

To Love Me Too

By

Brianna Johnson

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Director of Thesis: Luke Whisnant

Major Department: English

My flash non-fiction practice is influenced by Randon Billings Noble and Jennifer Marie Brissett, while my imagery and interest in black diaspora is rooted in slave narratives, and African and African American literature. I hope to create a collection of flash non-fiction pieces that can either stand alone or tell one chronological story. I hope to create a modern slave narrative with echoes of feminism.

This work is inspired by writers like Fredrick Douglass, Chimamanda Adichie, Zora Neal Hurston and Jennifer Marie Brissett. I want to follow Douglass's chronological scheme in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave. Written by Himself*. I will also be drawing from the inspiration of Christianity and its impact on each experience, much as Douglass did. Novels such as *Purple Hibiscus*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* will be used as inspiration for imagery and carrying a larger thematic image. "Breathe Deep, Breathe Free" will inspire some of the design elements that will be featured in my work. "The Dangers of a Single Story" has inspired the honest, transparency of this work.

These authors are the reasons why I began writing. I was inspired by their honesty, and dedication to love and freedom. They've shown me a beauty about being unapologetically all that I am in my intersectionality. They've also shown the strength that comes with breaking expectations and daring to make a new path. These writers taught me that my unique form of

expression matters and has every right to be heard. My work could open the door for conversations of what it's like for a black woman to grow up in America as a nobody. I was highly influenced by the boldness that Sojourner Truth had when she advocated for women to have the same rights as men. I was moved when I saw the trials that Douglass faced. I was enchanted by Kambili and Janie's journey from girls who could only be told what to do, to ladies that chase after freedom. I hope to awaken someone else's inner strength and I hope that my bite size experiences can effectively change the way a girl sees herself.

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A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Department of English

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

By

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APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF THESIS

Luke Whisnant, M.F.A

COMMITTEE MEMBER:

Marame Gueye, Ph.D.

COMMITTEE MEMBER:

Reginald Watson, Ph.D.

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF

English

Marianne Montgomery

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL:

Paul J. Gemperline, PhD

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Preface

Many people believe that every child has a right to life.

Imagine that you are standing in a room. It's cold. The walls are white, and the room smells like bleach, no, Lysol. You hear the beeping of a monitor. Two monitors. Panting. You look up and see that the sound of heavy breathing is coming from your mother. She is lying on a hospital bed with her legs spread and a doctor intimately pressed between them.

“One more push,” he says.

You hear your mother's scream drift into a weep. You look over the shoulder of the doctor and see yourself. You are small, and unaware of why everything feels different now. It's bright, too bright. You're cold and in pain. You squeeze your body to stop the feeling of falling. A nurse takes you to a corner in the room and asks,

“Do you consent to live?”

You cry.

1. Baptism

My pastor once said that being born is a form of baptism.

I was born midday August. I came fast. Faster than planned. My mother checked in, lay down and minutes later, I was a part of the living. I was a rare, almost unheard-of birth. Born dry and unholy.

My mother tells the story of how she prayed for me. She asked God to give her a baby girl. I would be her miracle. Her legacy.

I would be angry.

2. Black Woman

I didn't like my mom. She was black and a woman. She was black and a woman and she prayed for me to be black and a woman.

No one thought about the violence that would be done to
my body
my mind
my soul
as a black woman.

I was born Black and a Woman.

Raised by a Black Man.

The sister of two Black Men.

The niece of two Black Women and three Black Men.

The Black student, the Black athlete, the Black friend.

I was born into a Black body and no one asked for my consent.

Why was I so angry about that?

If you don't know, you must not be a Black woman.

3. Suicidal

I didn't realize that no five-year-old fantasizes about killing themselves until he said it.

I was talking with my now husband about mental health. It was the first time I admitted to always wanting to kill myself. Death may be a nightmare for some, but I dreamed of suicide.

“You know that’s not normal right?” He said.

I didn’t realize that no five-year-old child fantasized about killing themselves.

