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**Excerpt: *Hibiscus, Rose, Jacaranda* by Omega Douglas**

Venus's phone rings. It wakes her. She wipes her eyes. It must be Samora, she thinks, answering without looking at the caller ID. She's been waiting for his call. She didn't want to wake him earlier, she figured he'd still be asleep after his shift. And she knew he'd call once he was at work.

'Hello,' she croaks.

'Is this Venus?' comes a gruff male voice.

'Yes, who's this?' she asks nervously, sitting up in bed. Her pyjamas crumple uncomfortably around her waist.

'Mustapha.'

'Where's Samora? How did you get my number?'

'Samora gave it to me ages ago,' he replies dismissively. 'How much do you like him?'

'What?'

'I've known Samora longer than you. We're from the same place. I understand him and what's happening. He was cool before he met you. Now he's fucking paranoid. That's bringing heat on him. If you give the slightest shit about him, you need to pretend you don't. You're not a healthy connection for him to have.'

'Are you off your face? Where's Samora?' Venus is out of bed now, pulling clothes on.

'You know exactly what I'm talking about. Don't turn him into one of your marital causes. Leave him alone, he'll be fine. Safe. Like he was before.'

'I don't know what the fuck you're talking about, but don't call me again,' she hangs up and dials Samora's number, struggling into her trench coat at the same time.

Samora doesn't answer.

She's ringing him for the tenth time when she steps onto the night bus. Still no answer. By the time she's running through the pink pool of light outside Gloria's closed salon, she's given up on the phone and is yelling his name across the street towards the darkened warehouse.

One yell and there's the Alsatian and the flashlight. Then Samora is running towards the fence.

'Venus,' he bellows across the street. 'What's going on? Are you ok?' He's coming round the side, unlocking the gate, rushing across the road without looking. The dog at his heels.

She bursts into tears. He's holding her. What's happened, what's wrong he's asking, pulling her close.

'I haven't heard from you all day. You're not answering your phone. I didn't know where you were. You didn't come back to the flat,' she sobs. 'Then Mustapha called...'

'Mustapha?'

'Yeah, telling me all sorts of shit.'

'Like what? What was he saying?'

'I should stay away from you. You're paranoid since you've been with me. I knew there was something going on Samora. He knows something I don't. I know he does. Just tell me. We're meant to be getting married. What's the bloody point?' she's crying, shaking. Wanting to pull away from him but unable to.