



BLACK VEINS, OPEN MOUTHS

SONIA BENJOYE

Black Veins, Open Mouths

**A Collection of Dark Praise Songs and Things Better
Left Unsaid**

Sonia Benjoye

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For permissions, inquiries, or speaking requests, please contact:

benjoye21@gmail.com

Dedication

For the ones who held fire behind their teeth
and were told to smile instead.

This is for the ones who burned anyway.

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Author's Note

This book was not written for applause. It was written in the wreckage.
It was written when I had no language left but rage.
It was written after silence stopped being safe.
After grief outgrew my throat.
After I realized how much of myself I had buried just to survive.

If these poems sound like protest, it's because they are.
If they sound like prayer, it's because I no longer separate the two.

This book is not clean. It is not polite. It is not here to comfort.
It is here to remember. To name. To break.
And to speak in the voice I was never taught to trust.

If you see yourself in these pages,
in the bruises, in the breath, in the screaming,
know that you are not alone.
And you are not the wound.
You are what rose up anyway.

— Sonia Benjoe

Chapter 1

The Body Remembers

The body remembers in a language no one taught it.
It remembers everything you tried to silence.
The bruise that faded from the skin but stayed under the muscle.
The no that got stuck in your throat and turned into ulcers.
The night you ran.
The day you didn't.
The smell of something wrong that no one else noticed.
The ache behind your eyes that came from watching your own undoing and calling it survival.

Your spine holds secrets.
Your shoulders are archives.
Your knees tell stories when they creak
not from age,
but from kneeling too long in places you should have burned down.
Your jaw clenches like a locked door guarding what you couldn't say.

The body is not a temple.
The body is a battlefield.
Mine still smells like smoke from wars I didn't start
but had to finish
because someone had to stay alive to tell it.
Someone had to walk out with the names of the fallen etched into their ribs.
Someone had to keep bleeding so the truth could breathe.

The body doesn't forget.
No matter how many times you laugh to cover it.
No matter how many lovers you let in hoping they'll clean the place.
No matter how well you perform healed.
It keeps the score.

The body flinches when the voice gets too loud.
The body tightens when the door clicks a certain way.
The body guards you
even when you want to be free.
It doesn't trust the world you pretend is safe.

There are parts of me that learned how to survive
by disappearing inside of myself.
But I came back.
Not whole.
Not clean.
But loud.
Present.
And dangerous.

The body remembers
and today, so do I.

The body remembers in ways you don't expect.

It remembers the slam of a door and the things you didn't say after.
It remembers how you held your breath in that room.
It remembers how small your voice became when his hands became something else.
It remembers the first time you realized you were prey.
It remembers the second time you didn't fight.

No one teaches you how to come back from that.
They tell you time heals, but time just rearranges the evidence.
Your body is still the crime scene.
And you live in it. Every damn day.

The body keeps the blueprint of every betrayal.
The stiffness in your back is the price of holding it all together.
The migraines are memory.
The clenched fists are protection.
The sleepless nights are testimonies you can't forget long enough to dream.

You moisturize your skin and call it self-care.
You dress it in black and call it power.
You lay next to strangers hoping one of them will touch you gently enough
to make you forget all the times you weren't touched like a person.
But your body remembers.
It flinches before the hand lands.
It closes even when you tell it to open.
It distrusts pleasure because pain got there first.

The body doesn't just carry memory, it reenacts it.
Every time you smile when you want to scream,

every time you let it slide,
every time you say "I'm fine"
when the wound is wide open and weeping,
you're adding to the weight.

You have worn armor so long you don't know what it feels like to move without it.
You forget that you were soft before you were sharpened.
You were light before you were lit on fire.

And still, your body held you.
Through the breaking.
Through the betrayal.
Through the silence.
Through the lies you told yourself just to make it through the night.

Your body is tired of holding your grief alone.
Let it speak.
Let it scream.
Let it sweat truth and shed shame.
Let it rage, then rest.
Let it tell the story the world tried to erase from your mouth.

Because the body remembers.
And maybe that's not a curse.
Maybe that's the revolution.
That even after everything,
it still dares to survive.

Chapter 2

Teeth Under Tongue

There is a certain violence in holding the truth too long.

You learn early what not to say.

You feel it in the room before the rules are spoken.

Your voice is too sharp. Your questions too much. Your anger too loud.

So you fold it. Bite it.

Push it under the tongue like contraband.

And you get good at silence.

But silence is not empty.

It is a room with no windows.

It is your voice pacing the floor in chains.

They say you're graceful.

They say you know how to behave.

But they don't see the teeth marks on your tongue.

They don't hear the choir of swallowed screams behind your quiet.

You have learned how to nod through insult,

to smile through dismissal,

to make yourself small in the face of their comfort.

You were told it was survival.

But it was erasure.

And they applauded you for it.

You started to forget what your own rage sounded like.

You started to forget how your voice used to move like thunder.

You started to believe

that being good

was the same as being safe.

There are whole years of your life you cannot speak of

because you turned them into ulcers.

You buried them in your jaw.

They live in the grinding of your teeth.

