp, her legs wrapped tightly around him. He slowed down and dragged his dick in and out of her, tugging on her clit, her ring touching his shaft. He was so painfully, exquisitely slow and deliberate. This shit right here was why bitches clung to him, she thought as she heard her voice begging him to make her cum hard on his dick.

"Not yet, baby," he whispered rotating his hips and hitting a new spot on her walls.

She groaned so loud that he lifted his head up to look in her face, still moving slowly inside of her.
"Jobu," she whimpered, and she saw him squeeze his eyes shut.

"Make me cum!" she screamed.

"Not yet," he said, shifting his stroke direction.

"Jobu!" she yelled at him, squeezing her thighs tighter around him.

"Let Daddy have this," he whispered, torturing her pussy.

They were both sweating profusely, she could feel drops plopping from his face onto hers. The wet sloppy sounds coming from between her legs had her pointing her toes straight up into the air now.

"I don't want you giving my pussy away," he grunted, barely able to hold onto his control, "you belong on my dick…this dick right here…shit…"

She reached up and scraped her nails gently onto his neck and scalp.

"This pussy will always be yours, no matter what…no matter what…I love you…Jobu…I'll only love you—" she said.

She felt his back spasm and he pushed into her further, his cock swelling, spilling his seed deep inside of her.

"Always yours…always yours…only yours..." she whispered in his ear as he gave his all to her for one last time.

###

He made sure she was in a deep sleep before he put everything into place.

The Dora Milaje had retrieved his luggage and placed it in the BMW for him and waited outside the apartment.

He left a letter with the cashier's check on the bedside nightstand near the clock. He spent the last few moments in the apartment watching her sleep.

This was how he wanted to remember her. Satisfied, sleeping soundly because he had rocked her to sleep the right way. She had his ring, his beads, and a Border Tribe blanket was covering her spent body. His beloved. His woman.

He wanted to reach out and stroke her hair, but he was afraid she would wake up. She was so attuned to his touch. He hoped she would remember this night as something special and divine and as precious as he would keep it in his heart. He hoped she would forgive him for leaving her this way. No goodbyes. Just the memory of their lovemaking.

He stepped away from the bed and walked out of the apartment with Yejide and Ometeko following him once he was down the stairs.

They said nothing and probably had no idea there was a woman in the bedroom.

When he walked past Califia's bike in the carport, he felt a dam breaking inside of him, but he quickly shoved the image out of his mind.

Sitting in the back of the BMV, on his way to the airport to keep the façade of his being a regular foreign student going home, he felt a small wave of tears brimming along his eyes. He ignored it. Pushed it deep down. Locked it away for good. That N'Jobu was no more. He was now Prince
N'Jobu Udaku again. That woman behind him, the one who would wake up in a few hours alone, she was the past.

He handed his American cell phone to Yejide and she pulled it apart destroying it. His computer would be disposed of before they reached the airport.

He watched his neighborhood streak by him through the window.

America was no more.

She was no more.

"Prince N'Jobu?" Ometeko said, looking back at him from the front seat.

He leaned his head against the window, eyes squeezed shut, and his hands balled into fists.

"Your Highness, are you alright?" Ometeko whispered, reaching back her hand to touch him.

"Ometeko, no. Leave him be," Yejide said.

The first of many tears rolled down N'Jobu's face.

###

She smelled caramel cappuccino.

Stretching in the covers, Califia yawned, then stepped off the bed and padded barefoot and naked into the kitchen. The bathroom door was closed, so she thought he was using the restroom. She drank the fresh brew he pre-programmed for her and waited at the kitchen table for him to come out. But after a few minutes, when there was no sound of movement at all, she went to the bathroom door and knocked.

No answer.

Opening the door, she saw that it was empty. She ran to the living room.

His bags were gone.

Stomach churning in fear, she ran to the balcony and flung open the sliding door and screen door, her eyes searching the carport.

His car was gone.

She felt a wailing moan bubbling up in her throat as she ran back into the bedroom to get her cell phone.

"The number you have reached is no longer in service…"

"No…no…no…nooo," she whimpered, throwing on her clothes. She checked the time. It was nine in the morning.

Maybe he went to get food. He did that sometimes. Ran out to get muffins or bagels for her. Her hands were shaking. That had to be it. He was going to get them breakfast. His flight wasn't until three…

She glanced at the clock on the nightstand again. An envelope. Her name on it. His careful delicate
She grabbed the envelope and fumbled with tearing it open.

Inside was a handwritten letter and…a check.

She looked at the dollar amount. Twenty-nine-thousand dollars.

The letter. She took a deep breath. He was gone. He wasn't coming back. Hold on. Just hold on. Breathe.

She unfolded the letter all the way open.

"My Love,

Forgive me.

By the time you read this, I will already be in the air flying home.

I know you expected us to drive to the airport together and to say goodbye there.

I could not do it. I am sorry. I am a coward. Leaving you in Brazil was too painful, and I could not go through that again. I want you to remember us in this bed together. All the mornings and nights I have held you in this room, on our bed…that is how I want to remember my last time with you. The place where we made love, shared love, and spoke of love.

There are no words I could write that can ease the pain I know that you feel right now. I am still a selfish person. I only thought of the way I wanted to see us part. I will own that. You can hate me for that, but I will own that choice.

I have never met anyone like you, and never will again. I will hold you in my heart until I am no more on this earth. You are, and always will be, the greatest joy I have had in my life.

My beloved, go out into the world and move mountains. Know that I will be the wind at your side when you need to fly, the whisper that encourages you when you are ever in doubt, and the comfort that surrounds you when you think all is lost. I love you. Only you. You are my Oyá/Iansã, forever and always…

N'Jobu

She fell to the floor clutching the letter to her chest.

###

"A.J.! Brandon!"

Califia stalked out from her uncle's front porch slamming the screen door behind her as she searched for her two rusty butt brothers. Correction, half-brothers, because she was not going to claim that the problematic DNA inside them came from her mother. That was all their father.

Califia's cousin Kenny was out front turning the spit on the whole roasted pig that was grilling to a greasy and succulent tenderness inside the large barbecue drum that doubled as a smoker.

She could already hear Nana fussing with the boys when she finally found them around back pestering their mother, Melissa.
"Mom! Make them get in the bathroom and clean up the toilet!"

"What?" Melissa said, stroking the forehead of the older boy A.J.

"One of them peed on the toilet seat and didn't clean up after themselves. Ole nasty ass—"

"Cali—" Melissa hissed.

"They are so nasty."

Melissa looked at Brandon.

"Was it you?" Melissa said.

"Maybe…" Brandon said in a sing-song fashion.

Califia grabbed him by his arm and marched him back into the house and straight to the guest bathroom.

"Here!" Califia said handing him lemon disinfectant and a clean sponge.

Brandon grabbed the sponge and disinfectant and sprayed the seat. He wiped up the dribbles of yellow piss, then looked at her when he was done.

"Now clean off the sponge," she said.

"Where?" Brandon whined.

"Boy, you are standing right near a sink. Where do you think?"

"You mean!" Brandon huffed.

"And you're disgusting. You too old to be peeing on the seats like that. You lift it up, do your business and make sure you don't leave a mess for other people," Califia said running hot water on in the sink for him.

Her brother A.J. came peeking into the bathroom.

"I told him to wipe it off. He wouldn't listen," A.J. said.

Califia glanced at both the nine and ten-year-old. They both had the big foreheads of their Daddy and the same wiry haircuts into severe military high and tights.

"You have to respect other people's homes you guys, or they won't invite you back. Do you want to hear me yelling at you all day or playing video games with you?"

"Video games," A.J. said, a smile curling on his lips.

"Okay, well, do better, for me and Mommy," she said.

Brandon cleaned the sponge with more disinfectant under the hot water. Califia took over for him.

"Go play," she said scooting him out of the room.

The lemon smell was so strong in the bathroom, Califia held her nose. She washed her hands and laid the sponge on the windowsill to dry.
The house was filled with strong odors all day.

In the kitchen that morning she watched her mother and Nana pull the membrane lining from a bucket of chitlins, and later that afternoon had to endure the stench of them cooking on the stove. Outside in the yard, her Uncle Pete tossed a twenty-pound turkey inside a smoker right next to the rotating whole pig. Everything smelled of fresh dead meat, boiled eggs cracked open for potato salad, and pungent grated cheeses for mac n' cheese. The Atlanta heat wasn't helping either, so every odor was strong and stuck to her like glue. Chasing after the boys and her other younger cousins had her tired and irritable. She was happy to see her family, many she hadn't seen in years, but it felt like work now that she was an adult, and not fun running around like one of the kids back in the day.

By the afternoon, more relatives had crowded into the house and her Great-Uncle had pulled up into the driveway with his long ass RV with a slew of relations spilling out of it like a giant clown car. The Stevens family was legion.

Her sensitive nose and sluggish energy were happy to see her cousins that were her age finally show up. She caught up on family gossip about who was having new babies and ex-husbands, who was getting married, who was coming out the closet finally even though everyone knew and didn't care, and who had allowed Cousin Earline to make cornbread stuffing without any cornbread.

Califia's Aunt Doxie, the only other ginger in the immediate clan besides Califia, tossed back her fading strawberry blonde hair and cornered her niece near the rotating pig.

"Junie's girlfriend outchea starting trouble," Aunt Doxie said.

"How so?"

"She asked if there was any vegan food. Bitch, what we look like down here?"

Califia's cousins all cackled.

"I made a vegan turkey loaf for her, so she's good," Califia said rubbing lotion on her legs. She purposely wore booty shorts so her Nana wouldn't talk trash when Junie's girl came back from the mall with him.

"She was asking about the greens and the yams. 'Is there pork in it? I can't eat marshmallows on the yams because that's gelatin'. Nana is 'bout to break her foot in that gal's ass. You betta talk to her."

Califia rolled her eyes and saw one of her favorite cousin's roll up in a blue dodge charger. At least she could smoke a bowl with him right quick and get her mind right.

She'd been in Atlanta since N'Jobu left, and it was a smart move on her part because the moment she arrived in Georgia, she hit the ground running staying busy with family, running errands for older relatives and watching after her brothers since her mother decided to show up with the boys, even though this wasn't her family anymore since her divorce years ago. The Stevens family still accepted her as one of their own and even tolerated her sons by another man. She was always going to be Dante's wife no matter what to them.

The day N'Jobu left felt like the worst pain, but after reading his letter and depositing the cashier's check at her bank, Califia went for a long ride on her bike down the Pacific Coast Highway. After hours of riding, she felt level-headed enough to start planning her future. It still hurt to think about him, but staying active and out of California helped a lot.

She still read his letter every now and then, tracing her fingers over his signature that was written in Wakandan and feeling her chest quake from the words, but now it grew easier to think without
automatically wanting to cry. The grief was still there, but not as raw as it once was.

She stopped checking her phone for texts, and her social media accounts for DM's. All of N'Jobu's accounts were inactive. The last message he sent to all of his friends was a one-word statement. "Home." That was it.

Her own email account was now inactive because she had been using a university account for years. Even if she wanted to email N'Jobu, neither one of them could. And she never had her own email account. She made up one the moment her university account was taken away. She couldn't email him if she wanted to.

