

**HER HANDS HELD  
THE FUTURE,  
HER BACK HELD  
THE WEIGHT**



**SONIA BENJOYE**

# **Her Hands Held the Future, Her Back Held the Weight**

*A Collection of Blueprints Soaked in Blood and Brilliance*

***Sonia Benjoye***

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

[benjoye21@gmail.com](mailto:benjoye21@gmail.com)

## Dedication

**To the ones who never got to dream because they were too busy holding up everyone else's.**

To the tired backs and calloused hands.

To the brilliance buried under duty.

I saw you. I see you. I built this in your name.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to the women who came before me  
who did not have books but had blood  
who did not have rest but had rhythm  
who did not have safety but had vision

You held the weight so I could hold the pen.  
This is not mine alone.  
It is yours.

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## Author's Note

I did not write this book gently.

I wrote it with a back that still aches from carrying what wasn't mine.

I wrote it with hands tired from building homes I was never allowed to live in.

I wrote it with a heart that still remembers the women who held the world and were never held back.

This is not a collection of poems.

This is a map of survival written in muscle memory.

This is what it looks like when the ones who were told to be quiet start drawing blueprints.

When the ones who carried the weight start writing the future.

These pieces are not polished. They are pressure.

They are born of memory, injustice, brilliance, and bone.

Some days they felt too heavy to hold.

Other days they felt like the only thing keeping me upright.

If you're reading this, I hope you feel seen.

I hope you remember who you come from.

I hope you rest, and then rise again with your hands still full of possibility.

Because the future was never weightless.

And still, we carry it.

— Sonia Benjoye



## Chapter 1

### Blueprints in Her Spine

They never asked how she learned to hold so much.

How her back knew the shape of burden before her name even settled into her mouth.

She was born into blueprints. Not handed them, not taught.

They were sewn into the marrow, encoded in silence, passed down in looks and lifted chins.

While others played house, she was learning architecture.

Not of buildings, but of survival.

She knew how to build safety from stares.

She knew how to reinforce walls with a mother's ache and a sister's scream.

Every choice was load-bearing.

Every gesture a quiet rebellion.

Her spine, curved not by weakness but design.

It remembered the women who bent under history and still dared to lift.

Her body kept the memory of labor no one thanked.

And still, she stood.

She built futures without permission.

Held legacies that no one else remembered.

She did not ask to carry the world, she just knew what would happen if she let it fall.

So she walked with blueprints no one saw.

Blueprints that lived in her silence, her laughter, her grief.

Blueprints the world mistook for attitude, defiance, madness.

But they were brilliance.

They were prophecy.

They were a woman remembering her purpose.

And even when she broke,

her spine whispered,

I was made for this.



Nobody asked when it started.  
Not the building.  
Not the breaking.  
Not the blueprinting of survival stitched into her before she even learned her own voice.

They saw the way she carried things.  
Heavy things.  
Invisible things.  
But they never thought to ask what that weight was made of.

There were no scrolls.  
No sacred blueprints rolled out on a clean table.  
Only a body that kept the record.  
A spine that remembered the curves of sacrifice  
before she even had the language to name what she was holding.

Her grandmother never told her what to carry.  
She just watched her move through the world  
like pain was something you balance in your hands  
like joy was a luxury you had to earn  
like dignity was something you protected with silence.

So she learned.  
Not in school.  
Not in safe rooms or open forums.  
But in kitchens filled with swallowed tears.  
In bedrooms where her mother curled her back into a comma  
so her children could keep dreaming in full sentences.

She learned that you can hold love and exhaustion in the same hand.  
That you can raise children while breaking quietly inside.  
That you can be the only thing standing between chaos and continuation  
and no one will see you  
unless you drop it.

So she didn't.  
She never dropped it.  
Even when her arms trembled.  
Even when her voice cracked.  
Even when her own needs sat in the corner like a forgotten child.

Her spine adjusted.  
Reinforced itself.  
Not out of strength but necessity.

That's the part they always get wrong.  
They think she is strong because she wants to be.  
But no one ever asks what would happen if she finally put it down.

She is the kind of woman who holds the roof up while everyone argues under it.  
The kind who remembers everyone's birthday but forgets her own hunger.  
The kind who smiles through the tremble  
because she knows the whole house shakes when she cries.