In the tension at the base of your skull.
In the insomnia that will not let you forget.

Every time you were interrupted and smiled.
Every time they took credit and you said nothing.
Every time you wanted to scream and laughed instead.
That silence did not disappear.
It went somewhere.
It built a city of rage under your ribs.

This is where your revolution begins.
Not in the street. Not in the fire.
But here in the body.
In the place where you hid everything just to make it through.

You will not swallow yourself anymore.
You will not fold your voice to fit their comfort.
You will speak, and the world will learn what it means
to be made of thunder and restraint.
Of quiet and chaos.
Of sharp things hidden too long.

You will not apologize for the blade in your voice.
You earned it.
You bled for it.
And now,
you use it.

There were things I wanted to say that would have shattered the room.
Things that would have made them look at me like I had grown horns
or broken some unwritten rule about being a girl in a Black body who knows too
much.
So I learned to keep the words under my tongue like smuggled fire.
I taught my mouth how to carry knives without cutting anyone.
I made myself small in the name of survival
until I couldn't tell the difference between safety and silence.
They called it grace
but it was fear wearing perfume.
It was a woman chewing glass with a smile.

My mouth became a battlefield I didn't know I had to win.
Every time I wanted to speak, my jaw locked itself.
Not because I had nothing to say
but because I had too much.
I held back grief like a secret
shame like a second skin
and anger like a birthright I wasn't allowed to claim.
Not out loud. Not where they could hear it.
Not where I could be punished for it.

There were entire seasons where my body ached from the weight of unspoken things.

Whole years I cannot remember because I spent them pretending I was fine.
My laughter was a lie I told so often it started to sound like truth.
And even then, they said I was too much.
Too blunt. Too intense. Too loud in places where I hadn't even spoken.
But they didn't know what it cost me to stay quiet.
They didn't see the blood in my mouth.
They didn't hear the scream sitting in my throat for years
waiting for permission to become something other than pain.

I have swallowed so many versions of myself
that I forgot what my original voice sounded like.
I lost it somewhere between the apology and the forced smile
between the yes that should have been a no
between the don't make a scene and the be the bigger person.
I became fluent in performance.
But my body kept flinching
because it knew the truth
even when I refused to speak it.

Now when I open my mouth
the words do not ask for permission.
They come carrying fire and ancestors
they come with memory and warning
they come dressed in all the silence I endured
and they do not apologize for the space they take.

There is no redemption in silence.
Only rot.
Only delay.

Only self-burial.

And I am tired of dying in pieces for the comfort of people who never noticed the cost.

I don't hold my tongue anymore.

I let it speak

I let it bleed

I let it break whatever needs breaking

because if my truth ruins the room

then maybe the room was already a coffin.

They should have never taught me to swallow rage.

They should have feared the day I finally spit it back out.

Chapter 3

What the Fire Couldn't Burn

They came for everything.

My name
my softness
my story
my skin

They came with matches
with questions disguised as judgment
with rules disguised as protection
with love that sounded more like warning

I let the fire take what it wanted
because for a long time I thought that was power
to surrender before they could steal it
to hand over pieces of myself and call it healing
to walk away from the wreckage and pretend I never lived there

I was praised for surviving
but survival is not a compliment
it is a long slow war against disappearing
and every time I handed over another part of me
I called it sacrifice
but it was loss
and I was the only one burying the dead

I lost whole years inside that fire
burned down parts of myself just to make space for someone else's comfort
I tried to unlearn my own hunger
erase the parts of me that took up space
shrink my body
shrink my voice
shrink my rage
until the only thing left of me was ash

But even then
even in the quiet of the aftermath
even in the cold of what was gone

something was still there
something glowing under the wreck
something too stubborn to die

You don't get to choose what survives
You don't get to choose which bones stay standing
But there are pieces of me that refused to burn
No matter how much heat I gave them
No matter how many times I tried to let them go

There is a part of me that will not lie still
It rises through the smoke
It holds the memory of before
before I made myself palatable
before I bent myself to fit into a world that never asked for my permission

What the fire couldn't burn is the part of me that remembers
The part that still tastes like thunder
The part that never learned how to bow

I lost a lot
I lost people
I lost language
I lost softness I will never get back
But I did not lose myself
Not all of me
Not the part that matters

Somewhere in the ash is a heartbeat
Still loud
Still mine

I have been set on fire so many times I stopped calling it tragedy.
At some point it became routine.
They come with torches.
They call it discipline.
They call it love.
They say it is for your own good.
And you learn how to stand still while they scorch you.
You learn how to smile through the smoke.
You learn how to hide the smell of something dying inside you.

They burned the softness first.
The child who cried easily.
The girl who spoke before asking for permission.
The hands that reached out too freely.
They turned her into a lesson.
Into a warning.
Into ash.

They burned your hunger next.
Told you it was too loud.
Told you desire made you dangerous.
Told you women like you were better seen, better still, better silent.
So you shut yourself down.
One piece at a time.
Until you became a version of yourself you could barely recognize
but they could applaud.