But he could have a burner account. He could be watching her social media. She posted pictures of the family in Atlanta, shots of her eating lemon pepper wings, smacking on good barbecue, and making peach cobbler with Nana. But there were no responses or emojis coming from him.

She went out to a few clubs in Atlanta with her cousins and partied a bit, but she didn't feel like staying out longer and wasn't interested in drinking too much anymore. Junie was a big help in keeping her mind of N'Jobu by introducing her to a bunch of Kenny's single friends, hard-working brothas who wanted to get married and have kids right away. Many were very good-looking and valuable prospects, but her head wasn't in that space.

Someone had moved one of the house speakers to the window and started blasting music. The reunion was in full swing. The barbecue was the first activity and the next day the family would be touring the MLK museum wearing their family reunion t-shirts and matching baseball caps.

The barbecue smoke was getting to her so she went into the house.

"Whoo, they got this living room smelling like pig ass," Aunt Doxie said, "Cali, go get me the air freshener, please."

Cali went into the guest bathroom and dug under the sink. The lemon disinfectant smell was getting to her again, churning her stomach. Something caught her eye when she found the aerosol spray of apple-cinnamon freshener.

An unopened bag of sanitary napkins. Hers.

She sat back on her haunches, spray can in her hand, and her mind counted back weeks. She bought the pads before she left for Atlanta because she knew she would need them because she was due…

She ran to the bedroom she shared with her mother and dug her cell phone out of her purse. Searching on her calendar app, she felt her heart rate increase. She saw the date of her last period from a while back, and there wasn't anything marked for when she was due. She was always on time, like the Italian trains back in Mussolini's day. And she always marked her app when her periods came.

Holy shit.

Holy shit.

She'd missed a period.

She took her pills faithfully. It had to be the stress from the separation.

She fell back on her butt, her mind trying to think of every pregnancy cliché. She didn't have morning sickness. She didn't feel bloated. Her breasts weren't tender.
Calm down. Think.

She stood up from the floor and gave Aunt Doxie the air freshener, and walked outside to find her cousin Will so she could borrow his car.

###

She drove twenty minutes outside her uncle's neighborhood to find a drugstore in a predominately white area so she wouldn't run into anyone she knew. She bought two pregnancy test kits and toilet paper to cover her tracks. At the counter, she couldn't even look at the cashier as her total was rung up. She paid in cash and ran out to the dodge charger.

Sitting in the car she gripped the steering wheel.

She couldn't be pregnant.

As much sex as they had, her birth control was always strong. Full proof in her mind. She rationalized that if her pills didn't work, she would've gotten knocked up a long time ago by him. It had to be stress, the travel, eating heavier foods…

She couldn't tell anyone.

Walking back into her uncle's house, she was able to slip past everyone with the bag, and lock herself inside the master bedroom bathroom. It was more private and no one would go there first to use the bathroom.

She quickly read the instructions, peed on the applicator tip and waited.

She kept checking her cell phone for the time, the applicator stick hidden under a piece of tissue on the sink.

When she finally looked after the allotted waiting time, a rush of air exhaled from her mouth and a relieved smile crossed her lips. Negative.

She clutched her stomach and gave a nervous laugh. She wasn't pregnant. Breathe.

She wiped her face and wrapped the applicator stick in a ton of tissue and slipped it in her suitcase to be disposed of later when no one was around. She hid the other test kit in her suitcase too. She wondered if she could get a refund for it since she still had the receipt.

She returned to the barbecue in high spirits, her stomach flip-flopping from the quick reversal of fortune.

Jesus. What if she had been pregnant? She couldn't even get in touch with N'Jobu. Counting back days, she could only think if she had been, then it happened when they came back from Brazil, all the fucking they were getting in right before he left.

"Who is peeing on the toilet seat?" Nana yelled out.

Califia went to look for Brandon.

###

Califia had gotten over the pregnancy scare for a total of six days.

Her period still hadn't come, and her Aunt Doxie had mentioned dreaming about fish in the middle of
Sunday dinner at cousin Earline's house, and all the women present started tittering under their breath and looking at her cousin Marvella who had been looking pretty plump which was not the norm for her.

"I'm telling y'all, I dream of fish, somebody is pregnant. Hand to Gawd, I have never been wrong," Earline said, a Newport dangling from her lips as she sat at her dining room table. She tapped the cigarette ashes into an ashtray near her hand, and Nana just nodded her head in agreement while snacking on a lemon pound cake.

Just hearing the word pregnant made Califia's heart palpitate.

When they were back in Kenny's house and she had the guestroom to herself since her mother returned to New Jersey, Califia brought out the second pregnancy test kit.

She slipped into the guest bathroom while everyone was asleep and peed on the applicator tip once again.

Sitting on the toilet seat and waiting for the results, she was amazed at how calm she felt. The first time she had been jittery, but this time it felt like the quiet before a storm.

Time.

She stared at the stick.

Stared at it again then closed her eyes and felt a shudder go through her.

Positive.

The most responsible girl in the world, the one who swore up and down that she wasn't having any kids until much later in life because she had things to do…she was sitting there holding a stick that read "Positive." No guessing about one bar or two, or thinking she had misread the outcome. The shit said PREGNANT. Surprise Bitch is what it should've read.

She and N'Jobu had connected on a cosmic level and he had put a baby in her.

The first feeling she had once she returned to her guest room was a quiet awe. She touched her belly and imagined a teeny tiny formation of cells inside of her body. A little one taking traits from her and him and creating someone brand new.

The second feeling she had was a need to look up information, but she wanted to wait. She had to get to a clinic as soon as possible to confirm that she really was pregnant. She decided to use the last few days of her stay in Atlanta to wrap her head around this new reality.

The third feeling was she was afraid. Very afraid. What would her family think? Her friends? She had got caught out there, and the father of her child had left the country and she had no real way of contacting him.

But he was the son of diplomats.

She could maybe contact an embassy and get information on how to get in touch with him. Maybe if she direct messaged him with this bit of news he would respond.

They had never discussed what they would do if they got pregnant.

Honestly, had it been anyone else, she would've been upset with herself. But it was N'Jobu. The man
she loved. This child was made with love.

Wasn't no shame in that.

She fell asleep on the bed in her clothes, and the next morning as she scoured the internet for a discreet clinic where she could get tested, she knew one thing for sure.

She was keeping this baby.

No matter what.
Evergreen

Chapter Summary

Califia deals with being pregnant and alone.

Chapter Notes

Hey All,

Already prepping the next volume of Califia and N'Jobu.

Thank you for hanging with me. Hope those of you in the states had a good Turkey Day yesterday. If you don't celebrate it, then Happy Indigenous Peoples Day and Month! Shout out to my own Mississippi Choctaw peoples.

It was not easy writing Califia being alone in this chapter, but there is light coming, I promise.

I miss them being together, so let me work on getting that fixed.

Final chapter coming soon, probably late Sunday night after I go through all this leftover food, lol!

The next book will be titled "All Shades of Brown Boy" in the Black Boys Bloom Thorns First Series. Erik is coming, I promise. Let me indulge my sick need for this slow burn. Y'all know this shit turns tragic from the movie, so let us savor them for as long as we can. The next book gets a little hectic and sets up the course of Erik's life.

Stay up!

"So will you wait for me?
My evergreen
I know it's just as hard in Heaven
So will you wait for me?
My evergreen
I know it's just as hard
My evergreen
Evergreen
My evergreen…"

Yebba – "Evergreen"

Califia sat inside a clinic that was over-crowded and understaffed.

Her appointment had been for nine in the morning but she wasn't ushered into an examination room until almost eleven. She watched women of various backgrounds and colors sit around her waiting
for their names to be called. Some were obviously pregnant, and Califia imagined how she would
look in five months. Seven. Nine.

Sitting there gave her unhurried time to think.

She waited another week after she returned from Atlanta to see a doctor. Part of her wait was to see
if maybe the second test was wrong and her period would actually show up. It didn't. The other part
of the wait was to get her head straight, to make sure that having a baby was the best decision for her
life at that moment.

She had always been pro-choice, and always thought she would get an abortion if she had an
unplanned pregnancy. This baby was unplanned, but because it was N'Jobu's child, she had romantic
notions filter through her mind and even her dreams. Somehow, she would find him and he would
come back and they would marry and live happily ever after. But then, reality check. What if she did
find him and he didn't want a baby? Could she just go ahead and have a child if the father was
against it? They were both responsible for the pregnancy. If N'Jobu was concerned with not having a
baby, he sure didn't show it. Pulling out was not his thing.

If he indeed told her he didn't want the baby, and she went ahead and had it, then she would have to
figure out child support. The thought of him not wanting their baby made her feel agitated. She was
in love with him. Could she still love him if he wanted her to abort? Could she still love him if he
refused to see the child? And what if she could reach him and he did act like he wanted to be a
father? What if he turned out like her friend Yolanda's boyfriend who acted like he was in it for the
long haul, came to the baby shower and everything, then ghosted her after the baby was born?

Having the child would mean changing her immediate educational plans. She would have to put off
the credential program for at least a year. She wasn't starting until January, but by her calculations, if
she started the accelerated program, her baby would come in May, and she'd have to endure being
pregnant, trying to stay on top of her studies, and then find a job right after.

If she put off a year, she could maybe get her old job back at the Blue Rose after she had the baby
and earn some cash on top of the money N'Jobu left for her. She could live with her grandmother
and maybe get neighborhood babysitters to help her grandmother when she was at work. Use the
babysitting network of her friends whom she always watched kids for. Maybe she could sign up for
special single mother programs to get her through until she could get her credential and find a job.

Her own mother had gone through this. But she also had her father, Dante, to support her. And they
had gotten married.

Her mother.

Califa was not up to telling her mother. She wasn't even ready to tell Nana yet.

Now that she was clearly heading into the baby zone, she would have to sell her bike. Maybe find a
good used car she could buy. Nana's old Buick was on its last legs.

When she was finally led into the examination room, her mind was pretty much made up. The baby
was coming and she had to get ready. Sacrifice some things until she could get herself into a better
position. That may mean staying in the credential program through the pregnancy. N'Jobu's generous
monetary gift wouldn't last long with a baby. She could stretch it for sure, but babies grew and
became more expensive with time.

She peed in a cup. She was fortunate to have a clinic with an in-house lab, so she hung around
reading a book, and when the results were back, she wasn't surprised.
From the dates she gave the doctor about her last cycle, she was about three weeks along. She tried to figure out how her birth control could've failed her. She knew birth control wasn't always 100%, but she felt like there had to be a catastrophic reason why it failed now. She told the doctor about being ill and taking antibiotics, but it was the natural supplements she was using afterward that made the doctor suspect the culprit. St. John's Wort. It was known to break down estrogen. Califia didn't know that. She had been trying to get ready for Brazil and naturally help her anxiety, but instead, she had possibly made her birth control fail probably in combination with her antibiotic medication.

The doctor gave her a new appointment once Califia made it clear she was having the baby. She was given brochures full of info and was told to start taking prenatal vitamins.

Walking out of the clinic, she felt a bit overwhelmed. Keeping this to herself, for now, was not going to be easy.

Inside a drug store, she bought a large bottle of organic prenatal capsules. Holding the vitamins in her hands, her mind soaked in the gravity of her new situation. She wanted this baby because it was a part of N’Jobu and her, and probably the only part of him she would ever have again for the rest of her life. She felt faint for a moment and her empty hand reached out and held onto the shelf full of vitamins. She inhaled deeply and exhaled until she felt less faint and more aware of her surroundings.

