

Iconic Rouggs

Written &

Illustrated by:

Rokiatou Bah

ICONIC ROUGGS

Acknowledgment

To all the wonderful people who have lit a dream in my life

My husband Abduloulaye ,

My seventh grade teacher Ms. Tiani,

My tenth grade English teacher Jerry,

*Thank you for believing in me, for seeing me, for seeing what I
can be, and for believing in my ability to achieve greatness*

Prologue

Fashion is a vastly diverse word used in many different ways by many different individuals. Everyone has their own definition and image of “Fashion.” Overall most individuals agree on one thing, and that is that your fashion and sense of style is a physical representation of you as a person. In the few chapters written by Rokiadou, she clearly portrays how she was introduced to her passion of fashion and how she incorporates this in her daily life. Rokiadou’s passion was driven by her willingness to get in trouble by her parents and school staff for simply refusing to wear proper uniform and instead chose to add her own “pizazz” to her school uniform. This goes to show that when it comes to expressing yourself, not a thing or person can stop you, well atleast Rokiadou. In these few chapters she, in detail, explained how she prepares herself for a few events she attends whether it be big or small. In this you find that it is not always about the outfit you wear but how you wear it. Her outfits were always well put together being that the embellishments added on were well thought out hence why it accompanied her outfits making them all top tier. She in turn also sheds light on why it is important to wear or not wear certain things to particular events. For example, Rokiadou expressed the importance of not overshadowing the intended host or VIP personnel. All in all in these 15 chapters, Rokiadou was able to explicitly spotlight her vision of fashion and how she is able to express herself through her articles of clothing.

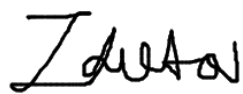


Table of Content :

Acknowledgment	p. 2
Prologue.....	p. 3
Chapter One- Sixteenth Birthday.....	p. 5
Chapter Two - First Eid Celebration As A Teen.....	p. 7
Chapter Three- 17th Birthday	p. 9
Chapter Four - High School Prom(June, 2017)	p. 11
Chapter Five- 18th Birthday(October 2017).....	p. 14
Chapter Six - First Fulani Concert(December 2017).....	p. 17
Chapter Seven- Cortland Fashion Show.....	p. 20
Chapter Eight- Aunt's Baby Shower.....	p. 23
Chapter Nine- Eid 2019.....	p. 25
Chapter Ten- Mansour's Birthday.....	p. 27
Chapter Eleven- Fatou's Birthday Outing.....	p. 30
Chapter Twelve- Twentieth Birthday.....	p. 32
Chapter Thirteen- Cousin's Wedding.....	p. 35
Chapter Fourteen- Idi's & Shaba's Birthday.....	p. 37
Chapter Fifteen- Eid 2021.....	p. 39
Author's Biography.....	p. 41

Chapter One- Sixteenth Birthday

The 30th of October was a long morning and day, but it ended with a lovely evening. For my birthday, I had my brows, nails, and feet done in Harlem, my make-up done in the Bronx, and dinner at Red Lobster on 42nd Street downtown. My companions were required to wear at least one piece of black apparel, which I had established as a dress code/color coordination. Due to everyone's budget, including mine, I was very careful about how much skin I showed, the sort of hairdo I wore, the way I shot pictures, and the location I chose to eat because I was only 16 years old.

I was determined to look classy on my birthday, so I began comparing colors that might achieve that look. I ultimately chose a black dress with some white in the pattern, but the outfit was black throughout. Makeup was the most significant because it was the one aspect of my *appearance* that really stood out. *My face was done in a soft beat, but I wore red matte lipstick on my lips, which made them look enticing.* I didn't have much in the way of tangible *adornment*, such as jewelry, *but my fingernails were painted white to match the white design on the dress.*

I kept my cultural bangles on both my hands, the right hand had green bangles and the left had faded black, white, and red bangles. Those bangles were part of my *identity* for a while, even though it did not compliment the entire look in a *fashionable* way, it was still part of my everyday *dress*. The *clothing* neckline was a turtle neck and because of that *I wore white rounded plastic earrings which intensified my face along with the makeup.* When it came to my hair *I pressed heat to my hair for it to transition from an afro to a silk press using a blow dryer and flat iron.* I used a rat tail comb to *part my hair to a side part.*

I was looking forward to my 16th birthday just like any other girl. It was my first time commemorating the occasion on October 30th, 2015, and it was memorable. For the first time, I felt what waxing one's brows felt like, and I had professional cosmetics applied to my face. It had been a day full of firsts, and as I gazed in the mirror, I realized I had begun to want for the next birthday, or any other day when I could feel as lovely as I had on my sixteenth birthday.



Chapter Two- First Eid Celebration As a Teen

Everyone was buddies, and there were so many festivities, cookouts, and get-togethers every other day over the summer of 2016. But this time, I dressed up to commemorate Eid, an islamic holiday commemorating the end of Ramadan's 30-day fast. Eid is a day to dress up in your best clothes and appear your best. My older sister had given me a bunch of gowns, and I chose a black and purple dress for the barbeque later that evening in the south Bronx. I'd also scheduled a makeup session with my first cousin, and later that day, a guy who was interested in me offered to pick me up and drop me off at the event's location.