And when they burned your anger
they called it purification.
They made you feel guilty for being human.
For having limits.
For breaking under pressure.
For raising your voice.
So you buried that fire under layers of quiet.
You held your tongue even when your throat felt like it would split open.
You clenched your fists until your fingers forgot how to reach.

And still
something remained

After the flames
after the silence
after the shame had been nailed to your chest like a name you didn't ask for
you found something glowing at the bottom of yourself
not pretty
not pure
but whole

The fire tried to take it
but it couldn't
It was too deep

Too wild
Too rooted in everything that made you a threat
Too honest to burn

The fire couldn't touch your remembering
The part of you that always knew this was wrong
That this world was never built for you to thrive
That silence was not your language
That submission was not your inheritance

The fire couldn't touch your rage
Not the wild rage that comes from centuries of being told to wait your turn
Not the rage that builds itself from bone and blood and history
Not the rage that kept you alive even when you wanted to vanish

The fire couldn't take your vision
The part of you that sees beyond the ruin
That sees yourself unshackled
unashamed
that sees new blueprints written in your own handwriting
that dreams with both hands open

They burned you because they could
because it was easier than facing the truth of your full self
But what they didn't understand
is that burning a body does not guarantee silence
Sometimes it summons something louder

And now when they look at you
they do not see a victim
They see the one thing they thought they had destroyed
Still standing
Still smoking
Still singing

What the fire couldn't burn is the reason you're still here
You are not just what survived
You are what refused to be erased

Chapter 4

Pretty for a Funeral

They told me I looked beautiful in grief.
Said the black dress suited me.
Said pain had a way of softening my face.
Said sorrow made me more feminine.
Said there was something holy about a woman who doesn't fight the fall.
And I almost believed them.

Because no one ever said I was beautiful when I was loud.
When I was angry.
When I was still alive and refusing to smile.
They only said it when I was mourning something
when I was too tired to protest
too empty to ask for more
too broken to make them uncomfortable.

They loved me most when I was quiet with mascara running
when my lips were sealed with loss
when I sat still in the pew with my legs crossed like a good memory.
They called it elegance
but what they meant was obedience.

I learned early that they bring flowers for the girl who never speaks back.
That they open doors for the woman who carries her sadness like perfume.
That they prefer you grieving over growing
dying quietly over living too loudly.

So I learned how to mourn myself in public
how to bury versions of me while smiling for the photo
how to plan a funeral for my joy while serving tea to the guests.
I became an expert in elegy.
I learned to eulogize the girl I once was before they decided who I should be.

And maybe that's what made me dangerous
not the rage
not the resistance

but the fact that I buried the girl they created
and never invited them to the funeral.

They wanted me to mourn beautifully.
But I mourned in rebellion.
I mourned with fists.
With fire.
With the sound of my own name finally said in my own voice.

There is nothing pretty about silence forced by survival.
Nothing lovely about dying slowly to be liked.
Nothing admirable about shrinking yourself to fit the casket they built for your
ambition.

I stopped dressing up for my own funerals.
Stopped painting my lips for men who liked me better in eulogies.
Stopped practicing sorrow just to be seen.

I want to be loved in the full heat of my becoming.
Not just when I'm falling apart quietly.

If you only think I'm beautiful when I'm grieving
you don't deserve me when I rise.

They said I looked beautiful in black
as if mourning was the first time they could finally see me clearly
as if the only time my presence made sense was when I was shrinking inside it
as if grief softened my edges in ways joy never could

They said sorrow suited me
like it was a shade I'd been meant to wear
like the silence wrapped around my body made me more palatable
like my pain was a performance they could clap for
as long as I kept the crying quiet and the dress tight around the waist

They never complimented me when I laughed from my belly
when I raised my voice without apology
when I walked into a room and took up space like I belonged there
They only saw beauty in my stillness
in the way my body folded under the weight
in how I bit my tongue until it tasted like obedience

So I gave them what they wanted
I played the part
I wore the black
stood still at the altar
crossed my arms and lowered my gaze
I cried without sound
carried my own eulogy like a handbag
became the woman who could lose everything and still be graceful

I turned grief into a second skin
I let them adore the version of me that didn't talk back
didn't demand
didn't need
I let them fall in love with my suffering
because it made them feel holy to witness it

But there is a difference between mourning and erasure
and I learned that too late

Because when the pain faded
they left
when I started to speak again
they stopped listening
when I rose from the ashes
they called me ungrateful
too loud
too angry
too much

They don't love you after resurrection
only when you're lying down
quiet
pliable
pretty

They don't bring flowers when you choose yourself
only when you've buried her

And so I buried her for real this time
the girl who smiled through the funeral

the girl who performed suffering so well they called it grace
the girl who wore pain like pearls just to be loved

I buried her without ceremony
no guests
no hymns
no final goodbyes

Because this is not her story anymore

This is the part where I take off the black
where I stop making my sorrow beautiful for their comfort
where I stop staging my own death just to be seen

I want to be loved in the full heat of my living
in the messy middle of my fire
I want to be kissed with the same tenderness they gave my brokenness
I want my joy to be holy too

If you only call me beautiful when I am quiet
you are not worthy of my noise
If you only see me when I am grieving
you are not ready for what it means to witness me rise

There is nothing pretty about dying in pieces
And I refuse to do it again for anyone

Chapter 5

Speak While They Bleed

Don't wait for the world to listen.
Speak over the screaming.
Speak over the sirens.
Speak while they are still bleeding.