Shit got real.

Walking to her bike with the bag of vitamins in her hand, heated tears streaked down her face making her eyes blurry and irritated. She felt so alone without N'Jobu. She sat on her bike and took out her cell. She hit up all his social media pages. All were deleted except for his Flashchat account that university students used to plan activities with large groups. She hit him up privately.

I HAVE TO TALK TO YOU. IT'S URGENT. I HAVE A MEDICAL EMERGENCY.

She sent the message and hoped he would respond. She kept it cryptic just in case he was reading it and his people were around him. She had already sent an email to the Wakandan Embassy asking for his contact info. She made up a story about being a Berkley classmate wanting to do an interview with former international students and their experience in grad school. Her other internet searches for his name came up zilch.

Riding home, she thought of who to tell first.

###

Bakari ate his burger like he hadn't eaten in years. The cheese and extra fried onions he asked for dribbled out from the bun and he wiped his greasy lips with a handful of napkins.

Califa sat across from him eating a less messy burger without cheese. She drank from the bottled water she bought instead of her usual sugar infested cherry cola. Their favorite burger spot wasn't full of customers, so they had a whole booth and entire left side of the fast-food place to themselves.

They shared a tray full of fries and Bakari finally looked at her. Really looked at her.

"What's going on, Cali?"

His voice was soft, not exactly prodding, but he knew her better than anyone, and his eyes told her he knew something was up.

"I have to talk to you about something important, and…I don't want you to judge me…and…"
Her eyes welled up. His hand shot across the table and held one of hers.

"What is it? I'd never judge you. You know that," he said.

"I went to the clinic. I'm pregnant. And I can't reach N'Jobu."

He squeezed her hand, and then he closed his eyes for a second. He pressed his lips together then looked at her again.

"You're the only person who knows right now," she said, wiping an errant tear away from her eyes. His gaze was gentle.

"So, the baby will be here before summer," he said.

"Yeah."

He saw the unanswered question in her eyes.

"Girl, I know you're keeping that nigga's baby. As in love with him as you are. You're making me an uncle before I get into law school. Dang, didn't even give me a chance to make some real money first before I spoil this kid."

She closed her eyes as more tears leaked out, a smile plastered on her face. Bakari scooted out from his booth seat and moved to sit next to her. He put his arm around her. Her head leaned on his shoulder.

"Cali, I'm here for you. Don't cry. My niece or nephew just has to wait a little longer for the really good toys from me."

"You stupid," she whispered.

"I wish you would've told me sooner. I would've gone to the clinic with you."

"I'm still trying to sort things out. Figure out how I'm going to do this."

"We gotta find N'Jobu," he said.

"I've tried. His Embassy sent me an email that they would forward my contact info, but I haven't heard from anyone. I even hit up Berkley to try and forward him a handwritten letter. They wouldn't give me any private info on him. I don't even know where in Wakanda he lives. I don't know anything."

"We'll figure it out. Right now, we have to look after you."

"I don't want a lot of people to know. Just you, Rolita, Soliel…Serah…"

"Serah would be the best person to contact in order to find N'Jobu. She may know some other ways to find him through her parents. Don't worry."

"We didn't plan this, Bakari…"

"Life is life. You two were probably meant to have this kid."

Califia looked up into his face.
"I miss him so much," she said squeezing her fists into his chest.

"I miss him too. When do you plan to tell your family?"

She sat back in the booth seat.

"I'm scared. My mom is going to pitch a fit. Nana is going to be disappointed. I'm embarrassed to tell my father. I just want to wait until I'm further along and I have my shit together more. He left me some money," she said.

"N'Jobu?"

"Yeah, almost thirty-thousand dollars."

Bakari whistled.

"That'll help for a minute," he said.

"You haven't heard anything from him?" she said.

"Naw. He just fell off the face of the earth. If he's doing military service, he may be off the radar until he's finished. And since he's the son of diplomats, they may keep him hidden for safety reasons."

Califia's face blanched at the thought of having their baby and not being able to see him for two years.

"I'll be there with you when you tell the rest of the family. I won't let them shame you or make you feel guilty that he's gone," he said.

"Thank you."

Bakari kissed her cheek and held her a little tighter.

"I want to tell the girls all at the same time. I'll do a face chat for that. I can ask Serah about finding him then."

"Don't be scared, Cali. You have a strong support system."

She squeezed his arm.

"Let me take you home," he said.

They walked out of the burger spot and slipped inside his car.

"Someone you may want to hit up is Moises. He has connections," Bakari said.

Califia took out her cell and texted Moises. She was exhausting all possibilities. The more she thought about it, the more she had to accept that she may never be able to find him. She would have to be a single mom. And the only thing she would know to tell her child was that they had been in love, a sweet crazy love that didn't last long enough.

Riding in Bakari's car, Califia held onto her stomach and stared out of the window. There were good pre-schools near her grandmother. But she wanted to keep her baby in Oakland near the social scene and around the people she wanted to raise her child with. She was an Oaktown girl. The Town was where N'Jobu's baby would grow up, rooted in its history and culture and legacy of Black resistance.
She sat up a little higher in the passenger seat.

She was going to raise a soldier. Raise her or him up in intentional Blackness. Give her child all the nurturing and emotional support she didn't get when she was growing up.

She looked down at her hands sitting on her belly. It was possible that N'Jobu would go on and marry his Wakandan wife and have other children and never see her again. Or their baby. But this firstborn, his firstborn, this one would be extra special. Because she was the mother, Oya/Iansã.

Califia smiled to herself and rested her head back on the headrest. A new sense of calm came over her.

She would make this work.

She had to.

###

Soliel, Rolita, and Serah gawked at her.

Their face chat session started breezily enough. Serah showed off her engagement ring and made them all mark their calendars two years in advance for her fall wedding. They were all going to be bridesmaids in her nuptials to Addae in New York.

Rolita was in the process of recording a full-length indie album with her band and would go on tour after she graduated. Plans were made to be groupies and follow them up and down the West Coast.

Soliel was busy starting her new job in social work in her city, but she was trying to be transferred to cases in her own neighborhood.

And then it came to Califia.

When questions came up about starting her credential program, she got very quiet.

"You guys. I'ma be real with you, so please just listen. I may have to put off my program for a year."

"Why?" Serah said with a look of surprise.

"I'm having a baby."

Eyes bugged out and complete silence from them all left her feeling awkward.

"By who?" Rolita said, and then Soliel started laughing.

"What is so funny?" Califia said feeling hurt and a bit miffed.

"Lia told me after you left Brazil that she would bet money that he would get you pregnant. You two had that baby-making energy the whole time you were here!"

Serah was the only one who hadn't said anything.

"Serah?" Califia said.

"I'm speechless. What about N'Jobu?"

"I'm trying to find him. He doesn't know. I just found out. You three and Bakari are the only people who know."
"Well, you certainly don't have to put off the credential program. You have to finish that. When is your due date? I can push back my tour a bit after you have the baby," Rolita said.

"Yes, let us know now so I can plan my flight to be there," Soliel said grabbing a physical calendar.

"You'll be able to fit the dress I have planned for my bridesmaids. If the baby is walking well by then, do you all think a toddler flower girl or ring bearer would be okay?"

Califia's mouth flew open.

"You two losers owe me ten dollars apiece," Soliel said.

"What's your email?" Rolita said holding up her cell.

"What is going on?" Califia said.

Serah started giggling, and then Soliel stared at her.

"Don't be mad, Califia, but….we had a bet going that you would get pregnant by N'Jobu. Lia guessed that would happen after she met him at the graduation dinner. She was even surer after Brazil."

"Ohmigod," Califia said.

"Cali, we didn't really think it would happen—" Rolita said.

"It was happening, I heard them every night in Sao Paulo—" Soliel said.

"Califia, don't be embarrassed," Serah said.

They all laughed with her until Califia started to tear up.

"Cali, don't cry," Rolita said.

"Oh, honey, it's okay, it's okay, don't cry. We three will be the Fairy Godmothers of a very beautiful baby girl—"

"Or boy—" Soliel said.

"It's a girl. I can feel it from here. We will treat her like a Princess, you watch, Califia."

Califia stared at her friends, thankful for their support and teasing.

"Serah, I really need your help finding him," she said.

"I will do my best. Addae knows people and I will see what my connections can do. He hasn't tried to reach out at all since he's been gone?"

Califia shook her head.

"Bakari told me to hit up Moises too."

"Yes, that's good," Serah said.

Soliel stared at Califia for a long time. "We are with you, sis," she said.

"Thank you, Soleil," Califia said, "I'm scared. Anxious as hell. Just so it's on the table, I was using
birth control, but my doctor thinks me taking some herbal medicine and some antibiotics messed up my pills."

"That's not important, Cali. None of us were looking at you like you fucked up or failed. It happens. You see what went down with Joi and Anderson last year. Pills, pulling out, condoms, and they still got pregnant. And now they have their favorite little girl."

"I have a lot to work out you guys," Califia said.

"Then we'll work it out with you," Soliel said.

Rolita took out a piece of paper.

"But first, time for baby names. And Rolita is a wonderful name for a girl, just so you know," Rolita said winking at Califia.

###

The morning sickness started.

Califia kept crackers by the side of her bed with water. She was told by Rolita that it helped her sister out a lot. Stuffing two crackers in her mouth and gulping down water, Califia sat in her bed inside her grandmother's house and waited for the feeling to pass. Her heightened sense of smell increased, and her breasts were starting to feel different to her.

There was still no word on N'Jobu.

At this point, he wasn't her main concern. She had to tend to the baby and prepare herself for school. She decided to stay in the credential program. She had to complete what she planned no matter what. Her own mother carried her while going to classes and through schoolwork. She could do that and more.

The uneasiness in her belly passed, the crackers doing their job quite well in Califia's mind. She stood up, stretched, and decided to shower before checking emails.

"Cali, you have some mail."

Nana's voice called from the hall.

Califia threw on some shorts and opened her bedroom door. Nana handed her a credit card bill, a cell phone bill, and a postcard.

The front of the postcard said "Welcome to Lake Nyanza" with a picture of cool blue waters and what looked like a small empty floating beach house drifting atop the lake. Flipping it over she saw only her first name and her grandmother's address. In small postcard type at the bottom, she saw the words "Nyanza Lake, Niganda."

N'Jobu.

It had to be him.

She looked at the picture again then stared at the writing on the back once more. It was his handwriting.

"Cali? What's the matter?" Nana said.
"This is from N'Jobu, Nana," she said, her voice small and jumpy.

"Oh, Dayclean. How is he?"

"I don't know. I can't contact him. I don't know where he is."

"There's no address on the postcard?"

"No."

"Cali—"

Califia reached out and hugged her grandmother.

"Nana…Nana…" Califia said shaking in her grandmother's arms.

Nana walked Califia back to her room and they sat on the bed together.

"What's wrong?" Nana said.

Califia wiped her eyes and held the postcard near her mouth.

"Please don't be mad…"

"Say it," Nana said, her eyes soft and her hands softer around Califia's waist.

Califia held her head down and inhaled. She wiped her eyes again and gazed at her grandmother.

"I'm having a baby."

Nana's sharp intake of breath made Califia flinch. Her grandmother nodded her head in a curious way.

