

THE SEVEN

&

THE SEVEN REVISITED



Alessia Brio

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T H E S E V E N

Personification of principles

Braving frigid winds and driving snow, Nia marched up Washington Street. The tails of her tattered scarf fluttered behind making her appear to strain against a knit leash held by Mother Nature's fury. Although repeatedly delayed by beggars seeking spare change, she was determined to reach the shelter in time to help the others serve dinner—and it looked as if she just might make it.

Nia was a magnet to those less fortunate. Her welcoming demeanor and gentle disposition drew people to her, and her eyes held them. They just knew she'd help, and she always came through—so much so that she seldom had enough left over to make her own ends meet. Case in point: over the course of ten city blocks, she'd given away the last fifty dollars of her most recent paycheck. Thus, it'd be at least another month before she could even think about getting her phone service reconnected.

The shelter would undoubtedly be filled to capacity, and then some. It was, after all, the busiest week of the year. On Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, many of the city's civic organizations served the homeless, but the following week such charity fell away like discarded ribbon and wrapping paper. Having salved its collective conscience for another year, the *haves* returned to their comfortable lives. The *have-nots* were nowhere near as fortunate.

Intensely aware of the trend, the struggling *Nguzo Saba* shelter planned accordingly. While community outreach took place year 'round, its most concerted effort always coincided with the week following Christmas—when most folks were preoccupied with college football bowl games, gift returns, and making plans for New Year's Eve.

As she turned the corner, Ujima's lilting voice called, "Nia, where

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have you been? We've been worried!"

"The usual," Nia sighed, taking Ujima's gloved hands in her own and kissing each cheek.

"So you're broke." The older woman gave a knowing smile.

Nia nodded. "I can't help it, sister. They're in such dire need."

"We'll talk to Ujamaa after dinner. He'll have some ideas." She snorted, "My brother always has ideas."

The women, not really sisters, locked arms and trudged the remaining two blocks to the shelter. Ujima's optimistic outlook buoyed Nia's spirits. As the problem solver of the bunch, Ujima often worked closely with Kuumba. They made a formidable team, and most suspected that their blossoming romance was much deeper than they let on. Passion for a cause often brought divergent people together, and those two were about as different as two people could get. It made for some spectacular arguments as well as some breathtaking accomplishments.

Kuumba's irreverence and seemingly cavalier attitude often rubbed the shelter's founder, Umoja, the wrong way, but no one could dispute that Kuumba was the most effective fund raiser they'd ever known. His good looks opened doors, and his charm melted icy hearts. The only college educated member of their diverse family, Kuumba was considering a run for city council next fall. There, he believed, he could do the most good for a seriously disenfranchised population. Still, Umoja made no secret of the fact that he questioned his daughter's choice in a potential mate.

Ujima held open the shelter's battered outer door, and the welcoming warmth and mouth watering aromas enveloped Nia, jarring her from her thoughts. As they stripped off their layered outer wear, Kujichagulia rolled toward them with a steaming foam cup of hot chocolate in each of his power wheelchair's cup holders.

"Thank you, Kuji!" Nia exclaimed, ruffling the boy's mop of already ruffled red hair and earning a gloriously sunny, freckled grin. "How's the leg today?"

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Kuji pecked at his voice synthesizer until the small electronic device emitted a tinny response. "Not so bad," he typed, but his eyes told a different story. The surgery to release his knotted hamstring was considered elective, and no one had yet been successful in convincing Medicaid that it was medically necessary. Kuji, however, was his own best advocate, and Nia had no doubt he'd eventually prevail. His mother, Imani, planned to take him to meet with their legislative delegates right after the first of the year. Her stunning and vulnerable beauty coupled with Kuji's engaging smile were certain to win the day.

"C'mon! Let's eat," Ujima coaxed. "Everyone's waiting."

Nia gasped as she turned the corner and stared into the shelter's main gathering room. At least three hundred people of all ages, shapes, sizes, and colors waited for a free meal. She hoped there'd be enough food. Kuumba spent most of the previous month soliciting donations from grocery stores and restaurants, but the last report on the inventory was not encouraging. The area businesses preferred to donate to the higher profile organizations, often netting themselves some free advertising in the inevitable warm, fuzzy news reports spawned by such events.