Because if you wait
they will call your voice inconvenient
they will say now is not the time
they will ask for your silence like it is a favor
they will ask you to whisper when your body is burning

They will write your pain into their history books
and edit out your voice
They will retell your story
without your breath in it

So speak
while their hands are still stained
while the lie is still warm
while the shame hasn't dried on your skin

Speak
because your silence won't save them
and it sure as hell won't save you

Speak like the walls owe you an apology
Speak like your grandmother's ghost is listening
Speak like you were born with fire in your mouth
because maybe you were
maybe that's why they've spent generations trying to shut it

You were taught to wait for permission
taught to be polite
taught to pick your moment
But they never pick yours
They never hand you the microphone

They hand you the mop
They hand you the coffin
They hand you your silence
wrapped in gold ribbon
and call it honor

And still
they are shocked when you speak mid-ceremony
when you interrupt their feast with a name they tried to forget
when you sing the names of the buried like a chorus
when your words smell like protest and refusal
when your truth shows up uninvited and unwashed
and refuses to leave

They want you silent while they bleed
because truth complicates their performance
because your voice makes their harm visible
because your anger ruins the show

But you didn't come to play background
You didn't come to watch them clean the blood off the blade
You came to name it
You came to haunt it
You came to speak until even the silence remembers

This is not a poem
This is testimony
This is the sound of a wound learning to speak for itself

And if your voice shakes
let it
And if they look away
let them
You are not here to be palatable
You are not here to be polite

You are here to speak
while they bleed
because they made you bleed in silence for too long
and your voice
is the only goddamn thing they never prepared for

They will say you should have waited
that your words made it worse
that your timing was cruel
but cruelty is what they did
and silence is the only thing that protected it

They want your pain to be quiet
your survival to be subtle
your testimony to sound like gratitude

They want you to speak in the language of forgiveness
even when your mouth is full of blood
even when you are the one who buried the body
and lit the match
and walked away with nothing but your name

Do not let them turn your rage into performance
Do not make it poetic for them
Do not clean up the story so they feel comfortable nodding through it

Speak while they deny it
Speak while they build their alibis
Speak while they write statements about how kind they were
Speak while their hands still smell like what they did

Because they will not remember what they did to you
but they will remember that you dared to speak it

And that
is power

They will call you a liar
They will call you ungrateful
They will say your memory is broken
They will say you imagined it
They will call you bitter
They will call you unstable
They will say you are just trying to ruin something
But what they ruined is already dead
and you are only holding the bones

So speak

Speak in the middle of the dinner
Speak at the celebration
Speak when the camera is rolling
Speak while they are still clapping for themselves
Because they never gave you space
They only gave you silence
and expected you to thank them for it

You do not owe them peace
You do not owe them the version of the story that makes them look good
You do not owe them the quiet girl
You do not owe them anything

You are not speaking to be believed
You are speaking because your voice belongs to you now
You are speaking to reclaim the body
to unbury the memory
to remind yourself that you are not crazy
that it happened
that you felt it
that your bones remember even if they never will

Speak because someone else needs to hear it
because someone is sitting in the dark with the same wound
the same silence
the same fear of being called too loud too much too late

Speak for her
Speak for yourself
Speak for the girl who swallowed her truth and never made it back

And when they cover their ears
raise your voice
And when they tell you it is not the time
make it the time
And when they tell you it is not the place
make it the place

This is your mouth
your pain
your power

This is your turn
even if no one gave it to you

Speak while they bleed
because they never stopped speaking while you did
and you have been silent for far too long

Chapter 6

Black Veins

I was born into a body already charged with meaning
before I spoke
before I sinned
before I could even understand the weight of it
they had already decided what it was worth

This skin does not get to enter a room quietly
This face does not get to be neutral
This mouth does not get to make mistakes without consequence
There is no such thing as innocent when your veins carry history
when your walk sounds like defiance
when your laughter is louder than their comfort can handle

I did not ask to be born into a lineage they feared
but here I am
with a name they cannot pronounce
and a voice they cannot silence

These veins are not just veins
they are rivers of inheritance
they carry memory and war and music and warning
they carry women who were never allowed to rest
they carry gods who were renamed out of existence
they carry every time I swallowed my rage to survive the hour
every time I buried my beauty so I wouldn't be punished for it

There is nothing soft about this bloodstream
It runs thick with everything they tried to beat out of us
Everything they tried to chain
Everything they tried to convert
It carries prayers spoken through gritted teeth
It carries screams turned into songs
It carries my grandmother's hands
and my mother's fight
and my own refusal to stay small

I have spent too many years being told my blood is too loud
that my strength is too masculine
that my magic is too dangerous
that my skin is too political even when I am just breathing

I was told to be grateful
to be exceptional
to be the one they could point to and say
see
she made it
as if my survival was proof the system worked
as if the bruises on my back were a fair price for the seat at the table