"Doxie called it in Atlanta. It was you she dreamed about, not Marvella."

"I'm sorry…"

"When is the baby due?"

"May."

Nana stood up and clapped her hands together. Califia heard the disappointment in the sharp sound.

"Does Dayclean know?"

Califia shook her head.

Nana took the postcard from her hand.

"Niganda? I thought he was from Wakanda."

"He is."

"But he sent you this from another country."

"His military training might be there."
"Go look up this Niganda," Nana said.

Califia picked up her computer bag and pulled out her laptop. Sitting on the bed, Califia waited for her computer to boot up. When it was ready, she looked up Niganda.

"It shares a border with Wakanda and the lake."

"You've tried to reach him…"

"Yes. I've reached out to friends, the Wakandan Embassy, his school. I think the military has him isolated. He might not be getting anything from anyone right now."

"Do your parents know yet?"

"No."

"Califia…Lord, Jesus," Nana said sitting back next to her.

"I know…I messed up," she said.

"Stop saying that. You're grown. You'll handle this like a grown up."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"You have a doctor? Do you know where you want to have it?"

"I'm still figuring that out. I saw a doctor at the clinic."

"You'll have to tell your mother soon. You're still on her insurance. You can get a good doctor through her."

"I'm not ready to tell her—"

"Not ready? This baby doesn't care if you're not ready. You get ready. Call her right now—"

"I can't. Not right now, Nana. Please. I'm still coming to terms with this—"

"Then I'll call her—"

Califia grabbed her grandmother's hand and held it tight, her own hand shaking while she held it.

"Nana, please…not now. She has always judged me and right now I'm not ready to carry any more shame. I didn't want to tell you yet either…but that postcard caught me off guard…I've been trying so hard to find N'Jobu so he can help me…I just need a few days…I can't deal with her…not yet."

"What about your father?"

Califia shook her head, and her eyes shut tight.

"I'll use the clinic for right now. N'Jobu left me a lot of money, and I can use it to handle things until I figure out all the details of where I'll have—"

"Okay, okay. Calm down. It's still early. Call them when you're ready."

Nana hugged Califia.

"Little girl, I'm not mad that you're having a baby. I just wish you had more time to live a little before
all the hard work that's coming your way. That's all. If I sound upset, it's because I only want to see you succeed and have some fun before life wears on you. And it will. Trust me. Dayclean doesn't feel like the type who would abandon you on purpose. How much money did he leave you?"

"Almost thirty thousand."

"That much? Why?"

"I don't know. He left me a letter saying he loved me and would miss me, and there was a cashier's check."

Nana patted Califia's knee and stood up. Her eyes were full of love and deep compassion as she rubbed Califia's shoulder.

"I'm going to get you some orange juice. You'll need a lot of folic acids. And greens. Pot liquor from a good batch of greens every week will keep you healthy. And fresh okra. I hope you have a girl, I can't deal with no more boys up in my house…"

Nana left the room and Califia sat on her bed feeling better.

She typed up "Niganda postcards" on her computer to see if she could trace exactly where the postcard came from in Niganda. Nothing significant came up. Niganda had a lot more information about its country available online more so than Wakanda.

Reading about Niganda, she learned that it had some beef with Wakanda over ancient land rights and some recent skirmishes over the use of Lake Nyanza. As recent as N'Jobu's trip back home in March. She hoped there weren't any serious problems for him there. She gazed at his writing again. No note. Just her name and address. Was he just letting her know he was okay? Thinking of her?

She lay back on her bed and stroked her belly. Somehow, he had randomly chosen a postcard and mailed it, and the moment she got it, she told her grandmother her secret and she felt better for doing it now instead of waiting. She curled up under the covers and Nana walked back in with a big glass of orange juice. Califia drank it down. Nana took back the glass.

"Rest a bit longer. That fatigue will come for you soon enough. I'll make you some breakfast."

Califia turned on her side and Nana moved her computer onto the old bureau in the corner. She turned to look at Califia.

"Ease your mind," Nana said.

Lying in bed, Califia dozed on and off and found herself in a weird lucid state. She curled her fingers around the postcard and for a second, she thought she could feel N'Jobu pressed into her back, that familiar pressure feeling so real. She could almost sense his lips on the back of her neck.

###

"I really need you guys to focus."

Califia stared at her class of teenaged charges. She stopped playing her berimbau and just stared at them, her eyes and energy weary from their lack of concentration and precision. Bakari stopped playing his drum and glared at the young people.

"From the top, and this time, please be serious," she said, striking the berimbau.
The students moved together, practicing the moves she showed them to help work on defensive stances. They still weren't getting it together.

"That's it. We're done for today," Califia snapped, walking away from the teens and placing her berimbau inside its carry bag. She heard the young people grumble, but she ignored them. Her hormones were all over the place and she had little patience that day. Bakari packed up his drum and stood next to her.

"You okay?"

She rubbed her shoulder and rolled her neck. She'd been feeling sharp pains in her shoulder all day, and her stomach was just having an off day. She couldn't keep any food down.

"Just a bad day. It happens," she said.

They walked out of the storefront studio together as another set of teacher's walked in. They placed their instruments in Bakari's car trunk.

"You still up for the movie?" Bakari said.

"Yeah, I'm good. I need to get out."

They rode over to the mall in silence, and once they found parking, Califia felt a headache building.

"Moises wasn't able to find out anything," she said as they walked through the mall.

Bakari looked disappointed.

"Addae came up with nothing. The Embassy hasn't responded to my follow up emails. All I have is that stupid postcard…"

"Cali—"

She stopped walking. They were near a Cinnabon booth and a sports outlet store.

"What the fuck am I doing?" she said. She put her hands on her hips and felt her head throbbing and her anger rising.

Bakari watched her with concern, and she shook her head at him.

"I'm okay, B."

"You're not changing your mind about having it are you?"

"I don't even know what to think, honestly. I'm making a mistake, right? I'm going to be a single parent and I'm not ready. I'm not ready…I'm not…"

Bakari pulled her closer to the sports store and out of the pathway of mall patrons whisking past them.

"Hey, it's okay to have doubts. You're not alone in this."

"I need him. I can't do this without him, I can't…"

"Yes, you can."
Califia folded her arms across her chest. Her nipples felt itchy.

"You want to go home?"

"No, I want to see the movie. I'm just...I'm venting. My body is being difficult today and my nerves are all over the place. My hormones are jacked...let's go see the movie. I'll be alright."

"Look," he said, pointing to the store window.

Califia turned, facing the window. He was pointing at a tiny pair of red Chuck Taylor sneakers.

"C'mon," he said, clasping her hand and pulling her into the store.

He bought her the baby shoes and she played with them with her fingers. It made her smile.

"All this stress will pay off when my niece/nephew puts those sneakers on," Bakari said.

She put the little shoes inside a shopping bag and they headed over to the cinema theater.

The movie was a horrible comedy that made Califia laugh anyway and it made her feel a whole lot better by the time they left.

They were buying Cinnabon mini bites when a sharp pain struck Califia's left side. Her hand gripped her abdomen.

"Cali?"

"Something doesn't feel right."

She closed her eyes and bent over, taking in sharp inhales to calm herself.

"Can you walk?"

"I think so. Bakari, something's wrong."

She felt like she was going to black out.

###

The emergency room doctor had kind eyes.

When Califia explained how far along she was in her pregnancy, the man had her moved to see an OB/GYN. Her mother's insurance was a huge help, and Califia saw first hand how much better treatment she received only because her mother had resources and a PPO.

Bakari sat with her as she laid on an examining table. She called her grandmother and let her know what was happening.

A short-haired woman doctor soon appeared along with a nurse, and she was pleasant and looked at Califia's chart.

"Hi Califia, I'm Dr. Huang. I'm going to do an ultrasound. Are you still feeling pain now?"

"It's more like a dull ache now. But it still hurts."

"Okay. I'm going to put some gel on you, it'll be a little cold, I apologize, and then I'll run the wand and we'll see what's going on."
Califia nodded.

Her blue paper gown was lifted up and she felt the gel cool her tummy as it was smeared on her. Bakari held her hand.

"Just relax, Califia. I'm going to use the ultrasound now," Dr. Huang said.

Califia closed her eyes and held Bakari’s hand as she felt the scan roll across her tummy. The doctor didn't say anything. Califia opened her eyes.

"You're five weeks along, right?"

The doctor's voice sounded puzzled.

"Is something wrong?" Califia said.

Dr. Huang looked at Califia. Califia refused to look at the monitor.

"I don't see anything in the uterus—"

"What?"

"Early pregnancy is hard to detect sometimes. This may be an ectopic pregnancy and I need to be sure."

"Ectopic?"

Dr. Huang took Califia's hand.

"Sometimes the egg implants itself where it's not supposed to. I don't see anything in your uterus and I need to find it. I'm going to use an internal wand on you so I can get a better sense of what's going on."

Califia nodded her head, feeling her lip tremble. Dr, Huang squeezed her hand and the nurse helped Califia get into stirrups. Bakari kept his eyes on her.

"Hang in there, Cali. We'll find out what's happening. Everything will be okay," he said.

She knew he was scared by the way his voice wavered. Califia closed her eyes again. The wand felt like a lubricated bulbous dildo as it entered her vagina.

"You're doing great, Califia," the doctor said.

Doing great meant nothing to Califia. She took deep breaths. Tried to focus on something positive. Those little baby shoes. Those cute tiny shoes that were overpriced and not worth buying because a baby could only wear it a few times before they became useless.

She thought of the shoes.

###

She sat in the hospital room.

She heard the doctor.

But she was trying to understand.
Nana was there with her along with Rolita. Bakari waited for them outside.

"My baby has implanted itself in my tube?"

"Yes."

Califia took a deep breath. She had money.

"Is it possible to transplant it to my—"

"No. Ectopic pregnancies are not viable. Right now, we are up against time. We don't want your fallopian tube to burst and cause more problems. You have some options at this point. We can give you medicine that may help break up the cells so the body can reabsorb them naturally. If the medicine doesn't work, we can do surgery and remove the…"

Califia heard all her options in a daze. Even the wait and see approach to monitor her hCG levels. But the concern was saving her fallopian tube. Dr. Huang said she still had chances to have a baby in the future. But this pregnancy. This one couldn't happen.

She rubbed her hand on her thigh, felt her leg bouncing with nerves. She would not be having their baby. She pressed her right hand over her eyes and felt her face grow tight. Nana's warm hand stroked her back. Rolita held her other hand.

She was able to tell them that she wanted to try the medication first before her tears came.

She was given the rundown of the side effects that could happen, but it was all white noise at that point.

They ran blood tests and checked her other vital organ functions before she was given an injection of methotrexate a few days later and sent home.

Lying in bed, she wrapped herself in a cocoon of blankets. As she began to drift off, she thought she could feel N’Jobu next to her. She turned her body and reached her hand out, knowing she wouldn't touch anything, but the feeling was so real it gave her comfort.

###

He woke up from a fitful sleep.

For a few moments, he felt the dull weight of Califia lying on his arm. He smiled and turned to face her and found nothing. His hand stretched out and felt only a lumpy pillow. He sat up.

The barracks were still dark even though it was nearing dawn. His breathing felt labored from the sudden feeling of Califia's presence.

