

The Journey To America  
Chapter 1: Chineló

Today's the day. My mom finally agreed to meet Kossi. We met over 3 months ago and until today, my mother refused to meet him. She didn't even know him yet she was already certain he wasn't worthy of me. She told me every time I went to the stream to meet him, "Chinelo you are my only daughter, you will be with someone who has a future and who will help take care of you and your family." Our family was poor for a while. We were living well until my mother decided to leave my father and take us with her. Since then, she has had to take care of all six of us alone. It is unfortunate because as a woman, you can marry into wealth, but as a man you have to build everything yourself. Women do not seek men who are born into poverty because they are more than likely to stay there. My mom wants me to marry into money so I can bring my brothers into it so that they too can find wives. The entire family is on my back but all I want to do is be with Kossi.

Kossi and I met at the stream when I was getting water for my house. He is no richer or poorer than I. He followed me around a couple of times before I agreed to go on a date with him. I tried not to like him. I tried for my mother, my brothers, and for the future of our family. I felt selfish being happy. I tried to convince my mom to just meet him. I knew if she wasn't just caught up in money, she would love him. She told me she would meet him and give him a chance but if she hated him then I would have to stop seeing him. I agreed out of desperation but I prayed she would put everything aside and actually get to know him. As I was getting everything ready, I grew more anxious. Kossi is finally here. He looks horrified and I can't blame him. I went to open the door for him.

"They were people marching in the roads, I couldn't get here any faster. Is your mom mad at me?" he said

There were marches all the time now and my mom even told me she was afraid there may be a civil war any time soon. When there is that large of a group opposing the government then chaos ensues. My grandmother raised my mom in times of war and my mom said she could not do it if it happens.

"No, I told you an earlier time than I told her. I heard the marchers were taking over the roads, I calculated that." I told him and he smiled

“Im so lucky to have you” he said before he looked over to my mom glaring at him

“Welcome,” she said in a hardly welcoming tone

“ Thank you for having me,” he replied and sat at the dinner table

I got everything prepared and made everyone’s plate. My brothers already knew Kossi because they all went to school together. For a while everything seemed to be going well. I noticed my mom grow increasingly quiet and more angry as the dinner went on. I was hoping she would notice everyone getting along and see that this could be our family but that seemed to make her more angry.

“Kossi, what are your plans with my daughter?” she said abruptly causing everyone to stop their side conversations

“Well I hope to marry her one day if she’ll have me”

“When is one day?” she asked and I could begin to see the color drain from his face. He looked at me and I looked down, I didn’t want to put anymore pressure on him.

“I don’t know, soon”

“And after that?” my mom asked and I glared at her

“Mom, no one plans out their whole lives like that” I said and she turned her glare over to me

“He should, he’s a man. He should have a plan as to how he’s going to take care of his wife” She said and turned back over to him

I thought about bringing up Nick. I mean he's even older than Kossi and yet my mother puts no pressure on him getting his entire life together in a plan. I bit my tongue as I knew that would anger her. I also didn't want Nick to have any problems with our mother.

"Well right now I am studying politics to hopefully get into government and--"

"The government?" my mother practically screamed causing everybody to flinch. "This government that is basically a dictatorship? This government that doesn't even care about us people on the bottom. You know a war may start any day now right?"

"Yes ma'am" he replied reluctantly

"You want to leave my daughter to fend for herself as a widow" she said and the room grew quiet.

I could tell he didn't know what else to say so I stepped in. "Mother why would you even speak that into the universe."

"I plan to change the government to make it better. The Gnassingbe family has been in power for too long. He said and smiled at me

"You alone will change the government?"

"Some one has to, right?"

I could have sworn I saw a smile on my mothers face.

"Okay" she said "it's getting late, shouldn't you be getting home?"

"Yes ma'am" he said as he started getting ready to go and I walked him to the door.

"That went better than expected" he said smiling at me

“*That* went better than expected? That was horrible, I felt so bad”

“She wouldn’t be a mother if she didn’t ask me those questions. It’s important for me to know our future together. I want us to be secure and happy.”

“I know, I do too. I just wish she was a little nicer”

“Its okay, I’ll make her love me eventually”

“Okay well I’ll see you later.” I said as I hugged him and he left.

I go to the table and start cleaning everything up while my mother just stares at me. When I’m done she tells my brothers to leave the room and tells me to sit next to her. I hate having heart to hearts with her.

“You know I love you right?”

“Yes,” I replied

“You know I just want the best for you right?”

“Yes,” I replied

“So why would you bring that boy into my house,” she said and I could already feel myself getting irritated.

“Mama I like him and I can’t feel good about being with him if I know you don’t approve. You’re trying so hard not to like him but I can tell you do.”

“Chi Chi, I like him--”

“I knew it!” I interrupted. “So then what's the problem?” She looked at me with a sad face.

“Chinelo, I want more for you. His plans are not good enough. He won't make it where he thinks he will. The world around us is ever changing and this government is doomed. He will not be the one to make you satisfied”

“Mama he will be the one to make me happy, does that not matter?” she looked as if she would cry.

“My daughter, trust when I say I speak from experience, happiness in the long run is nothing compared to comfortability. You will think you are happy at first but then you will look around at your life and realize you've made a mistake. Struggling with poverty is something no mother wants for her kids. If you marry a man with status, you will gain status and so will your brothers,” she said as she held my hand.

“Mama why is it all on me? Why is there no other way? I mean w-what if Kossi does do what he sets out to do and we are happy and comfortable?”

“*If* is not enough Chinelo,” the room fell silent.

“There is a man named Bartram Nossu--”

“No”

“He was living in America and has come back to find a wife”

“No no no” I said as she continued to talk.

“He says he remembers you from school before we moved and he liked you”

“Mom, no”

“He has agreed to come here and meet you and the rest of the family in a few days”

“Mom, please” I said as tears filled my eyes.

“Chinelo, he has taken a liking to you since he’s known you. This is your chance to go to America and be something more. This is your chance to make your family something more. I’m getting too old and too tired for this life. Do this for me please.”

“I don’t want this.” I said quietly.

“I know, but it is easier to grow to be happy with someone than it is to grow rich with someone in Togo.”

“Fine ma, I will see him. But I’m not making any promises. I refuse to be a wife that hates her husband so if I don’t like him I won’t do it. “ I said and she smiled and left the room.

My biggest fear is that I’ll like him enough to give up Kossi. There is so much pressure on me and after seeing my mom practically beg me I was already being swayed to do what she asked. I just want him to be a horrible person so she can let me choose my own path. I don’t even know how I’m going to explain this whole thing to Kossi now. I wish my world wasn’t like this. I wish I was born rich. I wish Togo wasn’t so chaotic right now. I wish Kossi and I could find our own way to Africa so my mother and I could both be happy. I wish I could decide my own life.