The blueprints are not in her hands.  
They are in her bones.  
Etched in sacrifice.  
Written in the stretch marks of generations.  
Drawn in the deep sighs she lets out when no one is watching.

She was not born to build alone.  
But she did.  
Because somebody had to.

And when the world forgets how much it takes to hold everything together  
her spine will still remember.  
Her back will still know.  
And her story  
will be the blueprint  
for someone else's freedom.

There were moments when she didn't feel like a woman at all.  
Not soft. Not fragile. Not fluid.  
She felt like foundation. Like stone. Like something people stepped on to reach  
safety.  
She was praised for being reliable.  
But no one asked how it felt to never rest.

You can only be the strong one for so long before the strength becomes a prison.  
You can only carry everyone for so many years before you forget what it feels like to  
walk for yourself.

She wanted softness.  
But softness was a risk.  
Softness meant someone else had to step up.  
And she had already learned what happens when you let go too soon.  
Things fall. People leave. Promises break.  
So she became the spine and the skin and the shelter.  
Not because she wanted to  
but because it was either bend  
or let the whole damn thing collapse.

There were days she woke up angry.  
Not at anyone in particular. Just angry at how invisible her labor had become.  
Angry at how quiet she had to be about the things that shaped her.  
Angry that no one remembered to thank the architect when the house stood tall.

And yet  
even on those days  
she kept building.

She built through heartbreak.  
She built through betrayal.  
She built through silence that felt like a betrayal too.

Her love was the kind that worked overtime.  
Her care showed up before it was asked.  
And still, people only noticed when she finally said no.

She wasn't bitter.  
She was exhausted.

There's a difference between giving freely  
and being expected to give until there's nothing left.

But something inside her never stopped drawing the lines.  
Never stopped measuring the walls.  
Never stopped dreaming of a structure that could hold all of them  
without crushing her in the process.

She wasn't asking to be worshipped.  
She just wanted to be seen.  
She wanted someone to notice that the blueprints were written on her back

and that every step forward came with a cost  
she was still paying.

And when she finally rests,  
when she finally breathes like the future is not hers alone to carry,  
someone will pick up those blueprints  
and find their own way through.

Not because she told them how  
but because she lived it  
out loud  
and unbreakable  
until the next woman knew  
she didn't have to carry it all alone.

## Chapter 2

### She Carried the Sky

She didn't just lift it.  
She wore it.

Like fabric soaked in stormwater.  
Like a mantle no one else could hold.  
The sky was never light.  
It came with weight, with wounds, with weather that changed without warning.

And when it cracked because it always did,  
she didn't run.  
She climbed into the broken places with her bare hands  
and stitched it back together using thread made of memory  
and grief  
and grace so quiet it went unnoticed.

No one told her how to carry something that large.  
They just looked at her and assumed she could.  
Assumed she would.  
And she did.  
Because the cost of letting go was watching everything beneath it fall.

Some days, the sky was kind.  
It hummed soft songs into her ears and reminded her what blue felt like.  
But most days, it was storm.  
It was pressure.  
It was a thousand expectations raining down on her back  
and no one offering an umbrella.

Still, she stood.  
Neck stiff from centuries of legacy.  
Hands full of prayers that never made it to paper.  
Back arched under the weight of futures that were always hers to protect.

She carried it while cooking.  
She carried it while bleeding.  
She carried it while smiling in rooms that didn't deserve her presence.  
And somehow, she made it look effortless.

But it wasn't.

Carrying the sky meant she didn't always know how to ask for help.  
It meant people forgot she had limits.  
It meant her silence became the space others filled with their needs.

She carried the sky because no one else did.  
Because someone had to.  
Because letting it crash meant burying everything she loved beneath the rubble.

And yet, the world rarely thanked her.  
They called her dramatic when she cried.  
They called her cold when she didn't.  
They admired her strength  
but flinched at her truth.

She didn't ask for applause.  
She asked for softness.  
For someone to look up and say,  
I see what you're holding.  
Let me hold you.

But even when no one came,  
she kept her hands steady.  
She kept the stitches tight.  
She kept the sky whole  
for those who would come after her  
never knowing they were walking beneath a sky  
held up by her hands.

She didn't just carry the sky.  
She became it.  
Vast.  
Sacred.  
Endless.  
And full of weather  
that only she understood.