He still had dreams of her, but lately, he was having vivid tangible feelings of her being in bed with him. Sometimes he thought he could smell her hair, or even hear a slight sigh like he used to encounter as she would turn in her sleep and hold onto his waist.

He swung his legs over the edge of the small bed and sat up. He heard the sleepy breathing from the other soldiers in the room.

Leaving her had only made her cling to his thoughts even stronger.

The last time he had leave, he went over to Niganda and snuck a postcard out to her. The moment he sent it, he regretted it. It was cruel. He had to break off from her for good. Sending her things would
give her false hope. Give himself false hope.

The other cruelty he suffered was sneaking off and watching one of their old sex videos. Although pleasurable, his orgasm was painful after it was over. He would never capture that intensity again. He deleted every video and every picture of her except for one. The one he showed Zinzi. He allowed himself just that single treasure of her. He told himself it was to remember her face for always. But he was lying to himself yet again. He would never forget her face. Or the sound of her. The feel of her.

He walked outside for a bit of solitude before morning chow and drills.

Being back home had him feeling boxed in. He lived in a fishbowl. Everyone watched him, wondering what kind of soldier he would become. Some in his unit were already trying flex on him, test his resolve, but many learned he was not to be fucked with and backed off. He was a natural leader and his unit made him their unofficial big dog.

Basic training was a bitch, their bodies broken down and reshaped into ultimate fighting and killing machines. His body felt more massive and solid. He was also finding out his best skills. He was great at reconnaissance, and his superiors found him to be a brilliant strategist. In two months, his basic training unit would be broken up and placed where they best fit. N'Jobu was already being fast-tracked into the officer's lane. He seriously began to think a military career might be an option to keep him out of the palace.

His family contact was kept to a minimum, and he liked that. T'Chaka was having difficulty adjusting to his new role and dealing with T'Challa at the same time. His father was already thinking of finding him a new wife and their mother scoffed at the idea. It was too soon. And too cruel for Bathwandwa's family.

N'Jobu saw the faint light of the new day crawling slowly on the horizon. When the sun hit his eyes, he closed them, thinking of Califia and her warmth, and her lips on his face and her fingers stroking his scalp.

"My love," he said, greeting the new morning sun as if it were his woman. Califia.

###

The methotrexate didn't work.

Her hCG levels continued to go up, even after a second injection. She would have to have laparoscopic surgery, the easier of two surgical options for ectopic pregnancies. She would go under general anesthetic and the laparoscope would go through her abdomen and inflate her with gas. They would find the pregnancy in her tube and remove it.

It sounded so clinical and precise when she was walked through the steps, but lying on the surgeon's table scared and helpless she couldn't help but ponder the reality; they were taking away her baby. Those cells that wanted to multiply and grow had chosen the wrong spot to settle. For whatever reason, her body miscalculated, and the cells were being taken away so she wouldn't die. She tried to concentrate on that. The surgery would save her life and allow her to have a baby later down the road when the time was right.

Her grandmother had prayed over her with Rolita, Bakari, and her mother before she went in. Serah and Soliel face chatted with her the day before and they all cried together. Things were happening so fast. One minute she was planning an entirely new life, and the next, she was losing it.
The anesthetist placed a mask over her nose and mouth.

"Count backward from ten to zero slowly, please…"

Califia counted down nothing.

When she woke up, her mother was sitting with her holding her hand. Nana was across from her.

"Hey," Melissa said, squeezing Califia's hand.

She couldn't even speak, the words caught in her throat. She closed her eyes back up. She felt stiff and a slight pain in her abdomen, but not enough to be too uncomfortable at the moment.

Nana insisted that her mother be told.

Califia wanted to make a story about having some other female affliction to hide the reason for a surgery, but Nana insisted it was better to tell her mother the truth. When Califia spoke to her mother over the phone, she was surprised at how well her mother took the news. Melissa was out on the next flight to San Francisco that day.

It got a little harder when her mother arrived in person. All the questions about N'Jobu, her birth control methods and why did she wait so long to tell her. Nana ran interference, but once the second dose of medicine failed, Melissa became a soldier and helped Califia prepare for the surgery.

A post-op surgical nurse came in, a no-nonsense Filipino woman who pulled back Califia's covers to check the bandages. Califia was able to get a quick peek at her surgical scars. Two small incisions on both sides of her lower abdomen, right below her navel. Her belly button was swollen. The nurse covered her bandages back up and checked Califia's pain levels.

"Give her some painkillers," her mother insisted.

The nurse left and returned with some pills that Califia gratefully swallowed.

"These doctors want to act like Black people don't feel any pain. You have to advocate for yourself all the time in hospitals," Melissa said, fluffing Califia's pillow.

"How are you feeling, little girl?" Nana said. She walked over to Califia and stroked her forehead.

"Tired mostly."

"We'll have you home soon," Nana said.

"Doctor said everything went well," Melissa said.

"My tube?"

"It was okay. They got to it in time and didn't have to remove it," Melissa said.

Califia exhaled long and hard. She felt her eyes water but she shook it off. She was okay. That was the important thing. She was okay.

Her surgeon came in an hour later and talked to her about scar tissue, future pregnancies, and taking care of herself during recovery. She would now be considered high risk if she wanted another baby. It was possible to have another ectopic pregnancy. And it was also possible to have healthy full-term babies. Many women did.
Califia was tired of all the baby talk. She wanted to go home. Hide in a corner somewhere and just sleep a million years.

She heard her mother take calls from her cell. Serah, and then Soliel, and then Rolita, and then Bakari. Rolita and Bakari wanted to stay until after the surgery, but Califia didn't want them missing classes because of her.

She listened to her mother give details to her friends, and after the doctor left, she willed herself to try and sleep and disappear for a while. Califia looked out towards the window in her recovery room. Somewhere out there, N'Jobu was living his life. The weight of this lost world was on her. Only her.

###

She healed with no complications, and yet she refused to get out of bed for any length of time.

Her life became sloth-like, occasional visits to the restroom about three times a day, and very little eating. She had lost weight and her hair had napped up to the point where it was just a matted wad of twisted curls balled up on one side of her head.

She stunk of poor hygiene and her gums were bleeding when she did occasionally brush her teeth.

Rolita and Bakari tried their best to bring her spirit back with visits, but Califia stayed a balled-up blob of misery.

She cried all the time and spent hours staring at N'Jobu's Fast Chat account. She told him everything in her private messages to him, and there was no response. He didn't even have the read function on so she could see if he even saw her messages. There was nothing. And she felt so much burning rage towards him. All of her abandonment issues were festering inside of her.

She dragged herself to the restroom and peed. Glancing down at her stomach, she peered at her surgery scars. Small shiny dark brown scars. Like two bugs sleeping on her tummy. She touched the damaged skin. Slippery smooth, almost like keloid scars but not raised. Ugly in her mind. An ugly reminder of what had been done to her. She would see these scars forever and know what had been taken away from her.

Her own body funk offended her and she finally took a shower. The water trickled down over her head and back and she felt more agitation rising from deep inside her gut. She found herself pounding her fists against the shower wall and screaming.

Her grandmother came rushing in, pulling back the shower curtain, finding Califia hunched down holding her legs against her chest.

"C'mon…c'mon now…you can't release this pain, I know…I know. Put this around you."

Nana draped a light blue towel around Califia and led her back into her room instead of Califia's.

Califia sat on the edge of Nana's bed feeling cooling beads of water dripping from her matted hair onto her face.

Nana wrote down some things and called Junie on the house phone. When she came back to Califia, she patted her head.

"I should've done this a lot sooner. I thought we could get past this, little girl. Where's your phone?"
Califia just pointed haphazardly towards her bedroom door.

Nana left and soon Califia heard her talking to Rolita. Feeling drowsy, Califia allowed herself to fall back on Nana's bed. There were cracks in the ceiling and Califia's eyes traced a long one that curled into a corner.

Nana returned and Califia's stare drifted across her grandmother's face.

"We'll fix this. We'll fix this," Nana said.

Califia felt her eyes fall shut. She would stay inside the darkness. The darkness felt safe.

But Nana's hands were on her shoulders pulling her up.

"Come up outta that, Califia!" Nana snapped.

"Look at me! Who would want me after this?" Califia shouted pulling the towel away from her body, her scars angry dark marks.

She balled up her fists and pressed them into eyes.

"Nana?" Junie walked into the room, "What's going on? She alright?" he said.

"Take this list. Go to the botanica and then get me some of that good sea salt at the organic store. The dead sea salt is the best if they have it."

"Keep your money, Nana, I got this. Anything else?"

"You still have your clippers here?" Nana said.

"Yeah, in the kitchen—"

"Get them," Nana said.

Califia opened her eyes. Her cousin was staring at her, not concerned with seeing her sitting on Nana's bed butt naked. Junie stuffed the list in his pocket and left the room.

Nana walked into her bathroom and walked back out with a pair of scissors.

"We keep negative energy in our hair. I'm cutting all this mess off," she said touching the lump of hair on Califia's head.

Califia didn't care and she listened to the metal move around her scalp and she felt her locks falling softly on her shoulders and down her back. Nana hummed as she cut, occasionally lifting up Califia's chin to stare into her eyes.

"I got you," Nana said.

When she was done shearing away the useless coiled strands, she walked Califia naked as the day she was born into the kitchen where Junie was standing and holding his clippers.

Nana sat Califia down in a chair.

"Shave it down clean," Nana commanded.

Junie nodded, grabbing an extension cord from under the sink and plugging up the clippers to a wall
outlet.

She felt the cool blades skim across her scalp. Nana watched from the dining table across from her. Califia didn't feel any sense of shame sitting there, nude, in front of her male cousin. Junie had seen a lot being with Nana and when their grandmother asked for something to be done, they all did it without question.

When Junie was done, Nana held her face.

"We are going to do a healing. You do what I tell you, yeah?"

"Yeah, Nana," Califia answered.

"Go on, Junie," Nana said.

Junie bounced and Nana made Califia slip into the purple robe that N'Jobu gave her. Sitting at the dining table, Califia watched her grandmother mix a bucket full of filtered water with ingredients she collected throughout the house. Mainly oils from lemon, cinnamon and a full box of cloves taken from the pantry.

A knock at the front door brought in Rolita.

Califia saw Nana speak quietly to her bestie, and then she saw Rolita taking the bucket, a broom, and a mop into the back room.

"You sit there. Don't do anything. Rolita is going to clean your room from top to bottom," Nana said.

Califia ran her hand over her newly shorn head. Smooth baldness met her fingers. Nana began washing sheets and blankets, and Califia heard Rolita moving things and making noise in the back.

Junie returned with the things from Nana's list and placed them on the dining table. He gazed at Califia.

"You hangin' in there, cuz?"

Califia nodded. Junie reached out and rubbed her back. "Nana will fix everything, you watch and see," he said before he left the house under Nana's orders.

When Nana was done washing all of Califia's linens, she made a pot of soup and fed Califia. Rolita joined them, smelling of the contents of the bucket. They all ate and Nana glanced at her dining room clock.

"Rolita, I thank you for your help, but if you need to go—"

"I'm here, Nana. I don't have classes tomorrow until the afternoon," Rolita said.

"Okay. We'll start early in the morning. Lucky for us, tomorrow is Wednesday. A healing day," Nana said.

