

## Sankofa

Word Count: 993 words

"There is, one last thing, Miss," your Grandmother's estate attorney ushered you to a small corner of the funeral home's viewing room. His too-close eyes and white snakeskin Clarks made you think a forked tongue would slip from his thin lips.

Reaching into the inner pocket of his field-green suit, he produced a weathered envelope. You opened it as discreetly as possible and quickly scanned the contents.

"...She left the house to *me*?" you breathe, more to yourself than anyone else. "That she did," the attorney affirms. "Just sign the paperwork enclosed, and have it back to me when you can." You barely acknowledged him as he tipped his ridiculous ten gallon hat to you before exiting.

The disbelief still swam through you. Grandma never missed an occasion to remind you that you were her least favorite grandchild. You thought she would've just left it to Mom or have it sold to pay off any remaining debt, but this? You never saw it coming.

And then there was the letter. All of it was clearly drafted by the attorney except for the very last sentence: "Whatever you do, do not - and I mean DO NOT - go digging in that backyard!"

You never listened to the hag before. Why should you start now?

The shovel fell away as you wiped the sweat from your brow, finally unearthing whatever Grandma didn't want you to find. It was smooth and cool to the touch, not unlike the throwing stones out by Lake Champlain. Instead of slate gray, this stone was a deep reddish-brown dotted and lined with white markings reminiscent of the bones of some ancient reptile. You didn't know why, but you felt compelled to run a thumb over the pebbled protrusions.

Then, the rock, stone, fossil or whatever it was began to glow red-hot, sizzling your skin, forcing you to drop it. When it hit the ground, the world immediately began spinning, blurring, merging and separating in a whirl of color. And just as suddenly as the movement started, everything came to a complete standstill once more.

You shuddered, feeling the strong urge to vomit after that disorienting experience. The need to lie down overtook you, so you move shakily back into the house.

You hear the faint sounds of humming from the kitchen when you step in through the living room screen door. No one else was inside when you were out, but maybe Mom dropped by? Gingerly approaching the kitchen, you find the source of the humming, stirring the contents of a simmering pot.

While she looked a lot like your Mother, this woman definitely wasn't her. Instead of her signature Biggie T-shirt and joggers - which she lovingly called her cooking clothes - the woman

wore a frilly, heart-shaped apron over a smart blue and white striped dress. Her hair was also pressed into sausage curls delicately pinned into a bun. She was stunning in that old-fashioned way.

"Excuse me," you called out, but she didn't respond. Maybe she was lost in thought. You try again with "Ma'am?", but she continued on as if she didn't hear you. You carefully sidled next to her and waved a hand in front of her face to no avail. She still gave no indication that she noticed you.

Then, she jerks her face in your direction. At first, you thought she'd finally stopped ignoring you, but the woman was looking through you?

"Clara!" she shouts. You jumped at the unanticipated volume and power behind her voice. But wait - did she just say Clara? That wasn't your na-

"Yes, mother?" a younger, similarly stocky version of the woman appears in the threshold and you couldn't believe your eyes. Although you'd only known her as old, she was a dead ringer for the photos packed into the overstuffed album at Mom's house. It was your grandmother! She gaped at you, equally surprised.

What has to be your great-grandma interrupted my staring contest with grandma. "What's wrong, child? Is there something on my face or clothes?"

"Nothing, I just didn't know we had a...*guest* tonight," Clara said while she appraised your outfit suspiciously.

"What guest? I haven't invited anyone to dinner tonight."

Your shoulders raise instinctively when Clara pointed an accusatory finger at you. "But there's someone right next to you,"

Great-grandma squinted in your direction. You tried to think of something quickly to get her to at least feel your presence if she couldn't see you. You took a long huff and blew it into your great-grandmother's face. The loose strands that framed her face barely budged, but great-grandma wrinkled her nose seemingly in response to the bit of air blown into her face.

"Clara, are you playing one of your tricks on me again, Clara? You need to excuse yourself when you pass gas."

"Pass gas? Mama I didn't-"

You cupped a hand to check yourself. Damn, you didn't think your breath smelled *that* bad.

Great-grandma kissed her teeth, "Ah, I don't have time for this."

"But Mama-"

"Go wash up. Dinner will be ready soon," she replied with finality.

Clara studied you incredulously again, but made a show of crossing the room to do as her mother instructed. When great-grandma returned to her toiling over the stove, Clara redirected her attention back to you. We had another stare off before she wordlessly motioned you to follow her.

You comply, padding up the familiar steps of the house to her childhood bedroom. Once inside, she quietly closed the door and ran the water in the standalone sink.

You tried to think of something to say, but the oddity of the situation had left you without words. Just as your mouth wrapped around an opening statement, Clara turned off the sink water, wiped her hands, and whipped around. She quickly drove you into the corner of her room with an umbrella you hadn't seen her grab pointed menacingly at you.

"Who are you and what do you want?!"