Being a Black girl, I was not a cool Black girl blessed with slang and swag. No one told me that there’s another version of Black beauty. At seven, I knew that I was black and that I had no business being smart. I knew that I was not beautiful and never would be because of my skin, nose, and lips. My hair was an abomination against humanity because it did not lay flat against my scalp.

My hair had to be tamed.

My lips had to be greased.

My skin had to be lighter

4. The Learning

We were playing on the jungle gym when a white kid's shirt went over his head. His belly was a different color than mine. That's how I learned that I was Black. I finally understood why I was bullied, and why I couldn't make friends. It was because God had made a mistake. He accidentally made Black people.

5. Learning to Hate

At six, I had a crush on Dillon Eckard. He was white with blue eyes and blonde hair. We sat beside each other in class. He knew that I was smart and picked me to be on his team when it was time for any academic games. Admiring him made me both meet up to what is expected of me and it crossed the lines of existing as a Black girl.

It was expected that I'd find a white boy beautiful.

That I'd prize his milky skin.

His bright blue eyes because they held a future vaster than the oceans

Or the skies.

That I'd drool over his masculinity and leadership.

That I'd hate how he'd never see me as worthy of intimacy.

At seven, I had a white woman teacher. Every day, she came into class and I watched her put on makeup. Powder, mascara, and lip gloss.

Powder for her skin that she wanted to be darker.

Mascara because she wanted darker eyes.

Lip Gloss to plump her thin lips.

One day, while she was putting on her makeup, I told her that I thought she was beautiful. She tossed her head back and laughed gently while her straight blonde hair streamed down her back and when she finished, she said, "Well thank you."

I don't know if I expected her to return the compliment, but I walked away feeling like I'd accomplished something. Feeling like I won an invisible prize that I'd never be able to show off. I know now that I thought she was beautiful because she was normal, and I would never be. I learned to hate.

6. Jill Crow

Black boys were normal. My brothers made new friends every day. The Black boys in my class ran around and played sports with the other kids. The Black boys would never like me because I was a girl. If my brothers did not like me, why would they?

I was not allowed to go anywhere because people like to hurt Black girls.

I was not allowed to speak because people don't listen to Black girls.

I was not allowed to play sports because Black girls cannot be strong.

Black girls do as they are told.

Black girls keep their mouths shut.

Black girls get pregnant at 15.

Black girls are the shame of all humans.

Black girls should learn to be pretty.

Black girls should learn not to be so smart.

Black girls should not exist because they birth Black boys.

And Black boys are a Black girl's problem to fix

7. Joe

A Black boy will let go of his pain when he is ready, and no Black girl can make him feel better.

In the third grade, I met Joe Keyes. He was every white teacher's biggest fear. An angry Black boy. The school system tossed him from classroom to classroom like a criminal too violent for their penitentiary. Throwing him to the next when they couldn't handle the heat. I saw no real beauty in him until one day he caused so much trouble that all he could do was cry. His tears, his pain birthed me into a new existence, and I befriended Joe Keyes.

I was not afraid of him like all the other students were. After all, he had feelings that could be reached just like everyone else. So, I made it my mission to protect him from himself. I moved myself from my seat next to Dillion and sat next to Joe. I made him laugh when he was quiet. When he was angry, I calmed him down. When he got in trouble, I stuck to his side instead of isolating him like the other students did. I was learning the role of a Black woman.

Two Black women taught this fourth-grade class. Mrs. Hardee, who was a gentle Black woman. She had soft round curves that made me look forward to being a woman. Her lips were full, and her nose was wide. She taught me about commutative property and what sensual sass could look like. Her hips swaying from one end of the room to another as though to whisper, "Yes, I belong here." Mrs. Hardee would sit down next to Joe, place a hand on his back and talk softly to him. She never embarrassed him. Then she birthed a Black boy and left. Mrs. Morning taught us for the rest of the year. She was skinny and aggressive with long hair. Mrs. Morning stood in the middle of the room and yelled at him to pull his shit together or get out. They both made him angry. I learned that a Black boy wants a silent Black girl when he is angry. A Black boy will let go of his pain when he is ready, and that no Black girl can make him feel better. He must choose it on his own

8. Transition

I came home from school and heard my mom say, “Pack what you can. We’re staying with your Aunt tonight.”