She didn't just lift it.  
She wore it like a second skin.  
Not because she chose to, but because no one else would.  
Because when things started falling apart, all eyes turned to her  
as if she was born with the blueprint  
as if holding up the sky was something written in her blood.

She wore it over her shoulders while washing dishes.  
She wore it tucked beneath her voice when she answered the phone.  
She wore it in every text message that said "I'm fine" when she wasn't.  
There were no medals.  
No ceremonies.  
Just the quiet knowing that if she let it drop, everything beneath it would break.

Sometimes the sky pressed so heavy into her skin that she couldn't tell where it  
ended and she began.  
Her spine bent in ways it wasn't meant to.  
Her neck learned to hold without complaint.  
Her heart kept rhythm beneath all that weight  
a steady beat  
a reminder that she was still here  
still holding  
still breathing  
even if no one noticed.

She became the answer to questions no one was brave enough to ask.  
She became the net beneath the fall  
the hands that caught everyone  
the silence that swallowed every scream.

There were nights she would lie awake  
eyes wide in the dark  
wondering what it would feel like to let go.  
Not to break  
but to be allowed to rest  
to be small  
to be held  
to not be the one holding the entire sky together with shaking arms.

But she got up anyway.  
Morning after morning



body aching from emotional labor no one saw  
and she carried it again  
because the sky never stays still  
because storms are loud  
because children need shelter  
because someone has to hold the roof in place when the world forgets how to love  
its builders.

She carried the sky while raising children who may never understand how much she  
sacrificed.

She carried it through jobs that drained her  
through relationships that praised her strength but never softened into her need.  
She carried it while writing poems no one would read  
while dreaming futures that barely had space for her own breath.

And when it cracked  
when the weight grew too much  
when the silence around her became too loud  
she didn't shatter  
she repaired.

She threaded gold into the breaks  
stitched beauty into the fault lines  
and whispered to herself  
you are allowed to rest  
but even in rest  
you are still whole.

They never saw the bruises on her spirit  
the quiet ache behind her smile  
but the sky knew  
the sky remembered  
and it bowed toward her in dusk  
just a little  
as if to say  
thank you  
for holding me  
when no one else would.



## Chapter 3

### Brilliance Built in Bone

She did not shine the way they expected.  
Her brilliance was not loud.  
It did not announce itself with applause or spotlights.  
It burned slow.  
It glowed steady.  
It lived in the marrow of her being where no one thought to look.

They were always looking for flash  
for polish  
for a certain kind of success that looked good from a distance.  
But she was never built for distance.  
She was built for depth.  
And her brilliance was buried deep  
beneath labor  
beneath lineage  
beneath the weight of centuries that lived in her body before she ever had a  
chance to choose.

She learned early that the world does not reward quiet genius.  
It doesn't see the girl who gets back up  
who cooks and creates  
who holds grief in one hand and a pen in the other  
who builds beauty from broken pieces while everyone else looks away.

They called her resilient.  
They called her strong.  
But they did not call her radiant.  
They did not recognize that the same woman who held space for everyone else's  
chaos  
was also the one who dreamed worlds  
who shaped language  
who rewrote endings that were never meant to include her.

Her brilliance wasn't soft.  
It had edges.  
It had history.

It had names etched into it  
names of women who had no books  
no legacy  
only children and quiet revolutions and bruised hands that never stopped  
working.

It was built in the way she spoke  
with fire hidden in tenderness  
with truth hidden in care  
with refusal wrapped in love.

It was built in the choices she made  
to stay  
to speak  
to fight  
to rest  
to rise again when rest was no longer an option.

Her brilliance was not in how she looked  
but in how she saw  
in how she could enter a room and feel the fracture before the noise started  
in how she carried ancestral wisdom in her silence  
in how she didn't need to be told she was sacred  
to act like it anyway.

They underestimated her because she wasn't loud about what she carried  
because she didn't dress her pain in performance  
because her intelligence didn't seek approval  
it just existed  
quietly  
completely  
and unshakeable.

Brilliance was in her rage  
the kind she learned to keep just under her skin  
until the right moment  
until the right poem  
until the right protest  
when the world would finally feel what she had been holding.

It was in her mother's eyes.  
It was in her daughter's laughter.  
It was in her refusal to break when breaking would have been easier.