The media tended to ignore their humble shelter. It was just not sexy enough for coverage. There were no celebrities graciously giving of their holiday time. No big name corporate sponsors. Ujamaa, who now managed the shelter for his aging father, spent every spare moment trying to form alliances with other entrepreneurs but most often met with derision in spite of his sincere attempts. His ideas were sound, but most found his gruff manner somewhat off-putting. Ujamaa envied Kuumba's easy way with people, and harbored more than a little concern about his sister's future with the smooth talking man.

Nia followed Kuji as he plowed his way through the crowd to the serving tables. He was one impressive kid, she thought. Kuji allowed no one to define him by his disabilities. Even Imani admitted that her son's innate strength carried her through the toughest times, fortifying

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her faith in humanity. For a child who could not speak, his message deeply affected all who were fortunate enough to make his acquaintance.

The shelter had several dozen regulars, but the number of new faces always took Nia by surprise. Their stories varied, but it all boiled down to a dysfunctional social services system. Most really wanted to get on their feet—or back on their feet—and all were expected to help in exchange for the shelter's hospitality. That seemed to set *Nguzo Saba* apart from the larger, more institutional shelters.

While the circumstances were dire, the mood was not. Smiles lit a good many of the faces. All were clothed, sheltered—at least for the moment—and about to be fed. They lived for today, not knowing what tomorrow would bring. Yet they had kind words and often breathtaking depths of generosity for one another. Most literally would give you the shirts off their backs. Nia had witnessed it on many occasions.

Earlier, Imani had taken the toddlers to the showers while their parents or older siblings rooted through the boxes of clothing donations. Socks, of all things, were typically in shortest supply but this year Kuumba managed to acquire two hundred brand new pair. They were irregulars, but who cared? It made for an even more festive atmosphere. Socks. Plain white tube socks. Simple things, indeed.

Umoja, in a rare display of frivolity, attempted to entertain the hungry and impatient children with makeshift sock puppets. The sight of the perpetually serious patriarch being so silly struck Kuji as hilarious, and he repeatedly tapped the "Whoop!" button on his synthesizer. This, in turn, caused the children to giggle—something the sock puppets had been unable to achieve, much to Umoja's chagrin.

Now that the seven of them were finally together, dinner could be served. The children always ate first, ensuring that they at least had full bellies should the food not last. Imani and Nia led the youngest to the front of the line and began filling their plates while Ujima passed out cartons of chocolate milk, another unexpected treat. It had been

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uncharacteristically donated by the public school system since it would pass its expiration date before school resumed following the holidays.

When all those under ten years of age had been served, a hush fell over the crowd. Imani's voice, crystal clear and achingly beautiful, began an improvised song of thanks for the fellowship and the bounty they were about to share. Even the children paid rapt attention. Out of the corner of her eye, Nia caught Kuumba as he surreptitiously wiped his eyes.

Kuji beamed with pride as one by one, the crowd stood in reverent silence. When Imani's song ended, Umoja spoke very briefly: "Friends, we share this feast in the hope that our community will continue to give generously, care deeply, and grow in harmony."

He gave a nod to the kids, and as one they enthusiastically dove into their dinners. The elderly were served next, and Nia helped to carry the plates of those who used crutches or walkers. The others engaged either in serving or in the kitchen, and she could hear Ujamaa playfully chiding Kuumba for dishing out meager portions. Perhaps he was warming to his future brother-in-law. Ujima had confided that an engagement was imminent, but she'd sworn Nia to secrecy.

When it became apparent that the food was indeed in short supply, Kuumba began making phone calls to bakeries, pizza shops, fast food joints—anything to supplement the fare. He told each, and truthfully, that his first calls went to the media in the hopes that the potential for free publicity would spawn donations not otherwise forthcoming. It worked, for within the hour they accepted three deliveries containing fifty loaves of day-old bread, two dozen cheese pizzas, and several paper-wrapped bundles of hamburger patties.

Umoja made sure to get a photo with each donor beneath the shelter's sign and promised to send a copy along with a receipt and letter of appreciation that could be used for PR if desired. Kuji posed for the photos, as well. He knew all about the pity factor, and he had no qualms about using it if it would help feed more people. No one need know that the back of his t-shirt read: Poster Child.