I heard it all, but we’d done this before. Hurricane after hurricane. We always had to leave because no one seemed to care that Black people would drown in the areas that the government gave us. No one came to see if we had somewhere to go, either. I thought it was another storm until Mom said, “The tape will be up in the morning, hurry up!”

I wanted to cry, but I knew nothing upset my mom more than seeing me be weak. So, I hurried and packed. Transitions never have a warning. You just move when you’re forced to. You dare not complain about it, it only makes things harder. Simply acknowledging the unfairness won’t change that it’s happening.

Did I say that loud enough for the allies in the back?

9. Black Mothers

Mom told me not to tell anyone at school that we were living with my aunt. My brothers shared the back room. Mom and I shared everything else. Every morning, we got ready for school. We had breakfast. Mom drove us to school early then went to work. Every Wednesday night she went to community college. Sometimes my dad picked us up and took us to Bible study with him. We'd come home hungry on those nights. My mom cried on those nights. Winter came and went. Then spring, and finally the end of summer when Mom said she found a house. We moved in and I had my own room again. I heard Mom say that Dad could move in if he wanted to. One day, his clothes were in the closet and we didn't go to Bible study with him anymore. We didn't come home hungry, but Mom still cried.

10. Black Girls

One Mexican, one African American. She was short and thick with breasts. I was tall and thin with hips. At 11, we didn't know what to do with them. God gave Black women bodies and we tried to change them. We didn't know that they made us useful to the Black man. We could be something to look, to touch. She didn't have a dad. Just a stepdad who drank too much when her mom left. My dad went to church too much. Our dads put us on shelves and showed us off when people came over. Our moms? They picked up the slack. Just like a good Black Woman does. Cooking and cleaning and saying, "Don't let them boys get in your head." No matter how hard we listened, we wouldn't get it until we fell in love.

11. Bryan

“That person can say ‘I was just joking’ but it’s like no... That changes the shape of a person’s soul”

-Michelle Obama

Bryan. He was mixed. Mixed. A term we use for people that don’t fit our complicated stereotypes. Bryan was certainly that. Complicated. Bryan was by every standard *my* bully. He pulled my hair, called me names, and wouldn’t let anyone carry on with their day without telling them how one time, I blew a snot rocket into my notebook. Surprise isn’t the right word for learning that your antagonist jerks off to the thought of you at night.

No one had really liked me enough to pick on me before.

I became a living girl around him. My cheeks blushed for the first time at 12 years old. I giggled when he looked at me for too long. I cherished that another complicated Black boy needed a Black Woman. I would heal him too. I would listen to him tell me about his Black pain. His father is Black and his mother, white. What happens when a Black father isn’t there for his complicated child and white lover? The child learns to hate blackness.

The more I gave, the more flirting disguised as bullying became just bullying. The cover for having a Black girlfriend became the reality of his hate for Blackness. He made me aware of my black skin. He recruited his white friends to call me things like “shadow” and “blacky.” Midnight jokes became old, unhealed skin. I knew being Black was ugly but being told so was new. To be made ashamed of my existence was new. What happens to a Black Girl trying to heal a complicated Black Boy? Her mind reaches nihilistic toxicity. Black Girls. We carry the pain of Black Boys, Black Men, white women. Who carries our pain?

12. To God in Prayer

Where was God during all of this? When my mother prayed for me to be born Black and a Woman? Where was God when I learned that I'm Black? Where was He when we lost nearly everything? When I lost respect for my father? When I lost respect for Black men? When I chose to die? Where was he?

I stood in the pool looking towards the sun. One last deep breath and it would be over. I knew what I wanted. I always did. No one had asked me if I wanted to be here. No one asked me if I wanted to be Black. No one asked me about being a female. No one asked me how I felt about any of it. I whispered, "God, if you love me, you'll let me go now. You'll let me make this choice. Don't send me to Hell. I didn't ask for any of this. Please understand. Please love me enough." I pushed all the air I could from my lungs and placed my face in the water. I spread my arms and legs in surrender. I tried to breathe in. I tried to breathe the water in. I tried and I tried but it wouldn't. I wouldn't. God wouldn't. I heard Mom call my name and knew I wouldn't.