The black and purple dress hung just above my knees, and the fabric draped wonderfully on and around my tiny figure. *I also used a flat iron to move my hair from its natural condition to one that has been heat treated. After that, I pinned my hair back to highlight how the dress's neckline is cut up to the side, revealing the collar bone. My pink painted toes shone off my fingernails and the outfit as I donned black 6 inch heels with open toes. You can hear the click and clack of my shoes, smell my Victoria's Secret perfume, which I got on a great discount, and see my lips, which are adorned with a glossy lip gloss that purks them out.*

I recall what happened. Because this purple and black dress was a supplement that complimented my figure, I felt like I was being looked at as a girl by a guy, and I was a walking attraction. I couldn't stop smiling that day for some reason; I looked asian, an asian. Barbie was a persona I was sporting on that particular day, and I liked it. My current spouse was a friend at the time, and I recall having heels on and being unable to cross from where I was standing to the other side of where the people were due to the wet grass in the middle of where I stood, and he lifted me up and carried me over the other side like a baby. In my purple and black clothing, I met a gentleman that day. I, too, was affected by everything. I also felt like everyone was looking at me; some of my female friends approached me with their cameras, filming and photographing me while hyping me up and complimenting me; this boosted my confidence not just in myself but also in my fashion sense.



Chapter Three- 17th Birthday

It was one of the coldest Octobers I'd ever known, there wasn't much to do that birthday, and there were less people at Red Lobster than there had been on my 16th birthday. I didn't actually celebrate it on the 30th; instead, it was on the 26th of October, for reasons I don't recall. I recall taking public transportation to my makeup appointment in the Bronx, and yes, the Bronx once more, since I had a specific cosmetic artist that I went to on a regular basis. It was such a pain because my appointment was almost canceled owing to train delays. I was terrified to leave my appointment since it began to rain, and I still had to go to Harlem to pick up my outfit.

This time my birthday dress was a cream/nudish dress color. *A supplement or modification I added was black 18 inch extensions to transition from the innocent baby face to a hot 17 year old. I went from having my natural moisturized blistex lip color to a dark dried matted nude color that became drier as the hours passed. I also changed the color of my nails, going from natural to short bright red tips. Because the front of this dress is open, I asked the makeup artist to apply foundation powder to my neck and breast area because I have skin discoloration on certain parts of my body, particularly the neck area. After applying the foundation, my skin tone was evened out.* I also inherited a dry left foot from my dad which forced me that day to pay a little extra money to have *oil treatment on my foot to smoothen out the dry foot.*

During this period, I've realized that I have a fantastic sense of style, and someone once told me, "I enjoy how you put things together." I intended to be stylish for my birthday, but I wasn't able to carry it out completely. When I tried on my birthday dress after ordering it, there was too much cleavage showing. I had to take it to a tailor to close up the cleavage a little more because I am a young woman with large breasts. I was too young to appear too exposed; I was uncomfortable, and society would think so as well. This was the point at which I realized I couldn't wear whatever I wanted because my body was changing and becoming more voluptuous.



Chapter Four- High School prom(June 2017)

It was senior year, and the girls were going insane trying to decide what style and design of dress to wear to prom. It became a competition to see who had the finest fashion sense; those with money didn't have to worry about "going all out," while those from limited households suffered. On the other hand, I meticulously designed my personalized prom gown with my childhood tailor five months before the event. I thought about what materials, hairstyles, heels, adornments, and make-up would match with my vision of a look. I'm not sure where my prom was held, but I know it was at a lovely rented nightclub 5 blocks from Facing History High School on 5th Avenue.

Even though it was summer, I knew I wanted a dress with long sleeves because it was Ramadan month, and I wanted to respect it by wearing decently, even if I did not fast when I was meant to for that day. My gown was black and gold, with a turtleneck and a huge opening at the bottom, as well as a back that was open. *My hair was cleaned and blow dried, and then my stylist, Michelle, added a slicking gel to help smooth my hair into an updo shape. She braided my natural hair into a single braid while applying gel to the hair and combing it together to erase all the space. After braiding my hair, Michelle took out synthetic black hair that was about 40 inches long and began wrapping and swirling it around the braid to create a design that ended up looking like a polished updo bun.*

I was slender, so the upper portion of the dress was *fitting tight to give and reveal certain curves in my body, while the bottom of the dress was opened wide to enable ease of movement in my six-inch heels and allow simple strides. I wore gold circular earrings on my ears, which gave my face a rounder appearance.* I had bigger lips, but the dramatic make-up, which included *a dark purple lipstick application on my lips by the beauty artist, made me appear bold.* I have a chubby face by nature, but *the make-up that was applied to my face was divinely sculpted, making my face appear thin and edgy.* I had my *eyebrows waxed* before getting my make-up done, and I prefer my brows to be boxy, but the makeup artist ended up *using a little eyebrow razor to arched my brows a little more than they were before.*

Since my freshman year in high school, I had been looking forward to prom. I remembered watching high school musicals and their proms, and I wanted mine to be just as extravagant, but in the most glamorous way possible. I wanted to be noticed in a new way by a lot of people, I wanted the compliments and the fashion kudos. Even after all the stress of putting myself together, I was astounded at how lovely I can look. Because I was small at the time, it was always the bigger or thicker girls who drew the most attention from the opposite sex, but I walked with confidence in my face and stride. At the end of the prom, consider how much money I spent for only one day and two to five hours, because it left a lasting impression.