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When everyone had been fed, the crowd began to thin. Those having a place to sleep departed to make room for others to claim some floor space. Most helped with the clean up, folding the tables, and stacking the chairs. Umoja distributed the vinyl mats that he bought for fifty cents apiece when the local camping supplier went out of business last spring. The purchase had gutted the shelter's meager bank account, but it was worth it to have something to pad the cold, hard floor.

Imani read the children a bedtime story in a small, adjacent room where they'd sleep. It was just slightly warmer inside, and Ujima had painted nursery rhyme characters on the walls for a homey touch. The kids, having so little stability in their young lives, felt safe there. She ended with a soothing lullaby and let a colorful curtain drop across the doorway as she exited.

Kuumba extinguished the lights in the main gathering room, and the noise level dropped to a low hum of quiet conversation. A few of the guests played cards, but most curled up to sleep. In the kitchen, the seven sat around a rickety wooden table and took stock of the shelter's assets. Allowing only a few moments to dwell upon the success of the evening, they quickly moved on to discussions about how to do it all again tomorrow—and the tomorrows after that. It was never ending, but this one week always presented more of a challenge. All were tired of the constant struggle, but quitting was simply not an option.

Nia spoke to Ujamaa about her deepening financial woes, and she finally accepted his invitation to move into the vacant back room. Her board would be a pittance, augmented by some bookkeeping in the evenings. A few of the regular children needed of some tutoring, which Nia would handle as well.

When they'd divvied up the morning's tasks and were about to retire, Kuumba stood. "Umoja," he said in a markedly formal tone that instantly grabbed everyone's attention, "I have asked Ujima to marry me. We would like your blessing."

No one moved. All eyes were glued to Umoja, who slowly rose and

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circled the table. He placed his hands on Kuumba's broad shoulders and looked deeply into his ebony eyes. Nia saw a bead of sweat trickle down the side of Kuumba's neck, betraying the man's seeming calm. Ujima held her breath. Apparently seeing what he needed to see, Umoja nodded to himself and finally spoke, "I will be proud to call you my son."

All breathed a collective sigh. Hugs and handshakes were followed by tears and laughter, subdued so as not to wake their guests. An announcement would be made tomorrow evening and preparations would begin for a seventh night ceremony. A exceptional end to an exceptional week of exceptional work done by exceptional people.

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Principles personified

"How is she?" Nia asked as she entered the hospital's small cafeteria, her features etched with worry. The instrumental holiday carols echoing from speakers in the water-stained ceiling, interrupted by an occasional page, did nothing to lighten the atmosphere. Dinner hours ended over an hour ago, and only the vending area offered refreshment through the night. The desolate emptiness only fueled her feelings of despair.

Ujamaa stared into a cup of coffee long since gone cold and shrugged. "She is concerned for the baby, of course, but the doctor says everything will be fine. Kuumba hasn't left her side."

"But the council meeting's in less than an hour! He can't miss that vote."

"Yes, I know. He will go. At the last possible minute, he will go." Ujamaa shook his head, "To think I doubted he'd be a good husband to my sister."

Nia nodded, "Kuumba's a good man – and he will make a wonderful father."

"He blames himself, you know, for the injuries. Lord only knows why. And Kuji?" he asked in a whisper. "Will he survive?"

"It's too soon," she croaked, fighting back tears. "The doctors say it could go either way. Imani wanted to be alone, so I came here. Where's Umoja?"

"He went back to the shelter," Ujamaa replied. "Said he felt useless here. I suspect he didn't want anyone to see him cry, and I can't say as I blame him. I'm gonna to join 'im soon. There's not much I can do here, after all, and he'll need help serving dinner. People will still come, y'know. Our *guests* aren't likely to have seen the news."

"Excuse me," a young man interrupted. "I'm from the *Gazette*."

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May I ask you a few questions?"

Ujamaa snorted as he rose, the metal legs of the chair scraping the brittle linoleum. "You've got a lotta nerve," he growled.

Nia placed her hand on Ujamaa's arm to calm him. Hostility would not help their cause, and their adversaries would be eager to portray them as violent. She turned to the reporter and gestured to an open chair. "My name is Nia. I'm from the Nguzo Saba Shelter. What would you like to know?"

He glanced nervously at Ujamaa, coughed into his fist, and stammered, "Well, for starters, could you give me your take on what happened downtown a few hours ago?"