But I do not want their table
I want the land it sits on
I want the names they erased to build it
I want the silence to break
I want the reckoning

My veins were never made to carry compliance
They were made to carry thunder
They were made to break open the quiet
They were made to call forth everything buried
to scream without apology
to remember who I am before the world tried to rename me

I am not asking to be understood anymore
I am not here to explain my rage
I am not here to make myself less threatening
I am not here to make them comfortable with my existence

These black veins carry generations of unfinished business
of women who did not get to speak
of warriors who were written out of the story
of spirits who are still waiting for justice

I bleed for them
I write for them
I live louder for them
I keep waking up
even when the world does not make room

even when the door is closed
even when the rules are not meant for me
I keep waking up

because these veins are not just mine
they are the map back to everything we were never meant to forget
and I am not done remembering

They act like blood is just biology
like it is nothing but tissue and rhythm
but mine carries ghosts
mine carries uprisings
mine carries songs that were never recorded but still hum in my sleep

I feel them
the ones who walked barefoot through fire so I could run
the ones who were never allowed to scream so I could roar
the ones who bent but did not break
who prayed with one eye open
who kissed their children goodbye with revolution in their throats

My blood remembers
even when I try to forget
even when the world tries to distract me with mirrors and crumbs and survival
prizes
even when I am tempted to rest in pretending
my blood reminds me
there is more to do

These veins do not flow in isolation
they are connected to a larger current
to a storm older than my own grief
to a story that did not begin with me
and will not end with me either

I come from a people who were not given the luxury of silence
who had to make meaning out of pain
who had to turn absence into art
who turned brokenness into beauty
who taught us how to dance in the middle of mourning
who braided power into our hair and dared the world to touch it

These veins are full of names that were never written down
full of Black women who did not live long enough to be seen
but still lived long enough to birth warriors
full of Black men who learned how to cry without sound
full of Black children who were told to be strong before they were even allowed to
be small

And I carry them all
every single one
every sacrifice
every silence
every shadow that shaped my light

So when I speak
it is not just me speaking
it is the blood speaking
it is the memory speaking
it is the ones who came before me saying
we are still here
we are still here
we are still here

My veins are not passive
they are not fragile
they are rivers of resistance
every heartbeat a reminder that I am still becoming
still breaking open
still sacred

And if that makes me dangerous
so be it
if that makes them afraid
so be it
if that makes them uncomfortable
so be it

Because I was never meant to be easy to swallow
I was meant to live
to stretch
to shout
to shift the ground beneath their comfort

And when I die

I want my blood to keep running
to seep into the soil and birth something wild
something that does not ask for permission
something that knows its name without needing to be told

That is what it means to have Black veins

It means I carry the future
It means I carry the fight
It means I carry the fire
and I am not done burning

Chapter 7

Bloodline/Battlecry

I come from women who did not die quietly.
Even when the world demanded their silence
even when the blade kissed their names
even when their stories were buried beneath someone else's glory
they still found ways to leave pieces of themselves behind.

In the way my spine straightens when someone tries to shrink me
In the way I speak with my hands
In the way I laugh too loud in rooms that weren't built for my joy
they are still here
not just in memory
but in muscle
in marrow
in the parts of me that never learned how to bow

My bloodline is not a story told in soft voices
It is a war drum
It is teeth bared and feet planted
It is every woman who was called too much
who stayed anyway
who bled anyway
who birthed beauty through pain they were never meant to survive

I do not come from weakness
I come from fire
from spit that turned to spell
from fists that broke through silence
from backs that bent but did not break
from screams that echoed across centuries and still shake the floor when I walk

My grandmother prayed with one hand and fought with the other
She carried God in her mouth and rage in her knees
She did not write poems
She did not have time
Her poetry was survival

Her verse was feeding children when the world forgot their names
Her rhythm was the sound of resistance folded into her everyday breath

My mother inherited that war
and I watched her carry it
like a second spine
She made meals out of nothing
She made space in places that never welcomed her
She smiled when it hurt
She didn't always win
but she never stopped trying
and that is what power looks like
not perfection
but persistence
not glory
but grit

So when they ask me why I am like this
why I speak with my whole chest
why I don't wait for invitations
why I do not make myself smaller
I tell them I was born from women who had to scream just to be heard
I tell them I carry too many names in my mouth to ever be quiet

This is not just my voice
It is theirs
This is not just my fight
It is ours

When I open my mouth
it is a battlecry
It is the sound of my ancestors saying
we did not die for you to disappear
we did not bleed for you to fold
we did not suffer for you to settle

My blood remembers what they tried to erase
My blood chants in languages this world tried to kill
My blood sings like it's preparing for war
My blood does not know how to lie down

There are wounds I did not choose
but there are weapons I inherited
and this voice
this poem
this refusal to be erased
is one of them

So I keep shouting
until the walls fall
until the sky splits
until every quiet girl hears herself in my fire

I am not just my mother's daughter
I am her rage multiplied
her prayers answered differently
her silence turned into thunder
and I will not stop