I sat in the back of the church watching my lap. I heard my Aunt Helen preaching. I heard her saying how much grace God had to give. I heard her say that God loved us so much. I didn't hear her walk up to me. I didn't hear her stop preaching. I felt her hands grasp my shoulders. I felt her lift me from my seat. She placed my head on her shoulder. She wrapped her arms around me. I felt myself weep. I felt my tears soak into her satin garment. I felt her weep with me. I felt love. Black love. A Black woman's love. A Black woman's God.

13. Black Man

Black women taught me to be strong.

White men taught me to want what does not belong to me.

White women taught me to hate.

He taught me to love. A Black boy taught me how to love.

His name is Justice.

And no, it's not a metaphor.

Love is such a strong word and that's what it was and was not.

I didn't know enough of love at the time to say that's what it was.

Looking back, it was, and so it is.

We were just friends. Had just met when he showed me to his dorm room. When he invited me to sit, I pushed myself onto the foot of his bed, feet dangling from the edge. I kept my jacket on. He smiled and laid down the long way. I didn't want to be too forward. We talked about philosophy. We talked about me. He picked my brain. No one had ever done that before.

“So, you're Christian. Why?”

“Why?”

“Yeah.”

“I've seen too much to not be. He's so real. I couldn't not be. You're not Christian?”

“I'- I mean I'm not not Christian.”

“It's definitely a personal thing. I've always grown up in the church so, I can't imagine my life without it.”

“Who got you into it?”

“My mom I guess, but it’s my choice really.”

“mhmm.”

“So, you’re a Christian because you feel things and because your mom took you to church?”

“It’s not like that, I have my reasons.”

“Like what?”

The truth is, no one had ever asked me. They just hoped that I was Christian. That going church was enough to make me.

We talked like that a lot. Him mentioning a factor about himself and me interjecting with my personal belief. Then my belief was in question and I didn’t have an answer. I was inadequate at best. Ignorant and innocent.

A Black man taught me to question myself. What did I know about myself? Why was I the way that I was? This Black man made me feel like a Black goddess as we cuddled that day.

This Black man made me feel inadequate at best.

This Black man made me uncomfortable in my shell.

This Black man made me grow.

14. Hope

The day we kissed. It wasn't planned but we knew it was coming. We were just right in every moment. Nothing out of place. We cuddled and talked. We even had similar tastes in music. I don't know why we stopped talking. I don't know why I turned my face to yours. Or why we pulled each other closer until my lips were on yours. They didn't match. We had no rhythm or comfort in kissing, but we didn't want it to stop. The love was wrong but right in every other way. Our anatomy said no while our hearts pleaded yes. Against all odds I was straddling you and kissing you deeply. Your hands searched my waist and drew my body harder against yours. Our lips fumbled around each other sloppy and delicately. I was a virgin and you were well experienced. Your lips kissed past my lips, down my jaw line to the length of my neck. Just before innocence became eroticism, you stopped. Love was all it could be.

We needed the moment as confirmation that we wouldn't last physically, just somewhere else. Like the energy of an echo. Love like this would turn spiritual, tying us into a knot and blowing us in the wind. A Christian and not not Christian lay begging God to let this be. The answer. We don't know. As time would tell, we would part and return, return and return. I'll never know the answer but to never return. No one knows until death what they gave up for the better. I can't help but believe I did the right thing. I have my sanity and love. I won. Right? I don't know where he is now and sometimes, I'm reminded of that. Other times, I'm glad. Our echo is beautiful and just that, intangible. Just energy. Just truth. Just a feeling. How do I know it was love anyway? Is a feeling enough? I feel God, so I know He's real. I've experienced Him. Love is not a religion, is it.

15. Firsts

The first time I rode my bike was after everyone had quit on me.