Chapter Five- 18th birthday(October 2017)

My 18th birthday marked the first time I purchased bundles of hair, coloured it auburn blonde, and turned it into a wig, as well as the first time I customized a birthday dress in African fabric, thanks to Fallou, my tailor. My make-up was different; it reflected my age, and I told my make-up artist, "You can finally freestyle on my face; soothing beats are no longer essential," which she did. Finally, the true me was revealing myself, and I was ready to go all out to honor myself. My closest friend Hawa and I looked up places on Google, but I wasn't satisfied with what we saw; I wanted something different from previous birthday celebrations, so we went to the Nikko hibachi restaurant on 1280 Amsterdam Ave, New York, N.Y. It's been a long year, and all I wanted to do was conclude it by trying new things.

I was finally 18 years old, a milestone that every child aspired to reach at the time. *My real hair was braided into ten back braids to help the wig lay flat; my wig was 28 inches long, but it's generally rounded to 30 inches; and the middle of the wig was plucked by my hair stylist Fatou to make it look more natural. I took off my little earrings and replaced them with a pair of large rose gold hoops that complimented my dress and heels. I usually wear a size 9, but since the shoes were so cute and only a size 8 was available, I squeezed into them. I wore a matted nude lipstick with a hint of transparent gloss to keep my lips from drying out instead of my strawberry chapstick.*

Furthermore, after an hour of wearing the wig, I found myself pulling the front too much, as the wig, like my shoes, was tight. *Because my arms were slim, the dress arms were made to appear large and ruffled, giving my arms plenty of room to breathe inside. The dress's top was off the shoulders, revealing very little cleavage. To blend in and create an even toned balance with my makeup on my face, I use foundation powder on my neck and chest area. Finally, the dress's bottom was tighter than usual, making a small ruffle noise when I walked because my thighs were rubbing together due to a lack of space to extend my legs apart.*

Body modification was at an all-time high when I became a legal adult. I wanted to be different in terms of how I looked, dressed, and felt. The feeling of needing to embrace a new era gave me a nice lift. But it was a lonely night; despite the fact that my

outing drew approximately 5-6 individuals, I was missing a former romantic partner. My eyes couldn't quit gazing at the entrance while I was eating hibachi, expecting that he would walk in and surprise me. I noticed my sense of style is appearing elegant on my 18th birthday.



Chapter Six - First Fulani Concert(December 2017)

This was my first Fulani concert; normally, only adults 21 and older are permitted to attend DTM's performances, but I was around grownups, so I was unconcerned. My aunt, whom I call Dija, advised me to dress more maturely. I dressed up in white trousers, a lovely outing shirt, a stunning blazer, a deep curly wig, and short heel boots to look older and mature. The event took place in the South Bronx from 11:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m., although my aunt likes to arrive a little later to make an entrance. It was a chilly and sleety December, and the roads were slick, so we travelled slowly and arrived at 12:30 a.m.

Going to the concert was a spur-of-the-moment choice. Then I remembered I had a new shirt that I hadn't worn yet, and *I had just showered about four hours before*, so I decided not to shower again till I returned. I had old back braids or cornrows on my head, and since it was too late to remove and redo them, *I grabbed an old toothbrush, soaked it slightly, dipped it in a gel bottle, and smoothed my edges back to make it ready to wear a wig. After applying dove soap to my face and brushing it with a sponge to wake it up, I rinsed it with warm then cold water. I sprayed the wig with water while combing it with a broad tooth comb to untangle the curls and produce the puffy appearance.*

After I finished with my hair, I moved on to my attire. When I removed my shirt and white slacks and *noticed that they were wrinkled, I decided to iron them.* I don't know how to apply makeup, so *I took an eyeliner and put it on my under eye lid to make my eyes look bigger because they're so small.* Then I made a dark color lipstick with two different *types of pigments that I can't recall and applied it to my lips.* I eventually located my black heeled boots, but they were dusty, *so I whipped them back to their original color, solid black, with wet tissue. After that, I doused myself with my Victoria's Secret perfume.*

I was a little more reserved at this event because it wasn't necessarily a gathering of my age group, and it wasn't a typical concert. My mother was one of the VIPs there, and she was scheduled to be called up on stage that night to be thanked for her support, and we were there to cheer her on. I also felt protected since I was dressed in jeans, a long-sleeved blazer, and hair that covered most of my face; it appeared as if I was hiding, and it worked. I was only uncomfortable when I initially stepped in and was attempting

to find a seat because I noticed a cousin with whom I used to be close sitting two rows behind me with her partner, with whom I was no longer on speaking terms. Apart from that incident, I sat and watched the performances.