Ujamaa, rather than sit back down, took his leave. "I'll be back later if Umoja doesn't need me. My father is a stubborn man. He'll beg on behalf of others but won't ask for help for himself."

"I'll be here through the night. Get some rest. You can relieve me in the morning. Hopefully, we'll have some good news by then – on several fronts." She handed Ujamaa his coat and stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek before turning back to the reporter.

"Okay," Nia forced a wan smile. She replayed the scene in her mind and tried to remove the emotion from her voice as she recounted the tumultuous events. "A group of about fifty people were demonstrating against the city's proposed seizure of properties along Washington Street, including our shelter, to make way for a shopping center.

"We – Ujima and Kuji and I – arrived around noon. I think you know Kuji, don't you? Aren't you the one who wrote the story about his volunteerism award last summer?" Seeing the alarm in his eyes as the reporter put two and two together, Nia softened her tone somewhat. "Anyway ... we joined those who were chanting. We had a permit. I mean, all the proper procedures were followed. Kuumba insists on it. When the council members began to arrive for the meeting, our chanting grew louder. Someone must've felt threatened, or perhaps just inconvenienced, and called the police.

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"When they got there, they just made us back away from the doors a bit. It was all quite civilized up 'til that point. One of the protesters, a blind man – a Vietnam vet who I've seen at our shelter many times – tapped an officer's leg with his cane. It certainly seemed accidental to me, but the officer, apparently thinking the cane a weapon, whirled around and *disarmed* him. This angered the man's dog, and that's when all hell broke loose."

Nia took a deep breath, willing herself to remain calm. "The cop used his pepper spray on the dog. It caught Kuji, whose wheelchair was right behind the dog, square in the face and he began to choke.

"I tried to get to Kuji, but the cops were pushing people away. The blind man was now without both his cane and his dog, and Ujima rushed to help him. She bumped into another of the police officers who knocked her roughly to the sidewalk without even looking in her direction. That was when her water broke and she screamed.

"Things could've gotten really out of hand, but Kuumba arrived just then. He knelt alongside Ujima and shouted for someone to call an ambulance. It's their first child, you know.

"By the time I pushed my way through to Kuji, he was having a seizure. Another man – I don't know who. It's a blur. – helped me get him out of his chair and lay him down on the sidewalk. I put my coat under his head.

"I've seen seizures before, but nothing like that. It went on and on and on. Kuji can't speak, as you know, but he was making these horrible noises – gasping and gurgling. There was blood coming from one of his ears. And then, he just stopped. I was so relieved that the seizure was over that I didn't even notice he wasn't breathing until he started turning blue." Nia shuddered with the memory. "I yelled for help, and one of the EMTs came over. They'd just finished loading Ujima into the ambulance and were ready to pull out."

The reporter scribbled as fast as he could, but he held up a hand for her to pause while he caught up.

"He's only twelve, you know. Just twelve." Nia shook her head.

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"Life has dealt him some really nasty cards, and yet he spends all of his time helping others. Anyway ... since he still had a pulse, they just used that mask and bag thingy on him. When the second ambulance showed up, the first took off. By then, Ujima was having contractions."

"How are they doing?" the reporter interrupted.

"Ujima will have the baby tonight. There is risk involved, of course, because it's early, but the doctors are optimistic. Kuumba plans to leave her just long enough to attend the council meeting and vote. Kuji ..." Nia couldn't stop the tears this time. "Kuji clings to life. He is on a ventilator, and they ... they just don't know yet."

She dried her eyes on a napkin and continued, "Anyway ... out of respect for those injured, especially since one of them is the wife of a council member, the meeting was postponed until this evening. And now," Nia finished, "you know as much as I do."

Kuumba poked his head into the cafeteria, but quickly withdrew when he saw the reporter sitting at the table with Nia. Kuumba rarely avoided the press, but Nia understood why he wished to do so now. Media attention could no longer influence tonight's vote.

"Would you please excuse me now?" Nia dashed out of the cafeteria before the reporter could reply.

"Kuumba!" she called down the corridor.

He stopped and turned. "Hey. I'm on my way to the meeting. Where's Imani? I wanted to touch base with her before I left."

"She's in the chapel. They'll only let her see Kuji for ten minutes of each hour, so she spends the rest of the time praying."

"It's that bad?" he asked, his eyes begging to be told otherwise.