Califia ate more soup and when she was full, Nana and Rolita walked her back to Nana's bed and made her get under the covers.

"Sleep," Nana said.

And she did.
Califia felt Rolita rubbing her cheek, trying to wake her up. When her eyes fluttered open, Rolita was smiling at her.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"You don't want to know," Rolita said, giggling a bit.

Rolita touched Califia's scalp.

"This is a good look for you. Seriously."

"Rolita! I need your help in here," Nana called from the hall bathroom.

"Be right back," Rolita said.

Califia sat up in her grandmother's bed. Her limbs felt heavy and her scars were itching. She just wanted to go back to sleep.

"Cali, come in here please," Nana called out.

Califia slipped out of the bed, wrapping her robe back around herself.

Nana was seated on the lip of the bathtub throwing dried lavender into the water.

"I boiled distilled water to make this bath for you. It's still a little too hot," she said.

Califia sat on the closed toilet seat.

Rolita entered the bathroom carrying a large five-gallon soup pot.

"Pour it in please," Nana said.

Whatever had been steeping in the pot infused the room with its odor the moment Rolita released it into the tub. It smelled of essential oils and the sickly-sweet aroma of dried herbs.

Nana lit two white candles floating on water inside small white glass holders. She placed them on the floor on each side of the tub. She ran her clean hands through the water.

"It's ready," she said.

Nana held out her hand toward Califia.

Califia hesitated.

"Babygirl, this is a healing bath. It will help wash away what's ailing you. You can't hold on to this pain. It's not good for you or that child's spirit."

Rolita rubbed Califia's shoulders.

"You have to let it go," Nana said.

Califia knew her grandmother was right. But the letting go was so hard. It meant letting go of N'Jobu for good this time. She didn't think she was ready.

"Listen to Nana," Rolita said.
"Little girl, I know what you are going through. I lost two before your Daddy. I've done this. My Mama did this for me. Let me do this for you," Nana said.

Nana's hand was still outstretched towards her. Califia took off the robe and let it drop to the floor. She clasped Nana's hand and allowed the older woman to help her enter the water.

It was hot. Almost too hot, but she eased down until her body was submerged.

Nana took a soft natural sponge and soaked it with the healing waters and poured it over Califia's head. She then rubbed the sponge and the water towards her body, wiping what she desired towards Califia's body. Rolita watched Nana, her sweet eyes connecting with Califia whenever she looked toward her.

Califia sat in the water as her Nana said a few verses from Psalms.

"Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress…my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. But I trust in you, Lord…I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hands…"

Califia was not religious, but she found comfort in her grandmother's voice as she rubbed the water into her skin. When Nana rubbed near Califia's stomach, Califia stiffened.

"I know…I know…it's okay…" Nana whispered and Califia let her drag the sponge up her belly. Her grandmother cradled her head in her arms and rocked her.

"I'm here," Nana said, "let it go…don't blame him, don't blame God, don't blame nobody for this. Not even yourself."

The pain welled up in her belly and Califia felt it purge itself up through her throat and out of her mouth as she let out a long wailing moan. Rolita stood up, her eyes searching for Califia's. They connected and Califia leaned back and submerged her head under the water. She kept her eyes open and she could see her Nana's blurry form above her as the herbs stung her eyes. She raised up and gripped the sides of the tub gulping air.

"Okay, okay…Rolita, hand me the bowl," Nana said.

Rolita gave Nana a wide ceramic green bowl as Califia wiped water from her eyes.

"This is what you will do. Listen good. Step out of the tub backward. Take some of this water when you get out, then go out into the backyard and pour it over your shoulder...backward. Don't even look at it. Toss it and come back into the house, hear me?"

"Yeah," Califia said.

Califia lifted herself up and stepped from the tub. Rolita helped her put on a new clean white robe. She stooped and pooled a good amount of her bathwater into the bowl and walked to the backyard alone.

Outside, it was the crack of morning. She turned and faced the house, tossing the contents of the bowl over her shoulder. She glanced up into the sky and caught sight of the morning star, Venus.

"Bring that one back to me," she whispered, hoping whatever deity that may exist would hear her. The agnostic in her hoped the Gods of her ancestors would hear her. The little faith she did have she clung to.

Standing alone, she waited for the first rays of sunlight to peek on her, the empty bowl clutched in
her hand.

"Come back to me…," she whispered, lifting her head up to the sky, "…come back."

###
Jewelry

Chapter Summary

The conclusion of this first volume...

Chapter Notes

Dear faithful readers,

Thank you so much for sticking with this first volume! It's officially complete, and I am now writing the second part of Califia and N'Jobu's story with Erik on the way.

So many of you are reading from so many far away places and that is so cool to me. I'm amazed that there are people who are just as interested in N'Jobu and his life as I am.

The next volume will be called "Black Boys Bloom Thorns First: Volume Two" I was going to call it something else, ("All Shades of Brown Boy"--I may use that once I write Erik's story as an adult at M.I.T. and in Wakanda) but it's probably easier to stick with the same name for now and just call it Part 2. Please look for the first chapter here: https://archiveofourown.org/works/16807660/chapters/39451285

Again thank you so much for reading, and I hope you stick around for more!

Uzumaki_Rebellion

"Cheap on your skin, smooth
Jewels that ring
Shine hit your eyes, black kiss the ring
Ruby ebony sides, time

Change my eyes for something cool

A dream never leaving my sight
A sun never leaving my side
A feeling, a door starts to close
I'm feeling the burn in my eyes
The eyes of a heavy
Best suited to staying indoors like a good nigga
I treated the hope like my home
And destroyed it, go figure
Still proud, best of my abilities
Still I think about an exit
No one ever will appreciate
The way you bare your soul (for them to) or attune
I'm through
I'm through...

Blood Orange – "Jewelry"

The Hatut Zeraze.

Dogs of War.

N'Jobu's father created the elite force as security for the nation in and outside of Wakanda, and N'Jobu found himself enveloped in their midst. Three years in the military, going up through the ranks without special consideration, and now he was in a position to make the military his permanent career, or transition into what his family wanted.

Sitting in the officer's club outdoor patio, N'Jobu sipped a prized honey-sweetened tea that his mother sent him for his birthday. He was now twenty-eight, an officer for his nation, a gentleman to his fiancé, Zinzi, and the favorite uncle of his three-year-old nephew, T'Challa.

T'Chaka was in talks with the council of elders to expand the country's secret spy ring further in the world. The ambitious King wanted his hand on the pulse of every major foreign city that could be a source of friction or vital global information for Wakanda. As the world grew smaller and more interconnected, it would encroach upon Wakanda sooner rather than later. And their neighboring country Niganda was actually trying to flex a bit in the United Nations, seeking redress for land inside of Wakanda.

The nerve.

N'Jobu scrolled through the intranet on his comm tab.

There were messages waiting for him from Zinzi. She wanted to discuss the upcoming trip to Washington, D.C. that summer, and he wasn't sure he wanted her to come with him and T'Chaka. Once he was back in Wakanda, there was less talk from her about marrying Gcuma, and he was afraid that she had given up all hope of making her dream a reality.

Of course, any talk of going to the states brought up the inevitable memory of Califia. He had done well to burn all bridges, and although he still felt love for her and thought of her from time to time, his life had pivoted into concerns and new challenges that made his American past echo away from him. His memories of her were no longer the giant splash in a pond; they were now the lazy ripples that were far away from the original source of impact.

His kimoyo beads vibrated. He tapped his earbuds for privacy.

"Zinzi," he said resting his eyes on her form above his wrist. She was wearing her favorite orange strapless wrap dress.

"I thought you were no longer seeing that woman from Birnin Djata."

N'Jobu's face took on a stony countenance. Busted.

"I am not seeing her like in a relationship, Zinzi."

"So, what is it? Just getting your dick sucked every now and then?"

"Actually, yes," he said, not shy about admitting it.

"You are terrible," she said, her playful exasperated tone making her look adorable with her
annoyance at him.

"How did you know I was there?"

Zinzi swiped her hand above her own beads and a photo of N'Jobu popped up on his arm showing him having lunch in a Birnan Djata restaurant. Alone.

"You are going to get caught if you are not careful, N'Jobu. The media loves catching pictures of you. She may turn on you and start selling stories on the social."

"I thank you for your concern, Zinzi."

For his first year in the military, N'Jobu fully committed to being a good soldier, barely acknowledging that he was once a sexual being. By his second year, he had loosened up enough to accept the fleeting carnal looks from some of his fellow female unit members. On a weekend pass, he met a woman who was so stealth with her flirting that none of his military comrades noticed him slipping away with her for an actual private conversation at a dive bar where they shared drinks and compared military tales. He missed just talking to a woman and hearing her laugh and not feeling the pressure of protocol to protect his royal image. He was able to be a man out with a woman. Nothing more.

That same weekend he danced with another female soldier who looked quite different out of uniform and on a dance floor. On a shared cab ride back to their barracks, that particular woman started rubbing her hand on his thigh and telling him he could do whatever he wanted with her and she would keep it private. The driver of the cab couldn't see what was going on because the traffic was so bad and his music was up loud. N'Jobu had glanced down at her and it may have been the angle that she was lying against him, or the way her voice sounded breathy and needful, but he felt a yearning to be touched by a woman. It had been so long, and he was feeling buzzed and open, so he let her hands rub on more than just his thigh. She soon had his zipper down and his dick between her lips. With her head bobbing in his lap, he closed his eyes and pretended her mouth was a warm wet pussy, and immediately he imagined Califia riding him. His dick grew harder thinking of her and he shot a hot load in the woman's mouth which she swallowed with a greedy sense of achievement. When she had finished, she licked her fingers and lips and whispered in his ear, "I will suck you off whenever you want, Prince N'Jobu." And she did until she was transferred to another unit.

By then, N'Jobu had connected with the cutie from Birnin Djata who had a family cottage that was private. She liked anal, facials and giving good head, so she kept him satisfied for the time being. But that was all he got from her, a little satisfaction from pent-up tension and nothing more.

She seemed happy to have royalty fucking her ass and mouth. She was always content when he left, but she did start to voice some complaint that he would never spend the night with her. He let her know that their arrangement could end if she kept pushing it, so she shut up about it quickly. He easily fell into his old way of damage control by buttering her up, telling her how much she made his life so much better by easing the pressures of being a soldier and a Prince with so much responsibility with a capital 'R'. It was manipulative, he knew this, but it kept her in check, making her feel special like she was the only woman who had the power to soothe a troubled royal. She willfully capitulated to his need for discretion and blind obedience. The last thing he needed was a scandal that would embarrass his family and Zinzi.

He told Zinzi about his arrangement with the Djata woman right away when it first began. Over the course of three years, he and Zinzi had become good friends, comrades in their mutual struggle to cope with what life had served them. They took long walks together, had quiet meals with one another, and by the third year, she was already placed inside the East palace with her own suite.
They never slept together.

Nor kissed.

They held hands for gatherings and were genuinely affectionate with one another, but it was like being with Bathwandwa.

He was in cahoots with her for secret hook-ups with Gcumu. Whenever Zinzi went to him, N'Jobu would go to Birnin Djata to have quiet meals alone and lay pipe on his own lover. The rest of the royal family thought their occasional weekend getaways were for them to spend time away together as a couple. He enjoyed the solitude of his meals by himself. He could quiet his mind. Lament over the fact that the sex he had without love was starting to bore him. When Zinzi would come to visit him, purely for show, her face would be lit up from great sex and great passion. He envied her.