Every day, my brothers would set the yard up. Push the basketball goal back and clear the yard of anything that could make me fall. They were good brothers. They had friends but every day they held the sides of my bike and ran beside me as I flew down the hill in the front of our yard. It was a big hill back then. We loved riding down it. We knew if we went fast enough, we would fly. By fly I mean catch air and then slam back against the earth. One day, my brothers quit. They said if I really wanted to learn, I would've done it by then. I wanted to cry. No one had ever quit on me. No one had walked away from me until then.

The first time I had sex, he had given up on me. With a few failed attempts, it was clear to him that I didn't want him. That I wasn't ready.

They went next door and got their friend to come over and play with them. I sat on the porch for a while. I knew I could do it. I wanted help though. I didn't want to do it alone. It wouldn't matter if I had to do it by myself. I didn't want them to be disappointed in me.

He didn't want to hurt me anymore. I didn't have to prove that I trusted him. He knew it, he knew I was scared. We slept in the same bed for months. Kissing, groping, yearning. Every moment happening within myself. The gift of over thinking intruded on every moment that we weren't talking or sleep. I loved him too much. Too much.

I could do it. It couldn't be that hard. So, I got up. I picked up my bike and pushed it to the top of the hill. I kicked my leg over and mounted the pink barbie bike. I loaded my feet on the peddles and pushed myself down the hill. The handles swiveled and I fell over before I hit the bottom.

I got up and went back up to the top. Time and time again, I fell. No one was going to pick me up. No one was looking. It was just me. That's all I needed.

I couldn't breathe when I was near him. Every second like when my brothers let go of my bike. I fell on my side every time. I was paralyzed. My hands and feet unable to work together. My mind stunted by fear that no one would witness this moment to say that it was real. I needed validation. Someone to say that I can do it. I wanted help falling safely but everyone had walked away. I disappointed myself. I wanted to love you fully, but I had to give up what I had conquered. I learned to do things on my own. This time, I had to learn this with you. I had to work with you, not just myself.

I rolled the bike to the top, got on and peddled. I held the handles tight.

I heard my brother yelled, "She's doing it!"

I had just got back from a day with my mom on the third Sunday in January. It was five going on six. The room was dark, only wet blue breaking through the window. I was calm and sure. He asked me about my day. It was great. Church was great, my mom was happy. He had been in bed all day. I told him I missed him. He turned and smiled at me.

We kissed. Gently. Tender. The room was quiet and still. One kiss and another. I didn't know that this was the time. That this was the moment. That I was ready. Each sealing of a kiss entangling us deeper. One hand sliding down my waist, the other finding its way around my body.

I smiled big and hard, peddling fast, faster.

"Bri, turn!"

I found myself naked and on top of him. One thrust and my body closed. He thrashed quick and steady pumps against my body. The moment staccato and new. I closed my eyes

against the motion and listened to my breathing. Each muscle giving and releasing until our bodies were one.

It was too late. A head on collision with the pecan tree on the corner of our yard. My brothers rushed over to get me up and brush the dirt off me. I wanted to go again, but they made me go inside. I could do it all on my own. All I ever needed was myself.

When it was over, he went into the bathroom. I heard him gasp. There was blood everywhere. We turned the light on, and blood was on the walls and on his face. He cleaned himself up and gave me a washcloth. We changed the sheets and lay quietly. He asked if I was ok. I wasn't. I wasn't mine, or alone anymore. He was bound to leave. What would be left of me now that I gave away what took me so long to gain?

My Black brothers taught me that I was all I needed. But this Black man, I gave it all away to this Black man. I needed a Black man for the first time. I needed him to stay, to love and make love to me. This Black man owned me.

16. Heartbreak

We were in the truck and I thought. I thought, I thought when I looked at him that he thought the same thing, that he missed me. He didn't! It was an accident and I needed the moment, but he didn't. He didn't want it. He wanted to be politically correct about what we were. We were tied at the soul, but not in the physical. He was lying to me. He couldn't tell me the truth. That he couldn't trust me with his heart. I was collateral damage and confused about what I wanted. He was right. I wanted him and I wanted a Christian man that would have children with me and build a home with me. He wanted music and weed. I needed music the way he did but nothing sounded more like music than marriage. I lied and told him I didn't want that, and he burned our bridges. He said he didn't want anyone else, but he started kissing someone else. Cuddling someone else. Lying to someone else. How many lies did we tell?