Chapter Seven- Cortland Fashion Show

It was March 2019, 22nd or the 23rd, when I hosted my first fashion show. I was a member of the Pan African Association up state In Suny Cortland University, located at 22 Graham Ave, Cortland, NY 13045. During the months of planning the show I, the representative, the president Funmi, Vice president Blessing, secretary Sarah, and senior advisor Ruth all came together to discuss the fabric we were going to buy to create our outfits for the show's opening presentation, where each of us will be called out to dance or walk down the stage. We all agreed on the color purple, and chose an African fabric to make the clothing out of. Preparing our outfits, and our overall appearance was very important for everyone because we all knew dress representation says a lot about an individual.

Funmi offered me my fabric as well as the location of a tailor in New York City where I could get my measurements taken and the cloth dropped off. To avoid my hair losing moisture and having a dry scalp the night before the show, *I washed it with Garnier Fructis conditioner instead of shampoo the night before. My hair moved from being a touch dry to looking more moisturized and having more volume after washing it with conditioner.* When I went to the manicure salon for my nails, *I requested that my cuticles be trimmed/cut down to make my fingers look more appealing because they were very thick.* My brows were bushy because I hadn't waxed them in three months; *after they were waxed with hot gel, they went from bushy to neat.*

Furthermore, the lace closure on my black wig that I planned to wear with my dress had a lot of got2b glue on it, making it difficult to keep sleeked, so I opted to wash it with conditioner and leave it to condition overnight in a plastic bag that I kept in the freezer for better conditioning. After that, my dress was finished, and the tailor invited me to try it on the morning of the fashion show, only to discover that my hips had grown wider. The tailor had to recut and remeasure me to get the dress to suit me properly. *I went from having a bare face to a complete makeup face with glitter eyelids* thanks to Blessing buddy Tyler who offered to apply cosmetics to my face. Her make-up was extremely heavy, and *I noticed that my face went from light to heavy as a result of the*

powder she used or the way she applied it. Finally, I attached the wig to my head and used a blow dryer to assist the glue stay to my forehead and prevent it from lifting.

Dressing up this time was a bit of a problem for me because I wasn't at home and wasn't working, so I had to make do with what I had. I had to put my faith in new people, including blessing's close buddy Tyler to apply my makeup, the local nail and eyebrow parlor to do my nails and wax my eyebrows, and the club tailor to make my dress. For me, the nicest part is being able to express myself; each outfit I wore had to represent me and my sense of style. To me, belonging to one's outfit is crucial. I was apprehensive, but I was convinced that even if I didn't look my best, I would still get people's attention.



Chapter Eight- Aunt's Baby Shower

In April 2019, I wore an African attire from Guinea for the second time; this time, I didn't have time to apply makeup or shop for heels, so I was only half clothed, but I did not disappoint. This time, the gathering took place at my parents' home in Harlem, at 131 West 142 Street, New York, NY 10030. There were probably sixty to eighty persons in attendance, and everyone was dressed up in "bazin." I had so many made-in-Guinea outfits from the previous year that I finally decided on a pink bazin skirt and a short-sleeved bazin top with green lining. I had long medium locs in my hair, which were enough of an excellent *supplement* to complement myself and my clothes; I didn't have time to paint my nails.

I was delighted to be able to take two days off to spend time with my family. My long locs brought out the beauty in my face; I was thinner in appearance at the time, and my eyes were not buried when I smiled. *I showered with an exfoliating body wash, which made my face look brighter and more rejuvenated.* MY mouth was smelling like onions because I had eaten a dinner with a lot of onions earlier in the day, *but when I brushed my teeth again, it started smelling like cold mint instead of the onions I had eaten. I sprayed a bunch of Victoria's Secret perfumes all over myself, including my wrist and behind my two ears, to make sure I didn't smell like the food that was being prepared in the home.*

Even though it was a tranquil evening, I still found comfort and peace of mind. I had a little nervousness before the guests arrived because I hadn't seen most of them in years, but it dissipated after a few minutes of being around each other. It was fun to witness the women throw money in the air to commemorate the birth of the baby and the mother. When I was eating all the different foods that day, I felt lucky, and I thought about the culture and how one day it may be me being celebrated. When there is a celebration and everyone is having a good time, bills and everyday problems fade away. My heart was at home at the celebration, and I forgot about my daily college routine in Cortland.