"Lt. Udaku."

N'Jobu looked up and spotted Gcumu. Zinzi's eyes widened when she saw him. N'Jobu ended their call.

"Captain Gcumu, Sir!"

"At ease."

N'Jobu pointed to the seat across from him and Gcumu sat down.

"Thank you for meeting me here," N'Jobu said offering Gcumu tea from the small kettle and extra cup sitting in front of him. Gcumu declined.

"Lady Zinzi looks well," Gcumu said, a wistfulness in his voice.

N'Jobu took a sip from his tea. He stared at Gcumu. Why couldn't this man just stand up and claim Zinzi for his own? It must kill him to see her holding his hand and living inside his home. The man probably thought N'Jobu was sleeping with her too.

N'Jobu took a cursory glance around the patio. They were alone.

"I would like for you to go to Washington D.C. when the royal delegation goes this summer. It would be good to have a member of our military leadership there. I have spoken to the King about this and he agrees with me. America needs to see that we have a backbone in this Niganda matter. You are one of our best. One of our fiercest."

"I thank you for your confidence in me."

"Lady Zinzi may be going with us," N'Jobu said.

He watched the Captain's reaction. Gcumu's eyes seemed to light up at her name. It was time to lay it out for the older man. N'Jobu leaned in and kept his voice low.

"I am aware of your extracurricular interactions with my fiancé."

Gcumu's face didn't even flinch. Smart man.

"Captain Gcumu, Zinzi is in love with you. I want to know why you refuse to stand up for her."

"It is not that easy—"
"You love her, right?"

"I do."

"Then claim her."

Gcuma let a small smile curl his lips. He sat back and folded his hands together.

"It is easy to say 'claim her' when you are in a position of power—"

"Power? Please. I am a but a mere puppet for my brother and family. I do what they say. That woman loves you as the day is long. She sits up in the palace thinking of you. When we are together, we are talking about you. When we are away from each other she is plotting to be with you—"

"Your family and her family would throw me in jail if they knew about us. Or they could ruin my career, my reputation…I have spent many years building up to where I am now."

"So what? Is she not worth the trouble?"

"She is worth everything!"

N'Jobu's eyes blinked at the veracity in Gcuma's voice. The older man looked around to make sure no one heard his forceful tone.

"Then show her she is worth everything. Risk it all, Sir. I will never be able to make her happy. If we get married, her life will be a sham. She will endure having my children, endure watching me go off to be with other women, endure being a member of the House of Udaku without the love she deserves. Zinzi is my friend. I love her like I loved my beloved Sister. I want to see her happy. You make her happy."

"I cannot…"

N'Jobu grabbed his cup of tea and drank from it. The man was pissing him off.

"I still want you to come with us to Washington."

Gcuma nodded. Some high-ranking officers entered the patio area. N'Jobu stood up to take his leave.

"Stay. Enjoy the rest of the tea my mother gave me. Think about Zinzi. Think about your own happiness, Sir."

N'Jobu saluted Gcuma and acknowledged the superior officers on his way out.

###

The flight drills were N'Jobu's favorite activity. Once they had moved from simulations during basic training and allowed him to fully put his talents to use, he found the war games they practiced exhilarating although they were quite dangerous.

The previous year the military had lost two soldiers in an exercise that had gone off the rails. A practice battle through the rift valley with young inexperienced pilots resulted in two Dagger ships crashing into one another. N'Jobu's mother was horrified and insisted that N'Jobu be taken out of the ranks of the Hatut Zeraze. He refused to leave. He had to put his life on the line just like the rest of the citizens. And he could fly the fuck out of any ship they placed him in.

The training he was up for that morning would involve several Dagger squads escorting Royal Battle
fighters in the midst of an attack with precious cargo on board. That meant his eyes and flight skills had to secure safe passage for the Battle Fighter that would follow his lead. This test would have him flying directly in front as the head Dagger.

He went through his pre-flight checks and scanned through the digital map displays for strategic defensive and offensive flight pathways through the terrain. They would run the exercise as if the camouflage shield and protective force field didn't work on the Battle Fighter and he had to be on the lookout for his targeted enemies. He knew the rift valley well, but the section they would be flying through was a bit precarious. It was the same terrain where the two soldiers lost their lives.

"Flight check, complete," he said into his mic to let his superiors know he was ready.

Lift off was smooth and N'Jobu was able to keep his team together in a tight flight formation.

"Snakes at the feet!" a fellow pilot from the rear of their formation called out. N'Jobu saw enemy Daggers streak into his peripheral.

He immediately led the Battle Fighter down into the narrow part of the valley where evasive maneuvers were carried out by his team. A deep canyon with a tricky corridor was their only option at this point to keep them off their ass. His job was to get the larger ship safely beyond the canyon and into the neutral zone miles ahead of them while the other Daggers ran defensive counter-attacks.

Swarms of Daggers from his squad showed why they were the elite in their field, crisscrossing the sky like swarms of bees moving in tandem. The strategy N'Jobu laid out prior to the exercise seemed to be working and they were making great progress toward their final destination.

His team was able to knock a few enemy Daggers out of commission right away, but one of Wakanda's trickiest pilots was flying for the other team, and N'Jobu knew this was going to be a challenge for him. He could already see some of his squad ejecting from their ships simulating direct hits. Their Dagger ships went into autopilot and returned back to base headquarters without them. It didn't appear that they had lost many thus far.

"We've been hit!" The Battle Fighter pilot yelled out, and on his viewscreen, N'Jobu could see the large ship wobbling behind him.

"How much damage?!!" N'Jobu said keeping his eyes out for more enemy Daggers.

Shit.

Several were dropping down from high above them, flanking them from their sides and accelerating fast to cut them off.

"Wale, try to keep that right side up, we're almost home-free!" N'Jobu yelled.

"We clipped the landing gear on the boulder range after we received the simulated hit! We won't be able to land at this speed without causing more damage. We should eject now while we have the chance!" Wale interjected, his voice pumped with adrenaline and a slight tinge of fear. This was as real as it got. One screw up and any of them could end up like those dead soldiers.

Fuck. That's all he needed. His first lead dogfight, and his team was fucking up the equipment and would possibly lose the cargo they were protecting. There was no way they could slow down to protect the ship without getting caught.

"All we have to do is get into the neutral zone. I'll be your landing gear. But we're doing it on water!"
"What?!" Wale yelled.

N'Jobu drifted his Dagger back and swooped under the Battle Fighter's right side. Once the Dagger's roof touched the Battle Fighter's underside, he yelled into the mic, "Speed it up!"

He felt the hum and kick of the Battle Fighter as it increased velocity and he kept the Dagger matched with it. This had to work. If N'Jobu's Dagger couldn't keep the Fighter afloat, the larger ship would touch down wrong and possibly break apart on impact without its protective shield in place.

"Approaching the lake, you ready Lt. Udaku?" Wale said.

"Go! Go! Yibambe!" N'Jobu yelled watching the water loom closer at a high rate of speed.

The Battle Fighter made a hard swerve and dropped down to skim across the lake. It was a hard landing and N'Jobu heard something crack under his Dagger. But they made it.

He could hear his team cheering above him as his Dagger sat submerged under the lake holding the right side of the Fighter afloat.

"I need some help down here. Water is coming into my cockpit," N'Jobu said unfastening himself from his pilot seat and trying to create an exit. He heard and felt the ship above him shift to the right side and drop lower on top of him.

He was trapped.

"On our way, Lt. Udaku!"

Since it was an unplanned water landing outside the scope of their original planned rendezvous point, it would take a few minutes for them to help him. But the deluge of water rushing in was giving him less time than that.

"Shit!" N'Jobu said. He was already swimming inside the Dagger. If he had been flying one of the smaller-sized Wasp Daggers, he'd be drowned already.

"I need you guys to hurry!" N'Jobu said, already swallowing water and pressing his face up into the roof of the Dagger.

He could hear movement outside and saw soldiers in dive suits cutting a hole in the side of the Dagger.

He held his breath for as long as could before he blacked out.

###

N'Jobu woke up lying in his own bed inside the palace.

He felt a body curled up next to him and he rolled over quickly to grasp it thinking he had been in a long never-ending dream.

He stopped.

Zinzi was curled up next to him above the covers, her braids covering her face. He rubbed his face with his hand. She woke up.

"Welcome back," she said.
"How long was I out?"

"A few hours."

His rescue from the Dagger was simple compared to the bacteria infection he got from swallowing
the lake water a few days later. T'Chaka insisted that he recover at home since his vacation was
scheduled to begin.

N'Jobu sat up and swung his legs around the side of the bed and stood up. He forgot he was naked,
and when he looked back at Zinzi, she just watched him. He walked into his bathroom and used the
restroom, then took a quick shower. When he stepped out from the steam, Zinzi was there holding a
fluffy robe for him to dry in. He took it and covered his body.

He stretched himself back on his bed and instead of sitting on the day chair next to the bed, she
crawled onto the bed with him.

"Feel better?" she said.

"Yes. I am hungry too."

She tapped her kimoyo beads to summon food service for him.

"Can we talk, N'Jobu?"

"About?"

"Us."

"What is on your mind, Zinzi?"

"We should just face the facts. We will be married. Gcuma is never going to claim me. We might as
well get used to the idea of being husband and wife. And since it is inevitable, I want to ask that you
stop seeing other women on the side."

"I spoke to Gcuma. I told him he should claim you—"

"He won't—"

"I persuaded T'Chaka to bring him to D.C. I think I've figured out a way to keep you in the palace
and make it so Gcuma marries you. But you have to give me time, Zinzi. Don't give up."

"It has been three years, N'Jobu. I have come to the conclusion that perhaps you and I should
probably try and create a real relationship between us. We like each other a lot. Love could blossom
from that."

N'Jobu stared at her.

"Have you given up on him?"

"Have you given up on your American woman? After three years, is your love still strong? Is it easy
to sleep with other women now?"

"Zinzi—"

"You could just as well sleep with me."
She turned herself on her side, her back to him. There was a knock on his suite door. It was the food. He remote opened his door and a member of the kitchen staff rolled their food into his living room space.

"Thank you," he called out to them without moving from the bed. He turned back to Zinzi and pulled her to face him.

"He's a coward, N'Jobu."

"Some things are being put in motion that may benefit us. Just give me time to see it through. The D.C. trip will allow you both to be together. Keep your faith."

"Will you try to see her when we go there?"

"There would be no way for me to see her in the few days we are there. She lives on the other side of the country."

"But to go so far there and not try to see her, that would be so sad."

He shook his head, "I can't. I just can't."

"Then you are a fool. Just like Gcuma," she said.

Not a fool, he thought, just a man who could finally think of her without crying after three years. He could look at the one photo he had left of her and smile instead of breaking down in sorrow. He had reached a place of closure. He had moved on but could still keep her in his heart and cherish their time together. There was no need to open old wounds, no matter how curious he was. It would crush him if she were married, or Bast forbid had children already. He couldn't face that. It would break him.

There was a knock on his door again. He went to his closet and slipped on some pants and a loose shirt. He opened his suite entrance and a whirling ball of energy ran in grabbing his legs.

