

The Art of Making Love by D. Van Robinson
Chapter Four – Naomi

Club Pulse was a beautiful venue; I already knew this from the pictures on their website. The visual was totally enhanced once I set foot inside. The ambiance was a far cry from the crowded hip-hop nooks and borough community centers I used to frequent in New York City. This place was full of class and Southern sophistication. I guess everyone in Atlanta didn't drive Cadillacs and sport diamond-encrusted grills after all.

There were a lot of fine brothers and sisters on the prowl. This was a 25 and over club, so there were no sagging pants or boy shorts—the dress code was very classy. The women in here were not playing with their Lenox Square evening wear. I almost felt underdressed in my chocolate Capri pants, white shirt and brown sweater. Oh well, being a New York artist gave me somewhat of a pass. I wished my sisters weren't trying so hard down here. I understand that there is a supposed "man shortage," but these women were lobbing the coochie like softball pitches.

I sipped my amaretto sour and continued to watch the spectacle of female objectification from the bar—it was definitely a buyer's market in the ATL. What was most interesting is that I could feel the energy of the women "dumbing down" for the sake of snagging some possible good dick for the night.

It's funny where life can take you. Two weeks ago, I was wrapping up the best art exhibit of my career at the New Museum of Art in Manhattan—when I got the call to do this "favor" for a family friend in Atlanta. At first, the thought of painting a mural in a nightclub seemed to be a step down from the artistic ladder I was climbing. After a brief research on the Internet, I learned that Club Pulse was the hub of the Southern Neo Soul Movement. It had been featured in *Essence*, *Black Enterprise*, *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines as well as a piece on BET on Jazz.

I began to look at this as my chance to reach the untapped Atlanta market and make a name for myself outside of New York City. If these affluent, African-American frequented a club full of my artwork, it would only be a matter of time before they start requesting pieces from me for their homes and offices.

As I surveyed the walls, I noticed they were mainly covered with traditional, black and white posters of famous musicians. On the east wall, the "regulars" were up there: John Coltrane, Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzie Gillespie and Miles Davis. The north wall was more contemporary: Kirk Whalum, Nina Simone, Wayman Tinsdale and Jonathan Butler. The west wall, nearest to the stage, had the modern leaders of the soul movement: Maxwell, Musiq Soulchild, Eric Roberson, Eryka Badu, Jill Scott, Ledisi and Anthony David. My eyes finally glanced at the band as I switched my stimulation from visual to aural.

Dayum, they sounded good.

I began to dissolve the images around me and allowed the band to serenade me. They looked so young to be playing so mellow and smooth. You would think they would be down the street at Club 112, or some other booty-shaking spot. But here were four young Thundercats, dressed in all black and performing the R&B classic, "Before I Let Go." The keyboard player sang into the mic like he was Frankie Beverly himself.

“Having fun?” Alvin sneaked up behind me. “I told you they were on point.”

“Oh dayum, Alvin. You startled me,” I replied. “Yeah, they sound good.”

“Those boys are hot, I’m telling you—and that keyboard player,” he continued. “He’s on his way, Naomi.”

“Boys is right,” I joked and turned to face him. “Are they even old enough to be in here?”

“Of course they are,” Alvin lifted his glass of Hennessy to his lips. “Now, ain’t none of them over 25, but they are damn good musicians for this 25 and over crowd.”

“And the *rising star* keyboard player?”

“Arthur?”

“Yes.”

“Art will be 25 on his next birthday. He’s the oldest and the leader,” Alvin bragged. “He’s got a music degree, but it don’t mean much because that boy was talented before the degree. I’m telling you, Naomi—Soul Reason is what keeps this place packed!”

“Excellent,” I responded. “Hopefully, they’ll enjoy the artistic renovations when we’re done.”

“Oh, hell yeah!” Alvin got excited. “So you think you can change the visual vibe up in here?” He finally finished his Hennessy.

“No doubt. I’m still gathering my vision, but I got big plans for this mural.” I gulped the remaining red liquid in my glass as well.

“That’s what I like to hear, baby girl. I’m glad you came to see what the club looked like before I shut it down.”

“No, I appreciate your flying me down early. That was real nice of you, Alvin.”

“Don’t even sweat it, Naomi,” Alvin turned and signaled the bartender to get him another drink. I turned to continue facing him. “Now, you’re staying at the Hilton Towers down on Courtland this weekend. I’ll come scoop you up tomorrow afternoon and we can see if your spot at the Studioplex will be ready by Monday. It should already be furnished, so all you need is y’clothes.”

“That sounds great. You think you and I could go to the art supply store tomorrow and get some of the equipment I’ll be needing?”

“Hell yeah,” he answered, and then snapped his fingers. “I just remembered I gotta meet with Art tomorrow. Ah hell, he can roll with us.”

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“It’ll be cool.” Alvin scanned me quickly. “How old are you, Naomi?”

“Twenty-seven.”

“You don’t look a day over twenty-two,” he laughed. “Well, you and Art should find something to talk about tomorrow. He’s really cool people and can give you a quick rundown of the city...since you’ll be here for a month.” The bartender handed Alvin another Hennessy. “You need a refill?”

“I’m straight,” I answered. “I’m just gonna go find a spot somewhere closer to the band and just enjoy the music.”

“Well, holla at me if you need me...okay?”

“I hear ya, Alvin.” I smiled. He disappeared into the crowd. I turned back to face the band. Now they were performing a male-vocal version of “Say Yes” by Floetry. I bombarded my way closer to the stage to get the full experience. The lights were dimmed to a soft amber as couples slow danced to the groove. The bass player was thumping that bass line that spoke to the depths of my soul. The beat was slow and steady and the saxophone was doing this funky call and response thing with the keyboard. That’s when Arthur leaned his full, chocolate lips into the microphone:

“All you gotta do is say yes...don’t deny what you feel—let me undress youuuu baaaaby...I am here to let you know...” he sighed and took a deep breath, “You make me SOOOO SOOOO! So, so, so, soooo, so, so.”

His voice pierced through my clothes and sent shivers down my spine. That’s not something that happens often. I’m surrounded by artists, musicians and singers all the time—so I wasn’t some star struck groupie who wasn’t used to hearing good music. This brother had something special. Alvin was right, *he was on his way*. I could see it in how he embraced the music like a seasoned soul legend. But he was just a kid...a kid who was touching my soul with every note exhaled from his chest.