Chapter Nine- Eid 2019

Eid is a celebration that every muslim man and woman is honored to be part of. The day before Eid was the last day of fasting for the Ramadan month, and Eid was the day of celebrating the muslims that fast during the 30 days. About Two to three weeks prior my dad decided to buy all of his children and wife an outfit for Eid, he contacted the fashion designers in Guinea that he knew would give him a reasonable price for clothes making. Fasting forward to the evening before eid, when I set my alarm to seven am for the next day because the prayer I planned on attending began at nine thirty am on 3400 3rd Ave, Bronx, NY 10456, which is 15 minutes from my home. I went to the prayer with my younger sister Zainab, cousin Idiatou, and the guy I was dating at the time.

For Eid, I never wear slacks and an oversized dress shirt; instead, I prefer to wear a loose dress that is islamically modest. I wore shoes called "mookeh" in my fulani language, which have an alligator shape. I paired them with brown pants and a cream large dress shirt that concealed my hands. In preparation for Eid, I had to *change my hair from an afro to little braids braided by my mother, Salematou. I used oil on my dry scalp to moisturize it. I used vaseline and shea butter oil to alleviate the exterior dryness on my right foot, which is always dry.* Finally, I selected a lighter creme headscarf to complement the ensemble.

Eid 2019 was unlike any other Eid before it. Even though I wore the outfit and the shoes that were provided to me to go with it on Eid, I was uncomfortable, and later on I realized that I felt different since it was not my regular style, but rather someone else's interpretation of a lovely outfit. I stared at the mirror for a long time because I wanted to make sure I looked good before I went downstairs into the gentleman car I was dating at the time, and his assessment of how I looked was important to me. I forgot to paint my toes, which made me quite uncomfortable because I've always been self-conscious about my feet, particularly my left. Despite this, I went to the mosque to pray in front of hundreds of people and received praises like "you look so gorgeous."



Chapter Ten- Mansour's Birthday

Friends get together to celebrate significant occasions, such as someone's birthday. It was my friend Mansour's birthday on September 28th, 2019, and he invited me and a few other common friends to come out and celebrate with him at a club called "Cavali New York," which is located at 3621 Steinway St, Queens, NY 1101. I was nervous because it was my first time going to a club and I had no idea what to expect or what I would experience. I invited my two cousins, Idiatou and Hawa, to my house to assist me in preparing for the birthday party. I was driving to Queens from West Harlem at 12:00 a.m., and I stopped to capture some photos before entering the club.

For the first time, I had to dress differently, outside of my regular comfort zone, to go to the club. I didn't have any club clothing in my wardrobe, but I knew or had a concept of how I wanted to look, so I borrowed Idiatou's clothes. I had not had a shower all day and because I was cooking fish, I smelled fishy, *so I took a shower with Dove body wash. Because of the cucumber and green tea dove soap, I smelled cool and fresh after the shower, and my body felt and looked hydrated rather than dry and desiccated. I used the traditional dove deodorant powder, which left my underarms looking overly white, which was a concern because of the sort of shirt I planned to wear, so I wiped it off with tissue and replaced it with the dove deodorant spray, which left no residue or white powder.*

After that, *I used Jergens Aloe Vera lotion on my skin.* Because I don't know how to apply makeup to my face on a daily basis, *I knew that using that exact lotion that day will transform my complexion from colorless to bright and refreshed.* I got my brows waxed a few weeks prior to that day, so it wasn't brand fresh. *Idiatou ended up using an eyebrow pencil to shape my brows from a slightly spread-out shape to a more curled one. Also, because I had short eyelashes, Hawa applied false lashes to my natural lashes to lengthen them and make my eyes appear larger.* I eventually got dressed in my black cargo trousers, black crop top, and one-hand top and was ready to party.

Preparing for that birthday club event made me understand that clothing might represent more than one identity. That day, I was a gorgeous girl; I felt like I was being

observed, and I was deserving of it. I grinned and felt inner glitter when I received praises from strangers on the street. I realized that black not only provided a person's appearance of elegance, but it also gave them a bold look, which I enjoyed. When I walked into that club, I sensed a warm welcome and knew everything was in order.



Chapter Eleven- Fatou's Birthday Outing

It's hard to not celebrate a birthday, because when one celebrates it once, it then kind of becomes a yearly tradition that can't be missed. My friend Fatou invited me to her 21st birthday dinner outing with other mutual friends on September 30th, and there was no dress code this time. I had ordered my dress from Pretty Little Thing online two weeks previously, and because it was red in color, I went ahead and purchased a red wig to go with it. The dinner was held in a restaurant on Lexington Avenue and 59th Street, and it was a cool evening. Because I had planned ahead of time, my preparations for this event were simple and stress-free.