Because this bloodline does not end with me
It begins again
with every word I refuse to swallow

They want us to talk about strength like it was a gift
but it was never a gift
it was a sentence
it was the way our mothers held back tears in front of children
the way our grandmothers buried dreams just to feed everybody else
it was survival
not freedom

We inherited strength because we had no choice
and we learned to wear it like armor
but no one asked how heavy it was
no one asked how tired we became
no one asked if we wanted something softer
if we ever dreamed of being fragile without consequence

I carry a bloodline that didn't have time to grieve
they just kept going
kept praying
kept pushing

even with wounds that never closed
even when they were dying in pieces

And sometimes I get angry at that
because I was born into a storm that wasn't mine
but I was handed a mop and told to clean it up
I was given their unhealed things
their unfinished wars
their silence and their scars
and asked to make something beautiful from it

And I did
I am still doing it
but not for their applause
not for their forgiveness
I am doing it because I want the ones who come after me to inherit something
different

I want my daughter's voice to be her own
not a reconstruction of everything we lost
I want her to know softness without suspicion
to cry without apology
to rest without guilt
to live without needing to prove she is worthy

Because I love my bloodline
but I am also building a new one
I am not just a link in the chain
I am the break
I am the shift
I am the choice that says
the pain can stop here

I still honor them
I still hear them when I move
I still pray in their languages
I still carry their names when I enter a room
but I am no longer letting their silence guide me

I speak
even when it shakes

even when it's ugly
even when the room was not made for it
especially then

Because the greatest tribute I can give them
is to break the patterns that tried to kill us
to scream what they were never allowed to whisper
to walk away from anything that made them small
to raise daughters who are not made of hunger
to raise sons who are not made of dominance
to raise a world where the bloodline does not have to be a battlefield

But if it still is
then I will fight

Not with swords
but with stories
Not with chains
but with choice
Not with silence
but with voice

I am the daughter of women who never gave up
and I am the mother of a future that will never ask permission

This is not a poem
This is a declaration
This is the war cry I was born to carry
This is the healing they never got to finish
This is my bloodline
and I am not afraid of it anymore

Chapter 8

The Silence I Choked

There are things I never said that still live in my mouth
not as words
but as weight
as tension
as the way my tongue curls back instead of forward
as the way my jaw locks when someone gets too close to the truth

I swallowed so much silence I forgot what my voice felt like
not the one I use to survive
but the one that rises when no one is watching
the one that speaks in my own language
before shame
before rules
before fear wrapped itself around my throat and told me to behave

I choked on silence
every time I smiled when I wanted to scream
every time I nodded when I wanted to run
every time I stayed in the room just to keep the peace
when the room itself was the war

There were nights I lay still just to be safe
nights I held my breath like prayer
like punishment
like maybe if I was quiet enough they would leave me whole

But they never did

And the silence did not save me
it only made me smaller
only made me disappear
until I became a well-dressed ghost
laughing on cue
shrinking in public
performing strength with a throat full of unspoken things

The world teaches girls like me to make silence a virtue
to wear it like a crown
to inherit it like duty
to swallow every no
every not yet
every this hurts
every don't touch me
every I want more
every I am not okay
until all that is left is a performance
and a pulse

I played that role so well they gave me awards for it
called me strong
called me graceful
called me admirable
but I was dying
I was choking on everything I never said

And no one noticed

Because we do not look for wounds in the well-behaved
we do not ask the smiling girl if she is drowning
we do not check on the strong friend
we just keep applauding

But the body remembers what the mouth cannot say
and mine began to revolt
I lost sleep
I lost breath
I lost whole days to the ache of things I would not let myself name

Until I couldn't take it anymore
until the silence turned to fire
until my voice came back not as a whisper
but as a reckoning

I began to speak
and my body started to breathe again

The first words were heavy
sharp

messy
but they were mine

And the more I spoke
the more I remembered
how power lives in honesty
how healing begins where silence ends
how my voice was never the problem
only the threat

Now when I open my mouth
I do not ask for permission
I do not look for their comfort
I do not shrink to fit the room

I speak
because I was silent for too long
because I almost disappeared inside it
because there is someone out there choking right now
on everything she's too afraid to say

And she needs to hear me speak
to know it's possible
to know she is not alone
to know that silence is not safety
it is survival on mute
and we were born for more than that

So I speak
with all the air I was once denied
with all the truth I used to fear
with all the fury that kept me alive
because this is the only language I trust now
the one I choked on
the one I reclaimed
the one that saved me

There are people who still only know the version of me shaped by silence
the version who smiled at the insult
who made herself small so others could feel big
who laughed when nothing was funny

who stayed after the first wound
and the second
and the third
because leaving would require a voice
and I hadn't learned how to use mine yet

They think that girl was the real me
but she was only the shell
only the survival
only the echo of everything I never said out loud

The real me was buried under layers of performance
under years of biting my tongue until it bled
of saying I'm fine when I was anything but
of letting things go because holding them felt too dangerous

But silence was its own violence
and I lived with it inside me like a slow poison
numbing
shrinking
undoing