The memory is always with me. The memory of when he hurt me. The memory of when I hurt him. The memory of saying goodbye for the last time. How sure I was. How sure I am that I made the right choice. That he was my soulmate, and that I had a choice about it. I've heard people say that sometimes, love isn't enough. I get it now. I get it. Being in love isn't enough. I chose him over and over again and it still wasn't enough. He wouldn't choose me to break his heart again and again. He wouldn't choose to die like that. He knew better. He knew me better. He loved me enough to make the choice for me. He didn't come back.

I owe him for it. He taught me to tell the truth. He taught me to accept that people make mistakes. To suffer. To hope and be aware. He taught me to shut up and learn. He taught me to love. He taught me to love me enough to walk away from anything that doesn't serve me. He taught me to eventually choose me over you and to love someone new. No one knows until death what they gave up for the better. I didn't need this Black man anymore, so I won. Right?

17: Silence

Middle English, From Anglo-French

Noun

1. The avoidance of mentioning or discussing something:

Uncommunicativeness

//We met at a park. I was sitting under a tree and you stopped to talk with me. We talked for hours. It was natural for the conversation to lull into our stances on sexual activity. It is of course a part of life. You told me about your partners. I told you about my waiting for marriage before having sex again. I didn't care what your reaction was, it was my choice. The day ended and we planned to meet up again and again. I became the noise in your forest. I was tiny when standing next to you. You were tall and handsome with a childlike smile. I told you how I worried about you being too tempting. You kissed me. I trusted you.

2. Complete absence of sound: Stillness

//I stopped by your place because my sister gave birth the night before and I worked a double that day. The delivery room was constant beeping, doors opening and closing. There was noise of a baby being born and my teeth chattering because I was too cold. At work, we yelled across a grill and listened for "Got it!" I was tired and needed peace. Your place was sure to be that. You lived alone and you hated it. Going to work and returning to quiet. You once referred to it as walking through a forest. Usually quiet, except for the constant taunting of birds. The birds being cars. I wanted to be a tree in that forest. To enjoy the peace that came with quiet

3. The fact or state of abstaining from speech: Muteness

//You let me in your place and gave me a shirt to slip into before I crawled in your bed. I knew I was safe with a man like you, so I slept. When I opened my eyes, I found you still beside me, smiling. Heaven must be like this. A bird landed on my branch in the form of a gentle kiss to force a crack in my trunk. I unrooted, climbed my half naked body on top of yours. You stopped smiling. I was still at peace. Your hands caressed the sides of my face and pulled me into another gentle kiss. I was awake enough to know that I was ready to go home. But there was another kiss to be had. And another. I was ready to leave.

Verb

1. To compel or reduce to silence

//Your hands were big and strong, your body much larger than mine. I was tired and in your home. Your bed. No one knew where I was, or who I was with. My phone was dead. I placed my palms to your chest and pushed you back. You kissed me harder. I felt your muscles ripple over my weakness. I was uprooted and tipping. What would have happened if I said no? Would you have stopped? What would have happened if you didn't? Did I have to say anything? Would I be powerless if I said no and you didn't care? Is this my fault? Yes, I shouldn't have been here. I stopped fighting and let you push into me. I wanted it to be a good thing. But it wasn't. I didn't like it and I didn't want it. My trunk bent and broke under me, I landed with a great thud on your forest floor. Tears welled as you rolled on top of me. Finally, you took in my discomfort and pulled out.

2. To cause to cease hostile firing or criticism

//I cried as I got dressed and you asked *What's wrong? Did I do something wrong? You don't think I raped you, do you?* I knew I wouldn't be able to stop you. I left. If a tree falls in forest, silence is broken. Does it matter if no one heard it? Does it matter if no one knew? It happened. I circle that forest and ignore the tree that fell because the world I live in questions things like the subjectivity of a tree falling. The world I live in makes me question the sound of my own voice.

18: Chose Love

Dear Justice.