It's exciting to try on new clothing, especially when it's for a special occasion. I had already showered and applied lotion, and I had old cornrows on my head with my natural hair, so my front edges were all frizzy and laying in different directions. *I took a toothbrush that I normally use for my hair and put a small amount of gel, gently dampened it with warm water, and smoothed my edges from curly to laying flat and nice;* this allowed me to glue the red wig to my head quickly and simply. *Because the area beneath my eyes was gloomy, I used concealer to brighten it up and draw attention to specific features on my face. My lips had a natural hue to them at first, but I applied clear lip gloss on them and they became delicious. I was wearing open toe heels, so I added a gentle orange nail color as a complement, and I was set to go.*

When attending someone else's special event, it's usually a good idea to avoid overshadowing them, whether on purpose or by accident. I knew Fatou was going to wear a dress from the start, so I wore pants instead. Despite the fact that I was wearing pants, I did not limit my appearance; I made sure I looked fantastic. That evening, I felt really posh; I felt mature and responsible because I had planned ahead of time for my costume, arrived at the event on time, and was well-dressed. Because of the way I smelt the "Coco Chanel Mademoiselle" perfume on, I remember feeling lavish and wealthy. That exquisite evening in the Upper East Side instilled in me a strong sense of self-assurance.



Chapter Twelve - Twentieth Birthday

Every year, I look forward to my birthday since each birthday number represents a new promise for a better life. For some reason, the age of twenty seems to be insignificant because twenty-one is just over the corner, but my twentieth birthday was all about glitter, and my dress was two dresses in one. The silver side (a costly material) was seen, while the other side was soft cotton. I was broke for my 20th birthday, therefore my tailor Fallou designed the dress for me as a birthday present, and I wore a 32-inch ponytail with pink eye shadow. I was going for a Barbie appearance, influenced by Nicki Minaj, and I noticed that my style gradually evolved into my favorite rapper's style. On Lexington Avenue and 59th Street, I went to the same restaurant that my friend Fatou went to for her birthday dinner.

This year's birthday planning was really different and stressful for me. Because buying a wig was out of my price range, I decided to try a ponytail this year. I went to the beauty supply store and bought a long black weave extension. *I had braids in my hair, and because it was dry due to a lack of moisture, I sprinkled some water on it to give moisture, allowing me to easily remove the braids without shedding. This technique helped my hair go from brittle to softness, hydration, and a smooth cuticle by washing it with a Garnier Fructis hair shampoo and deep conditioning it for about an hour. I used a hair blow dryer to untangle the curls and transition from curly to straight afro hair after washing and deep conditioning my hair, which was wet and curly.* I moved on to other parts of my body that needed attention once I completed prepping my hair.

After that, I had to prepare my underarms because my dress didn't have long sleeves. I had shaved my underarms two weeks earlier, but hair began to grow back approximately one inch or half an inch, *so I shaved my armpits using a two-dollar razor, which resulted in it being neater and fresher.* After my makeup artist, Penda, put makeup on my face, *I went from having a bare face to having a baked face, thanks to foundation and pink glitter eyeshadow on my eyelids.* I had to put oil all over my skin because my clothing was short and exposed a lot of skin. I had already applied my regular jergens body lotion, but it was only for moisture; *the shea butter oil I used helped my skin go from normal hydration to having my melanin shine and glow in a really bleaming*

manner. Finally, I took off my modest ordinary earrings and replaced them with my long pink earrings, which changed the contour of my face from oval to longer.

I was apprehensive about my birthday that year; I felt obligated to celebrate despite the fact that I didn't have enough money set up. Most people would encourage me to keep it simple, but dressing up has never been straightforward for me; it's either all out or nothing. Thankfully, everything worked out, and I learned that I am someone who wears the clothes rather than the clothes wearing me; in other words, no matter what I wear, whether it is a low-cost item or a high-end item, I always look dashing. This increased my self-esteem and caused me to view myself in a more positive light when it came to attractiveness. I had the impression that I was a high-quality person who added worth to anything she touched or wore.