Nia took both his hands. "Yes. It's that bad. He stopped breathing and was without oxygen for quite a while. She shooed me away. Wanted to be alone, she said, so I left. I'll go up and stay with Ujima while you're gone."

"Thanks. She's scared, but won't say so. Hell, I'm scared, too. Thirty-six weeks is still early enough to be risky, but ..." he trailed off.

"You'd better get going," Nia said, realizing that he procrastinated.

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"It'll be hours and hours before the baby comes. Tell Imani I'll be with Ujima if she needs me."

"Will do," he promised. "I'll be back as quickly as I can."

Nia watched the proud man's back as he hurried toward the chapel. The vicious attacks which peppered Kuumba's campaign for city council only served to strengthen his resolve. He never stooped to his opponents' level. He stuck to the issues and won in spite of the fact that most of his staunchest supporters were not even registered to vote. Voting required something the homeless lacked: an address. Kuumba's election to the council gave Nia, and many others, hope.

The battle over Washington Street polarized the community, and Kuumba's relentless opposition to the development scored him both friends and enemies. On the council, he represented the minority position, although a few still sat the fence— playing the political odds. The inadequate compensation being planned comprised only one part of the problem. Those old row houses that had been handed down from generation to generation for over a hundred years, and the historical society considered them worthy of preservation. Tenants of the rent-controlled apartments would receive nothing; only the landlords stood to benefit. Those who squatted in the abandoned warehouse had no options at all. In a nutshell, those most affected were completely disenfranchised.

And, of course, there was Nguzo Saba. They began keeping records when Kuumba first informed them of the city's plans. The figures—the sheer number of people served, day in and day out—still amazed Nia. *How could anyone, when confronted with the hard data, even consider destroying such a place?* she wondered. The answer, of course: greed.

Nia moved briskly toward the elevators. She would watch the council meeting on the television in Ujima's room. They would cheer for Kuumba when he spoke and hold hands as the council members each voted, praying for a reprieve. She would rub Ujima's shoulders and coach her through the contractions. They would try to pretend that their lives did not teeter on the brink of disaster.

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Nia dreaded Ujima's first words. "How's Kuji?"

"He is alive," she responded, truthfully if somewhat evasively. "Not out of danger, but alive."

"Nia ..."

"Let's focus on happier thoughts, shall we? Your baby is coming tonight! How close are your contractions?"

"Still over twenty minutes apart," she smiled. "Kuumba should be back in plenty of time for the birth. Turn on the TV, would you? The meeting starts in a couple minutes."

All three local stations broadcasted the council meeting live. Nia selected the one which was typically more sympathetic to their cause. They normally watched the more conservative channels in order to get a better idea of the challenges they'd face when seeking support. Tonight, however, she preferred not to stir the ire such broadcasts often evoked. Ujima cocked an eyebrow at Nia's choice, but said nothing.

The screen showed the council bench, a semi-circular affair with a podium at the midpoint of the arc. Ten members of the council were seated, and the chairperson leaned on the polished wood podium.

"I don't see Kuumba," Ujima fretted. "He should be there by now."

Nia shushed her. "They're starting."

"Ladies and gentlemen," the chair began, adjusting the microphone, "members of the media, and citizens watching at home, welcome. As you are no doubt already aware, this special meeting was supposed to have taken place this afternoon. However, a series of events made it necessary to reschedule. The council extends its sincerest well wishes to those injured in this afternoon's ... um, scuffle. We can delay consideration of this pressing matter no further. Each member of the council will have ten minutes to speak, and then we will vote. The issue on the table this evening is the seizure of properties along Washington Street for economic development. I'll cede the microphone now to the council member from the First District."

A contraction diverted their attention. "They're getting closer,"

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Ujima noted through clenched teeth. "Just sixteen minutes this time."

A nurse bounced in, recorded Ujima's vitals, and bounced out. By the time they were again able to attend to the broadcast, the Second District council member spoke. She was one of the undecided, along with the representative from the Sixth District. Kuumba spent long hours trying to convince them to vote against the measure. Her remarks sounded nice, but had no substance. Typical political double talk.

Third, Fourth, and Fifth District council members strongly favored the proposal. Ujima'd endured four more contractions by the time the member from the Sixth District began to speak.

"Did Kuumba show up yet?" she asked as her most recent contraction ended.

Nia shook her head. "He's still got a little time, though."