There were entire years where I cannot remember what I wanted
only what I was afraid to lose
Only what I kept giving away just to feel safe
my time
my voice
my softness
my no
my too-muchness
my almos

But silence does not keep you safe
it just makes the harm quieter
it makes the harm harder to trace
until you start blaming yourself for the things you were never allowed to say

I learned to speak again in pieces
not with poetry
not with performance
but with shaking hands and a tired mouth

I spoke in kitchens when I should have left
I spoke in mirrors when no one else would listen
I spoke even when I cried through it
even when my voice cracked
even when the words didn't land softly

And every time I did
something inside me came back

Not all at once
but slowly
like memory
like truth
like light that had always been there but had nowhere to live

Now I speak without rehearsing
I speak without apology
I speak without needing them to understand me
because silence was the lie
and this voice
this rough
unpretty
unfiltered
full-of-history voice
is the truth

Some people preferred me when I was quiet
when I didn't correct them
when I didn't name the harm
when I didn't ask for more

They say I've changed
and they are right
I changed the moment I chose my voice over their comfort

This is not bitterness
this is resurrection
this is me walking out of my own grave
me unchoking the words that died inside me
me looking silence in the eye and saying

not anymore
never again

Because I was never born to be polite at the cost of my own breath
I was never meant to be the backdrop to someone else's power
I was never created to hold my tongue while my truth rotted inside me

I was made to speak
and now that I have
there is no going back

Chapter 9

We Are Not the Wound

We were taught to see ourselves through what happened to us
to name ourselves by the harm
to wear the pain like identity
to shape our stories around the things we survived
and forget that survival is not the same as becoming

They told us we were strong because we kept going
but they never asked what it cost
They called us brave when we didn't break
but they never noticed the cracks

They love us when we speak like broken things learning to heal
but they don't know what to do when we speak like fire
like clarity
like power that doesn't apologize anymore

We were never just the wound
We are the one who crawled out of it
stitched her own skin
named her scars after gods
and kept living

We were never just what they did to us
We are what we built after
what we carried through
what we refused to pass on

They want to write our stories like a eulogy
like grief is all we have
like suffering is our only song
but I have seen joy rise from the bodies of women who were never supposed to
dance again
I have seen laughter crack open a silence that tried to bury us
I have seen girls reclaim their names like gospel
I have seen Black women walk into rooms like thunder and not ask to be quiet

We are not the wound
We are what survived it
We are what refused to die
We are what kept breathing
even when the air was thick with memory
even when our own reflection scared us
even when the only thing louder than the pain was the silence around it

We are not the bruises
We are not the breaking
We are not the story they tell to make themselves feel better
We are the voice that interrupted the lie
We are the body that said no and meant it
We are the scream they tried to turn into a whisper
but failed

This world does not know what to do with women who know their own power
who name their own rage
who don't dress their trauma in politeness
who say
yes I bled
but watch what I do now

So they try to shrink us back into the moment that hurt us
because it's easier than facing what we've become
but we are not returning there
We are not going back to silence
We are not returning to the place where we were last small

We are not the wound
We are the knife that carved a new story
We are the hands that rebuilt the altar
We are the hymn that never stopped humming under the rubble

We carry pain
but we are not made of it
We carry memory
but it does not own us
We carry fire
and we know what to do with it now

This is what it means to live after the breaking
This is what it means to not be a victim of your own life
This is what it means to say
I am more than what happened
I am more than who hurt me
I am more than the silence that followed

I am not the wound
I am the woman who walked through it
and came back louder

They want us to keep bleeding in beautiful ways
to make poetry from our pain
to be inspirational while unraveling
to be strong while dying slowly
but I am done performing resilience for people who only show up to watch me
suffer

There are parts of me they will never understand
parts I had to carry in silence for so long they became shape
became posture
became voice

There are rooms I sat in smiling
while my body was screaming
rooms that called me healed because I wasn't weeping
called me whole because I was standing
but no one asked if I felt safe
if I could sleep
if I had stopped replaying everything just to make sense of it

I have been treated like a story instead of a person
turned into a symbol
into proof of survival
into a reason for others to feel less guilty

But I am not here to be proof
I am not here to be consumed
I am not here to turn pain into performance
I am here because I made it

not for them
but for myself

I made it because I refused to end there
because I wanted more than endurance
I wanted softness
I wanted joy that wasn't followed by grief
I wanted a life that didn't start with remembering what I had to survive

So I started naming myself again
not in the language of pain
but in the language of becoming

I am not a wound
I am the hands that held it
the mouth that spoke through it
the feet that kept moving
the spine that stayed upright

I am not just a survivor
I am an artist of my own becoming
I am rebuilding the pieces of me that were stolen
not as they were
but as they could be

I do not owe the world a neat ending
I do not owe the world my silence
I do not owe the world my suffering wrapped in grace

What I owe is to myself
To the girl I was when I first went quiet
To the woman I am now who refuses to stay quiet again
To every Black girl who was taught that survival was her only calling
To every body that was touched without consent and told to carry it with dignity
To every voice that was punished for telling the truth

This is not about their healing
This is not about their guilt
This is about us
finally looking in the mirror and seeing more than what was done to us
finally claiming joy that does not come after pain
but beside it

despite it
through it
above it

We are not the wound
We are the medicine
We are the spell
We are the hands that shook
and still wrote the story anyway

We are the kind of truth they never expected to survive
We are the daughters of silence who learned how to scream
and still kept their softness

We are not the wound
We are the return

Chapter 10

Mouth Open, World Ending

If I open my mouth wide enough, maybe the whole system falls in.