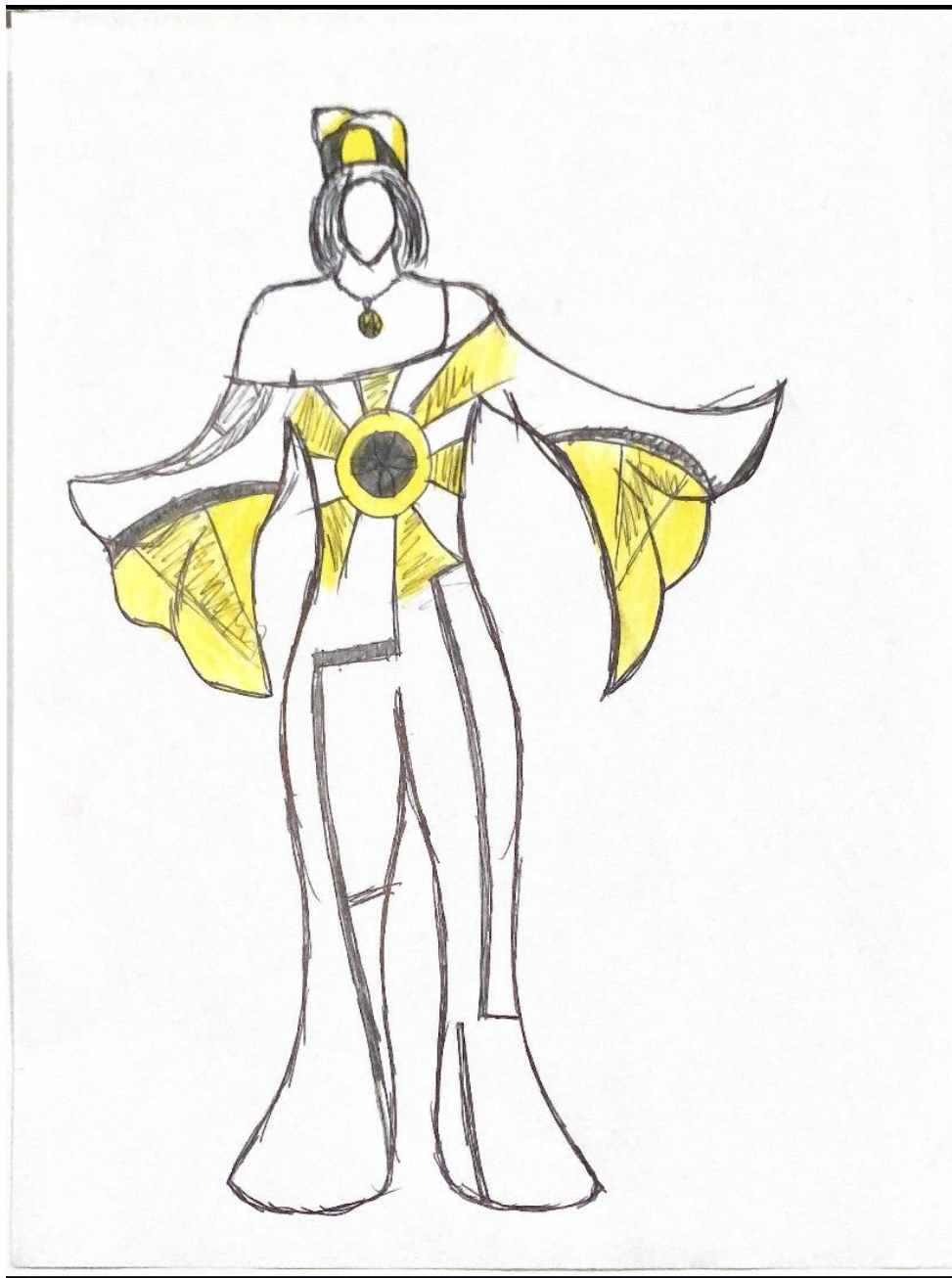
Chapter Thirteen- Cousin's Wedding

Preparing for a wedding is a major undertaking; you want to seem glamorous, extravagant, and representative of your social level. When my cousin Fatima got married in November 2019, my two other closest cousins, Hawa and Idiatou, and I designed identical dresses for her wedding ceremony. This time, I went with a fall color bob wig to match my fabric color; the bob was a perfect choice because I needed to make sure the style from head to toe didn't clash. We hired a traveling makeup artist named Ara to apply makeup to our faces, and it took her about three and a half hours to complete all three of our faces. At 4 p.m., we arrived at the wedding hall, which is located at 3395 3rd Avenue in Bronx, NY 10456. Even though it was bitterly chilly, we were all dressed to the nines and ready to attend the wedding.

Dressing and grooming for a wedding is demanding not only for the bride, but also for the invited guests. Knowing that I would be wearing a wig and that my outfit will include a hat, I knew I needed to braid my natural hair underneath the wig tiny and flat to allow the hat to sit correctly. *Because I have naturally large breasts, I had my tailor, Fallou, cover up and tighten the cleavage in the front of the jumpsuit to help my boobs go from large to a little flatter so that outside perverted attention would not be drawn to them.* Also, because I was tiny and my collar bone showed a lot, *I wore a long MK circular gold chain to hide it and make that collarbone look smaller than being so out in the open.* Finally, because I have dry feet, which I inherited from my father, *I went to a nail shop in westside Harlem to have them scrubbed and wrapped in plastic to add moisture and prevent my feet from flaking.*

The most crucial days and events in your life are when you discover who is truly constantly by your side and who prioritizes you in their life. Looking back on that wedding day, I've realized that the dress itself may influence how important an event is to someone. Fatima's bridesmaids, who were supposed to walk out with her, did not even make it a priority to get together prior to the wedding and plan to dress extravagantly to show that they are the bride's best friend; instead, the bridesmaids appeared to be outside guests who came to the wedding rather than close friends of the bride. I felt out of place because I wasn't a bridesmaid, and because I was dressed so

nicely, my aunt begged me to walk out with the bride and pretend to be one of her friends, which was awkward because Fatima and I were arguing at the time, and knowing that she was about ten years older than me, it didn't feel right to be introduced as a friend instead of her little cousin. Overall, I received numerous compliments on my attire, and I was relieved that something went well that day.