They missed the speakers from the Seventh and Eighth Districts when the doctor came in to check Ujima's progress. "One hundred percent effaced," he told the nurse, "and seven centimeters. Call me when she gets to nine." He disappeared without even acknowledging Ujima. The nurse shrugged apologetically and then disappeared herself.

Kuumba, representing the Ninth District, should have been next. The chair announced that, given the extraordinary circumstances, Kuumba would be allowed to speak when – if – he arrived.

Ujima's contractions picked up steam, and she barely enjoyed six minutes of rest between each. The nurses peeked in and out more frequently, too. Checking this and tweaking that.

"There!" Nia pointed as the member from the Eleventh District stepped away from the microphone. "There's Kuumba!"

Ujima, in the throes of another contraction—hard on the heels of the last, merely grunted in response. "Nia, I want to push. I need to push."

"I'll get the nurse," she said, heading for the door. Kuumba's voice, barely recognizable, stopped her in her tracks. She turned to stare at

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the television.

"Today," he began, "my dear friend Kujichagulia left this world."

"No! Oh, Lord, please no." Ujima was wailing and pounding her fists on the mattress.

"Kuji died doing what he loved and what he believed in. He died trying to save Washington Street. I would have gladly taken his place if given the chance."

Kuumba continued speaking, but his words just floated in the air. Nia stood frozen in disbelief. "Kuji," she whispered and half expected to hear a tinny "Yo, foxy babe!" from his voice synthesizer.

Two nurses pushed her aside, jarring her from her trance. "You'll have to step outside, ma'am," one called over her shoulder.

Nia forced her legs to move. They felt heavy, as if all her insides had dropped into them, leaving the rest of her hollow. She could hear Ujima's continuous cries echoing through the dark tunnel of her mind. Aimlessly, she shuffled into the hallway – not sure where to go or what to do; feeling a desire to help, but not knowing how.

She looked up and saw Imani walking toward her, Umoja and Ujamaa on either side. Nia collapsed into their arms. A nurse, embarrassed by their tears, herded them into a vacant consultation room and closed the door. Imani, eerily composed, comforted them in turn; sharing tales of the esteem her son held for each.

Ujamaa left to get them some water and returned with the news that the council referendum had been defeated by a vote of six to five. The chair, who could've cast a tying vote, abstained. This brought another round of tears; these tinged with relief to know that Kuji did not die in vain.

When they regained some of their equilibrium, they went together to check on Ujima. The charge nurse looked surprised to see them. "We lost track of you during the shift change. We've been looking all over the hospital for you," she said, giving no indication if the news was good or bad. "You can go on in."

Kuumba stood at her bedside, staring with wonder at his newborn

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son who was sleeping peacefully against Ujima's breast. He looked up as they entered the room and smiled. "We are again seven," he said with pride.

"Our son will be called Kuji," Ujima announced as the tears streamed from her eyes. "May his life honor that which we've lost."

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EPILOGUE

NGUZOSABA

The Seven Principles of Kwanzaa

Umoja [oo-MOE-jah] (*Unity*)

To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.

Kujichagulia [koo-jee-cha-goo-LEE-yah] (*Self-Determination*)

To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.

Ujima [oo-JEE-mah] (*Collective Work and Responsibility*)

To build and maintain our community together and make our brother's and sister's problems our problems and to solve them together.

Ujamaa [oo-JAH-mah] (*Cooperative Economics*)

To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.

Nia [nee-YAH] (*Purpose*)

To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

Kuumba [koo-OOM-bah] (*Creativity*)

To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we

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inherited it.

Imani [ee-MAH-nee] (*Faith*)

To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

A B O U T T H E A U T H O R

Take one part Appalachian redneck, one part insatiable sex goddess, and one part filthy-minded wordsmith. Mix well and serve with chocolate-covered cherries. There you have the one and only Alessia Brio.

Alessia writes all colors and flavors of erotica, from heterosexual to ménage to same sex, and from twisted to humorous to deeply touching. (Sometimes, usually by accident, it even qualifies as romance.)

Her work has earned her critical acclaim in the form of an EPPIE for Best Erotica (*[fine flickering hungers](#)*) and a Romantic Times Top Pick (*[Coming Together: For the Cure](#)*) in addition to a plethora of glowing online reviews.

Readers can find her online at alessiabrio.com