I got married. I always imagined that you'd crash my wedding. That you were the Dwayne to my Whitney. I didn't think about you that day. I know that makes you happy. That I'm happy. He's a lot like you but also everything that you couldn't be. He's my best friend now. He holds me and talks to me now. He's a Christian too. He didn't do anything special. Maybe that's why I married him. Because it wasn't complicated. I knew he was the one the moment we kissed. Everything in me said yes. I didn't have to ask for permission. It just was. I love him the way you taught me to. Consistently and in truth. I don't need him the way I needed you, but I love him the way I should have loved you, with respect for my own intelligence and worth. With respect for the melanin in my skin. With admiration for the Black excellence that we are. You are Justice but he is truth.

I'm pregnant too. I know, you still remember me as the naïve girl that you met in college. I've grown and cried and hurt. Just like you taught me to. You are my soulmate, but he's the one. You, Black man, taught me that I would have to choose me over you. He taught me to love me enough to do it.

No longer yours,

Bree

19. New Song

I am a Young Black Woman pregnant with a Black Baby Girl. Yes, you may laugh now. I wanted a boy, many boys. Life taught me to care for Black Boys and Black Men. I didn't know that it was teaching me to love Black Women. To Love me too.

Little Black Baby Girl,
You will be born in a generation
That wants everything you have.
Your sun resistant Black skin,
Your thick luscious lips,
Your gravity defying hair.

They will want your innovative thinking,
Your creative spirit,
Your resilient soul.
They will want to be you but
Never tell you.

Little Black Baby Girl, I will be bold.
I will hold my head high.
I will show you how to balance your crown.

I will pray for you, Beautiful Black Girl

I will teach and learn from you.

I will love you out loud.

20. To Love Me Too

I stood holding tongs at the stove in my small old kitchen that cost big new kitchen money. My educated husband sat hunched over our round dining table, donated from his fraternity brother, working on his lesson plan. “A Different World” was playing on my parents’ old TV set, also handed down. I could hear Dwayne and Whitley working through their differences.

Chicken in a cast iron skillet made a continuous grand applause as it fried. Grease evaporated, rose and soaked into my freshly retwisted locs, just as it did my mother’s afro and grandmother’s brown freckled face. SWV’s “Rain” blared through my headphones making my head swoon.

I stepped back from the stove, legs loosely under my wide stretched hips, arms drawn to a sideways V shape at my waist. My hips sunk and swayed to the chorus: “Let your love just fall like rain.”

I inhaled the smell of frying chicken, turned to see my beautiful black groom as three locs swept my cheek. The bridge sent me into final climax as I exclaimed, “Damn I luh bein black!”

As if for good measures, memory tossed me seven months back. One month after being married, standing in the kitchen, pulling laundry out of the dryer. Mom said to always mind what I dressed like. Christian law said be strong. My ex-lovers said I’m not enough. I said to be perfect.

You, my Black king, entered the kitchen behind me. You, sweet Solomon, grasped my shoulders and turned me to face you. One hand under my chin, the other still on my shoulder. You, the Black man I never meant to meet, said “You are so much more than enough.”

Blessed by words I'd never heard; I was born again. Baptized in the beauty of being enough. Endless in his eyes. I wept. Washed anew.

A month later after this encounter, dreadlocks formed. Two more months and I spoke out in my voice, claiming my own strength. Two months further and Black became beautiful, and a privilege. A gift to pass on to my unborn Black baby girl.

Memory wouldn't let me forget where I came from. Memory wouldn't let me miss this moment. Memory wouldn't let me live it down.

I learned that being Black is an extreme sport. We are underestimated and defined. We learned to play the fiddle while everyone else kicked us for being second. If we are not careful, we will dismiss the truth of our Black life mattering.

We must fall in love with being Black.

We must wear our skin like pearls.

We must define what is significant and important.

We must define what is worthy of your time.

Everyone wants to tell us who to be and to love them for it.

Slim thick with a cute ass.

A man's peace.

A praying woman.

A freak in the bedroom

Black woman, you are enough. With your disrespectful hair, demanding voice, and fearfully made body. You are more than enough.

Black woman, love you too