And even when no one saw it  
even when the room overlooked her  
even when the world tried to reshape her into something smaller  
she knew.  
She knew what she came from.  
She knew what lived in her blood.  
She knew that her worth was not up for debate.  
It had already been paid for by every woman who came before her  
who never got to write their names in the books  
but wrote them in the bones of the daughters they raised.

She did not need permission to shine.  
She did not need permission to speak.  
She did not need permission to take up space.

The brilliance was already there.  
Built in silence.  
Built in fire.  
Built in bone.  
And it would outlive every system that tried to contain it.

She did not wake up knowing she was brilliant.  
That part took time.  
Took years of unlearning.  
Took digging through the silence she had been taught to keep  
and pulling out the gold buried beneath it.

They told her brilliance looked a certain way.  
Polished. Perfect. White-hot and palatable.  
But her brilliance had scars.  
It had calluses.  
It had a scream that was older than her body  
and a softness that had survived every attempt to harden it.

She came from women who birthed genius in shadows.  
Who solved problems while stirring pots

who saved lives with no degrees  
who healed with hands the world never called skilled.

She watched her mother make miracles out of too little.  
Watched her aunties turn grief into ritual.  
Watched women with nothing build everything and never ask to be seen.

That was brilliance.  
Not the kind you market  
but the kind you inherit.  
Not the kind you measure  
but the kind you remember  
when you are finally allowed to feel whole.

There were days she forgot it.  
Days when the world made her feel small.  
Days when rooms grew quiet when she spoke  
when credit skipped over her  
when her voice echoed like a mistake instead of a contribution.

And on those days  
she had to whisper it back into herself.  
I am not here by accident.  
I am not a placeholder.  
I am not anyone's backup plan.  
I am the blueprint  
I am the brilliance  
I am the reason someone else will believe they are possible.

She wasn't looking to be celebrated.  
She just wanted to be allowed to exist  
fully  
without shrinking  
without translating  
without pretending she was something less than sacred.

Her brilliance was not only in what she created  
but in what she refused to destroy  
even when everything around her tried to break her open.

It was in her restraint  
in the battles she chose not to fight

in the fire she kept from burning everything down  
even when she had every reason to.

It was in her storytelling  
in how she made pain into poetry  
in how she made language bend  
and truth taste like honey after thunder.

And even in stillness  
even in exhaustion  
even when she could not carry the whole world  
she remained radiant.

Not because she needed to be  
but because it was in her bones.  
Because even brilliance gets tired  
and still shines through the cracks.

Even brilliance needs rest  
and still teaches in silence.

Even brilliance breaks  
and still becomes something holy  
in the rebuilding.



## Chapter 4

### Inheritance of Ash and Gold

She didn't just inherit stories.

She inherited silence.

The kind of silence that sits heavy in the chest  
that passes down like heirloom grief  
like a secret everyone knows but no one speaks aloud.

They left her more than name and blood.

They left her the weight of things never said.

They left her the task of remembering  
in a world that forgets women like her on purpose.

Ash and gold.

That is what they gave her.

Burned things.

Beautiful things.

Half-formed dreams and unspoken wisdom.

Pain pressed into poetry  
and resilience carved into every bone in her body.

Ash from all they lost.

Gold from all they refused to give up.

She did not ask for this inheritance.

But it was placed in her hands like a blessing  
and a burden  
and a quiet dare.

She was told she was lucky.

Told she should be grateful for how far they had come.

But no one mentioned how close the fire still was  
how the smoke still lingered in her lungs  
how even the gold she held carried heat.

They gave her names of women she would never meet  
women who bent the world into something liveable  
even when it was not kind.

Women who worked themselves to bone  
and called it love.  
Women who left instructions inside lullabies  
and warnings hidden in recipes.

She carried it all  
even when it didn't fit.  
Even when her hands ached from the weight.  
Even when she wanted to choose a new path  
but couldn't  
because the road beneath her feet was paved in their voices.

She learned that survival had a language  
and she was fluent in it  
even before she knew what it meant.

She learned how to read danger in a room  
how to make herself smaller  
how to hold her anger like a secret weapon  
how to keep going  
even when everything in her begged to stop.

But somewhere between the ash and the gold  
she also inherited the blueprint for rising.  
She inherited the ability to build something better  
something freer  
something softer  
from the ruins.

She carried their grief  
but she also carried their genius.  
She held their sorrow  
but she also held their song.  
And when she spoke  
when she stood  
when she wrote her name in a world that tried to erase her  
they rose with her.  
All of them.  
Every woman who was ever told to sit still.  
Every girl who was ever told she was too loud.