Not just the lies they told me.

Not just the men who took and never looked back.

Not just the girls who laughed when I cried because no one taught them better.

The whole thing.

The silence.

The shame.

The praise for pain dressed as strength.

The worship of women who stay small just to be loved.

They have built entire empires on our silence.

Decorated altars with our obedience.

Called us holy when we bled without screaming.

Called us angry when we bled and spoke anyway.

They want our mouths shut because they know what lives inside.

Memory.

Truth.

Names.

Fire.

I was not always loud.

There was a time I made myself into a beautiful echo.

I wore their expectations like perfume.

I said what they needed to hear to stay safe, to stay loved, to stay untouched.

But the truth does not die when you ignore it.

It waits.

It thickens.

It starts to live in your bones.

And one day, it starts speaking whether you're ready or not.

This mouth has learned the hard way what silence cannot save.

It cannot save your body.

It cannot save your mind.

It cannot save the ones who come after you from repeating your grief.

But a voice?

A voice can burn down what silence made sacred.

A voice can rewrite what pain tried to claim.

A voice can become prophecy.

So I opened my mouth.

Not for them.

For me.

For the girl I used to be who flinched when someone called her name too loudly.

For the women I come from who died with secrets tucked in their throats.

For the children watching us now, learning how to live loud.

I opened my mouth

and names fell out

and memories came home

and rage found language

and grief found rhythm

and suddenly

I was not just one girl screaming

I was every girl they ever told to sit still

rising through me like flood

The world ends like this sometimes.

Not with war

but with one woman refusing to lie one more time.

With one voice saying

this happened

I survived

but I will not perform that survival for you

I will not make it easy to ignore

I will not let you sleep through what you did

If I open my mouth wide enough

maybe the whole system falls in

the fathers who left

the lovers who silenced

the churches that crushed us under the weight of their shame

the teachers who only called on the quiet girls

the world that rewards us for being likable and punishes us for being real

All of it
down my throat
into the fire

I am not the ending
I am the undoing
I am the mouth they cannot unhear
I am the sound they prayed would never return
But I am here
And I am loud
And I am tired of shrinking to fit inside the lies they wrote

So let it fall
Let the system crack at the sound of one honest sentence
Let the myths choke on my name
Let the world remember that silence was never peace
and voice was never the danger

This is how it ends
and this is how it begins
Mouth open
world ending
and no regrets

Closing Note

There is something holy about telling the truth out loud.
Not the polite truth. Not the one that makes everyone feel better.
The kind that stings when you speak it.
The kind that has lived in your mouth for years without a name.

This book is a mouth that refused to stay closed.
It is what happens when silence is no longer safe.
It is what rises when shame loses its grip.
It is blood and memory and voice returning to itself.

I did not write these pieces to be understood by everyone.
I wrote them for the ones who know what it feels like to be told to make yourself
small
to be punished for surviving
to be asked to translate your pain into something beautiful for someone else to
consume

If these pages found you
I hope they gave you permission to stop shrinking
to speak in the voice they tried to silence
to remember the body is not the betrayal
to know you were never too much
they were simply not enough to hold you

This is not the end of the story
This is the breath before you begin again
With your voice
your truth
your name

Open your mouth
Let it fall out
Whatever the world told you to bury
Whatever you carried alone
Whatever they tried to erase

Let it all out
Let the world hear you this time

And if the system trembles
good.

Acknowledgments

This is for the quiet ones with dangerous truths.

For the girls who survived being erased.

For the ones who carry fire in their throats.

For every artist, rebel, mother, monster, and miracle
that gave me permission to howl.

I see you. I owe you.

About the Author

Sonia Benjoye is a writer of fire and bone. Her work walks the edge between poetry and protest, between grief and power, between silence and the scream that breaks it. She writes for the girls who were told to be quiet and the women who forgot they were allowed to be loud. Her voice is not decoration. It is disruption. It is memory. It is prophecy.

Her books do not comfort. They confront.

Among them are:

What It Took

The Paradox of Passion

Woman. Weapon. Work.

This Is the Season for Guts

God Was Never the Problem

Mother. Monster. Machine

Black Veins, Open Mouths

And many more...

Each one is a different howl. A different hymn. A different reckoning.

Sonia writes from the places most people are told to bury.

She does not flinch. She does not whisper. She does not wait for permission.

She writes for the ones who are done surviving quietly.

She writes so the world remembers we were always more than the silence they gave us.

Connect With the Author

For speaking
Publishing
Collaborations
Or conversations
Reach out

Email: benjoye21@gmail.com

Website: [Sonia Benjoye – Digital Bookstore](#)

Instagram and Substack coming soon