"Hey little man," N'Jobu said sweeping T'Challa up in his arms.

"He has been asking to see you all day. We saw the dining cart go in," T'Chaka said.

"Uncle N'Jo! Uncle N'Jo! Baba gave me a new car, come see!" T'Challa said, squirming from out of N'Jobu's arms and grabbing his hand, pulling him from the suite.

Out in the hall, a small metallic motorized Exxy car was parked in the middle of the marble floor.

"Hey, look at this!" N'Jobu said.

T'Challa ran around N'Jobu and hopped inside the car.

"Watch me! Watch me!" T'Challa yelled.

N'Jobu stroked the boy's cloud of black curls on his head. T'Challa's big brown eyes were piercing as he made sure his uncle was actually watching him.

"Are you watching?" T'Challa asked again.

"I am watching," N'Jobu said.

"You cannot catch me!" T'Challa yelled as he drove the car away at a pretty decent speed.
"Whoa, that is really fast," N'Jobu said glancing at T'Chaka.

T'Chaka held up a small remote-control pad.

"Parental controls," T'Chaka said winking.

It was good to see his brother bonding with his son. It had taken a long time for him to get to this point. It was a relief to the family, especially their mother.

"Are you well?" T'Chaka asked.

"Much better. I was talking with Zinzi."

"Is she here? I would like to speak with her. T'Challa stay around Uncle N'Jobu's hall, okay son?"

"Aw, Baba! I want to go to the other side!"

"I need to talk to Lady Zinzi. We will go to the other side soon."

"Okay, Baba!" T'Challa said driving in circles, the Exxy car headlights and backlights flashing and making car honking and fake traffic noises. Two Dora Milaje stood nearby watching the little Prince.

T'Chaka followed N'Jobu inside his suite. Zinzi walked out from N'Jobu's bedroom. T'Chaka gave N'Jobu a sly look.

"Your Highness," Zinzi said.

"Please, I am practically your brother now. Sit…sit," T'Chaka said.

Zinzi and N'Jobu sat on his sofa across from T'Chaka.

T'Chaka took a moment to stare at Zinzi. Zinzi glanced over at N'Jobu.

"Zinzi, N'Jobu has suggested to me that you should sit in on some council meetings. He values your judgment, and there are some topics that need to be discussed and negotiated soon, and your expertise with elder care and health would be quite useful to me in making some decisions. Are you open to doing this?"

N'Jobu tried his best to suppress the smile spreading on his face. For months he had been planting seeds in his brother's ear about Zinzi. Now it looked like it was paying off.

"I would be honored to sit in with the Council of Elders and yourself," she said.

"Great! We can talk more during dinner tonight," T'Chaka said.

"Baba! Come on!" T'Challa yelled out from the hall.

"My boss calls to me," T'Chaka joked, standing up and glancing at N'Jobu, "I will see you both later tonight then."

N'Jobu and Zinzi watched their King leave the suite. When he was gone, Zinzi grabbed N'Jobu's arm.

"What was that about?"

"I told you I was working on some things in your favor. Trust in me, okay?"
Zinzi gave N'Jobu a slight smile.

"I shall see what you are up to," she said leaving the suite.

N'Jobu sat back down on his sofa. Getting free from the palace was contingent upon having Zinzi hooked into the inner circle by way of his brother.

Alone, N'Jobu tapped his kimoyo and the old picture of Califia popped up. Fate had not been kind to them, but he could still try to carve out a world for himself in Wakanda. That meant freeing himself from Zinzi.

###

"I think you've actually gotten better at this," Dante said, staring at Califia.

"Old man, I've gotten better at a lot of things," Califia quipped moving her White Queen.

"Are you two ready to eat yet?" Nana called from her kitchen.

"No!" They both shouted, still focused on the chess board.

Every Sunday Califia came to her grandmother's house to play chess with her father and have dinner.

Since Dante's release, the last three years had become a renewal of a real family life that felt whole again. Nana and Dante had hidden the details of his parole from her. After the loss of her baby, when she thought life was just at a bleak low point, her father was released from prison. As her Nana would tell her, God closes one door and opens another.

She sailed through her credential program, and was blessed to find a job and an apartment right where she wanted to be in Oakland. N'Jobu's money gave her a safety cushion in savings, and she was grateful for his kind gift.

She could think of him and smile now.

It took a long time to get to a place of peace with him. Once she gave up her search for him, once she gave up exerting any energy clinging to him, the world opened up, things she wanted fell into place. The elementary school she taught at thought they were lucky to get her. Most first-year teachers didn't last long there. The kids were deemed too rough. Un teachable. Lost. But to Califia, they were her and Bakari when they were young. Thorns first and blossoms later. Many of the White and non-Black liberal teachers with solid educations from elite schools came through with all theory and good intentions. But they were not equipped with the harsh reality of the children's lives and burned out fast. Her school was desperate, and Califia asked for a salary just above what they were offering and she got it.

It took her a few months to whip her first sixth-grade class into shape, but in shape, they did get. Some were like her. One or both parents in jail. Some had family caught up on drugs; the opioid epidemic had risen significantly. Many had no food to eat and depended on the free breakfast and lunch program to get through the day. Some were exhausted from babysitting younger siblings because everyone worked in the home and were gone all day and night. PTSD was real with violence and domestic abuse. Several students tested her by stepping over her boundaries to see what she would do. Run like the other teachers, or stick it out. Califia knew this life. And she connected to the children because of it. She didn't let them off the hook because of it. Her standards were high. There was brilliance in those broken homes. She just had to keep vigilant in not letting these young people fade their own lights. It was exhausting work and she thrived off of it. The children saved her life.
Her cell rang. Bakari.

"Time out, I need to take this call," she said.

Her father stood up.

"We'll finish this after dinner," Dante said kissing her forehead.

She took the call outside on the porch.

"Hey, man," she said.

"You coming or what?"

"I thought about it."

"And?"

"I'm coming."

"Yes!"

She already knew Bakari was already fist-pumping his hand.

"I haven't seen your parents in ages, and I'll be able to see my mother on the way back, so I can kill two birds with one stone."

"Albert will be there—"

"Ah, Bakari, come on—"

"What? He's a good dude. He likes you. His family is having their annual soiree there... naw, listen to me Cali,... hear me out... this is something you need to hear."

"See, I knew this was a set-up."

"No, it isn't. He was going to be there anyway. I see him every summer, so of course, if you are there, you will see him anyway too."

"Finish your point negro."

"You haven't been to Oak Bluffs in years. Albert is the only cool dude I still keep in touch with, and it would be nice to have him hang out with one of my non-Jack and Jill Stepford Wives Black Children again—"

Califia started laughing.

"What makes you think we'd be a good fit? I only met him once. And I was fifteen."

"True, but he still asks about you after all these years. You may be the one who got away from him."

"We have nothing in common. I'm anti-capitalist, and he's a lobbyist for big Pharma. He likes basketball, I'm into football. His parents are part of the Boule, and my parents wouldn't be allowed in the same room with his. You know that. He's also a damn Republican for God's sake. What sane Black person is stuntin' Republican nowadays?"

"Opposites attract. Hold on, lemme send you a picture."
Califia held onto her phone and waited for a picture to come through. All she remembered about Albert was that he was seventeen and lanky with hair that appeared to be a mixture of three different textures. And he was fair-skinned to the point of not being able to hang outdoors on the beach for a long time because his skin would turn lobster red. But he had been cute and stayed glued to Califia's side the month she had stayed with Bakari and his grandparents who were full-time residents on the Black side of Martha's Vineyard. She remembered letting him rub on her teenaged titties after scoring weed for them from some White teenagers on the other side of the island. What turned her off from him was that he was always poking fun of her and Bakari's Oakland accents, and tried to correct her opinions on the greatest male emcees in Hip Hop, even though she gave a list of female emcees that would obliterate his choices. It was like he had to one-up her in everything, and she was sorry she let him feel her up. She never saw him again.

Her phone chirped. Photo received.

"Uh oh…hold up now," she said, gazing at what Albert had turned into.

"Now!" Bakari said.

"Is this shit photoshopped?"

"Nope."

"Damn. Jigga man on the come up," she said.

Albert Pettigrew the Third. From the Virginia Pettigrews. Not to be confused with the dark-skinned Pettigrews from North Carolina who were rumored to be the off-shoot from a bend in the family tree. The ones who couldn't pass for white when it was convenient.

Shiitttt, she might let this mofo suck her titties again.

"Well?"

"Okay. Thirst trap material."

Her phone chirped again.

"What's this?"

"His phone number. And email."

"Man—"

"Listen to me. He has connections. In New York, D.C., and L.A. He has companies looking to invest in social projects to clean up their images. You and Soliel have trouble with grants, right? Albert can help you bypass months of waiting for crumbs. Come on. A man who still talks about you after ten years? Even when you were lookin' kinda busted back then—"

"Fuck you, B—"

"If a love connection can't happen, then at least try a money connection."

"You sayin' I should hoe myself out?"

"Look at him! Would it really be hoe'ing? Tell me you wouldn't hit that."

"I would hit that."
"Bingo!"

"The things you set me up with…"

"I'ma need you to get yourself the flyest dress you can afford. I mean a serious snatch yo mama's edges out dress."

"Why?"

"I kinda told Albert you would be his date for the Congressional Black Caucus event that's happening in D.C. when you do come back East."

"I am going to kill you—"

"Look at his picture again—"

"Why do you always put me in these situations without asking me first?"

"I'm going too. Albert's paying for everything. Our travel, hotel, food…everything."

"Is Shavonne going?"

"She has her cousin's wedding in St. Thomas to go to. So technically you will be both me and Albert's date. Listen, this is a chance to rub elbows with Black people who have money and have access to people with money. Take advantage. Use the connect."

"You right…you right. Soliel and I do need help."

"Coolio. We will enjoy Oak Bluffs, then go to D.C. and party it up on Albert's dime. For once that dude is paying for shit. It'll be a blast. Now call him. He's waiting to hear from you."

"I'm sure he is now that you've served me up like hot sex on a platter."

"No, I didn't."

"Lemme go in here and have dinner with Pops and Nana."

"What y'all eating?"

"Enchiladas."

"With the shredded chicken, olives and sour cream?"

"Yes."

"Damn I wish I was back there."

"I do too. It's not the same in these streets without you here. Fucking Yale."

"I'll be making that Yale Law School money soon enough. Go eat. And don't forget. Get a dress to impress. D.C. doesn't play. We need to slay, Ma."

"Bet."

She hung up and looked at Albert's picture again. She was going to find a dress that made him wish he never made fun of her Oaktown lineage.
Sitting with T'Chaka out on his personal balcony for breakfast, N'Jobu took hold of the envelope his brother passed to him. A thick silky black envelope with rich gold embossing that said "The Royal House of Udaku."

He flipped the envelope over. It was from the Congressional Black Caucus in Washington D.C. A private invitation.

They would be attending their special gala event.

N'Jobu let his finger slip across the letters that made up Washington D.C. on the envelope. Three thousand miles away from Oakland. So close and yet so far from her.

"What are you thinking, Baby Brother?"

"I believe D.C. is known to be sweltering in the summer."

"We shall find out soon enough," T'Chaka said feeding T'Challa a bit of fruit from his plate. N'Jobu watched his nephew eat and then opened the invitation to read the details.

So close and so far away...

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