Good evening, everyone. Thank you for coming, some of you from a long way. I'm Daniel, and fifty years ago tonight, a lot of you would have had no reason to be in this room. Michelle is the reason.

I want to tell you about our first apartment.

We moved in on a Tuesday. By Thursday, a pipe had given out and there were two inches of water across the floor of a place we could barely afford. I remember standing in the doorway doing absolutely nothing useful.

Michelle put on a headlamp.

She moved boxes until three in the morning, stacked everything we owned on the kitchen counters, went to sleep for three hours, and left for work at seven. She did not complain that night. She has still not complained about it, and it was 2004.

That's the thing I'd want the people who only know her a little to understand. Michelle doesn't get louder when things get hard. She gets quieter and more precise. I've watched it for twenty two years, across three moves, two kids, and the year we ran the whole business out of a garage with a space heater.

Nia, Tobe, you've had a front row seat to this your whole lives, and I don't think you know yet how unusual it is. You will.

She teaches for a living, which surprises nobody who has ever watched her explain something. She has a garden that has no business producing what it produces. And she walks. Miles and miles, most weekends, usually alone, which is the only hour of the week she takes for herself.

That's actually what I want to say about fifty.

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Michelle has spent twenty five years making sure other people's lives worked. Students, our kids, her mother, me. And fifty is a good moment to turn some of that around.

So my wish for this year is simple and I'm saying it in front of sixty witnesses so it's harder to ignore. More hours that belong only to you. More walks. More mornings where nobody needs anything.

Mama Okafor, thank you for flying in. Thank you for her.

Everyone, would you stand with me.

To Michelle. Fifty years, and the steadiest person any of us know. Happy birthday.

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