Chapter Fourteen- Idi's & Shabas's Birthday

My cousin Idiatou's birthday and my good friend Shaba's birthday celebration were hosted in my Fiancee's residence at 346 Sanford Avenue, Newark, NJ 07106 on July 25, 2020. I happened to be dressed in the same color as the birthday girls. They wore polyester spaghetti dresses, while I wore lace spaghetti dresses. We had invited a set number of people to the celebration, but an unanticipated number of people showed up without invitation, causing chaos in the house. It was a party, but it was a wild one.

Preparing for a party is always a last-minute endeavor. I browsed on Facebook the night before for people selling dresses with same-day pick-up. *Because I've gained weight in the last few months and my hips have widened, I chose a stretchy material dress that will fit and drape beautifully while highlighting my curves at the perfect angles. Fatou applied makeup to my face, and I moved from naked face to soft beat makeup, which was a lighter foundation that didn't make my face feel heavy. I had showered and been at home all day, so I smelt like home. I wanted to smell fresh, so I sprayed Victoria's Secret Coconut perfume and body spray on. Finally, because I had faux locs in my hair, I knotted half of them up to make my face appear more open and elongated rather than closed and narrow.*

Partying is not for everyone, including myself. I am not normally the type of girl who votes to go out and party; instead, I prefer to go to the movies or have brunch in the morning, but this time was different; I had to show up and show love to my cousin. This time, I felt exposed; I felt a little undressed since the clothing's material was too thin, and I felt like every part of my body underneath was vivid, even though it was all in my thoughts. This is one of the reasons I don't generally go to parties because there is always a dress code, whether expressed or not, and I don't want to be the center of attention. Dress communicates one's identity, and I understood for the first time that I adore the idea of looking exquisite but reserved.



Chapter 15- Eid 2021

Ramadhan had come and gone far too quickly, and I was ready to welcome and celebrate Eid. My life situation changed as I gained weight, took on more obligations, and gained new responsibilities. I was no longer living with my parents, which clashed with the money I spent on grooming and shopping at the time. As a result, I dressed up and beautified less. My Hijab and silk abaya were purchased in the South Bronx, along Third Avenue. Finally, the next day, I dressed up and went to worship at a mosque at 483 Washington St, Newark, NJ, 07102 at 9:00 a.m., and after the morning prayer, my fiance snapped some photos of me, which I loathed because of my recent weight gain.

At times, wearing modesty can be the most simple kind of dressing; it keeps you covered and reserved. Because it's a religious festival, I knew I couldn't show any skin right away. *I used a moisturizing detangler to transition my hair from tangled coils/curls to stretched waves while it was in an afro. My cousin hawa then assisted me in braiding my extended wavy hair and oiling my scalp to seal in the moisture.* On the morning of Eid, *I began wrapping my emerald hijab in a circular motion, which normally transforms your face from one of experience to one of innocence and naiveté.* Finally, I put on my abaya, which still looked odd on me because my breasts were too huge, and I covered the open cleavage section with the bottom of my hijab that was hanging to keep the modest look.

Dressing might be the most inconvenient thing to do at times, especially after you've tried so many supplements or made so many modifications to yourself and nothing has changed. I didn't feel like I belonged in my body, I felt large, and I didn't want to be seen in my clothes because of this inner conflict, so I changed from my abaya to jeans and a t-shirt. Even when my fiance complimented me, I felt he was being rude by calling me lovely; I felt I had been duped and had devolved into a pitiful thing. For a while, my enthusiasm for dresses faded; I didn't feel like the same person I was a year earlier, who could wear anything and yet look stunning. I'm still figuring out who the new beautiful me is.



Author's Biography



Rokiataou Bah, the author, was born on October 30, 1999, in Hackensack, New Jersey, and grew up in Harlem, New York. Her elementary school, PS194M, was the first school she ever attended in New York City, where she and a few other teachers recognized her passion for styling and fashion. There has been a lot of turbulence, emotional abuse, and life hardships growing up in a low-income household with African parents and traditional culture. Rokiataou used writing to escape everyday life challenges and sadness. She began composing her first poetry book in 2017 and

eventually published it on Amazon under the title "A Season Spent With Sadness." Her writing set her free, and opened her mind and heart to what she really wanted to be in life, that's to enter the fashion world and become a fashion stylist mogul.

She later studied psychology at the University of Cortland in upstate New York because she wanted to help individuals with their internal struggle and emotions. However, she ultimately became dissatisfied and concerned since she realized that deep down inside, fashion was her actual dream. In August 2019, Rokiatou returned to New York City and enrolled in The New York City College of Technology. She did a semester of nursing at City Tech, unaware that the school had a fashion program. When she found out through a classmate, she changed her major to Fashion of Business Technology, and her dream became clear to her; she began making plans to become a stylist, and she has been doing fashionable photo shoots with various styles to build her foundation on social media, specifically on the Instagram platform. Finally, she is organizing her own version of New York Fashion Week, finally unveiling an amazing app that will alter the way people buy digitally and physically, with the money she has been making from her roadside assistance business after graduation in Spring 2022.