Every ancestor who had to swallow brilliance  
because the world could not hold it.

She was the one who remembered.  
The one who would not let their names be forgotten.  
The one who carried both the fire and the gold  
and turned it into a future  
no one thought she deserved  
but she claimed anyway.

She did not come from wealth  
but she came from worth.  
And that was harder to hold.  
Because worth isn't always visible.  
It doesn't glitter.  
It doesn't announce itself.  
It waits for you to grow strong enough to carry it.

They didn't leave her land  
but they left her language  
the kind made of lullabies and side-eyes  
the kind spoken in footsteps and shared glances  
the kind that told her how to navigate a world that was never made with her in  
mind.

They didn't leave her gold bars or trust funds  
but they left her the memory of hands that created beauty  
from absence  
from hunger  
from pain.  
She came from women who could feed five mouths with one cup of rice.  
Who could make a wedding dress out of grief  
and still walk into the room with their heads high.

That was wealth.  
That was gold.  
And she wore it, even when it felt too heavy.

But it wasn't all gold.  
The ash was real too.  
The unspoken trauma

the stories half-told and swallowed halfway through  
the rage tucked neatly behind discipline  
the exhaustion that shaped her mother's face  
the sadness in her aunt's voice that no one ever asked about.

She inherited that too.  
The generational ache that follows women  
who always gave more than they got.  
The pressure to be grateful  
for having a little more  
even when that little more still came with chains  
just painted a softer color.

No one told her it was okay to be angry.  
To grieve what she was never allowed to call a loss.  
To question the weight passed down to her with a smile.  
To want more than what survived.

And so for years, she tried to carry it all  
without complaining  
without dropping anything  
without asking  
Is it okay if I set this down?

But something inside her shifted.  
Not a break  
a bloom.  
A refusal to inherit only the silence.  
A decision to name the pain  
to name the brilliance  
to claim it all as hers  
the ash and the gold  
and to build something beautiful from both.

She started writing it down.  
Started putting names to the feelings her mother never spoke.  
Started asking questions the women before her weren't allowed to ask.  
Started daring to believe that she could hold both legacy and liberation  
at the same time.

That was the real inheritance.  
Not just the fire  
but the freedom to walk through it  
and not come out burned.

She would be the one to break what needed breaking.  
She would be the one to carry forward only what served healing.  
She would be the one to tell the next girl  
You get to choose.  
You are not just what was handed down.  
You are what you create from it.

And that  
that was the gold  
glowing at the center of all the ash  
the part no one could steal  
because it was made inside her  
because it came alive  
the moment she said  
I will not be quiet about what I carry.

## Chapter 5

### Heavy is the Hope

Hope was never light for her.  
It did not float.  
It did not dance on the breeze or arrive in a pretty package.  
It arrived in pieces.  
It arrived tired.  
It arrived with dirt under its nails and blood on its feet  
and still, it arrived.

They told her hope was soft  
but they never had to carry it through war.  
They never had to hold it in their mouth while biting down on rage.  
They never had to choose it in rooms that swallowed their names  
or in systems that mistook their brilliance for threat.

For her, hope was not a dream  
it was a decision.  
A commitment.  
A clenched jaw and a steady hand.  
Hope was what she carried when everything else had already broken.  
It was what she wrapped in cloth and laid gently at the feet of a future that had not  
yet earned her faith.

It was never easy.  
Some mornings she woke up and couldn't feel it.  
Some nights she cried into her pillow  
asking the ceiling why she still believed  
when belief had betrayed her more than once.

But still she rose.  
Still she cooked.  
Still she showed up in rooms that didn't see her.  
Still she spoke when silence would have been safer.  
Still she mothered, mentored, marched, made.  
Still she created with hands that remembered the weight of centuries.

Hope lived in her rituals.  
In the way she watered her plants.  
In the way she taught her daughter to walk like the world belonged to her.  
In the way she forgave people who never said sorry  
not because they deserved it  
but because she refused to carry more weight than was hers.

Hope wasn't always beautiful.  
It didn't always look like light.  
Sometimes it looked like resting when she felt lazy.  
Sometimes it looked like crying in the car before a meeting.  
Sometimes it looked like saying no  
saying not today  
saying I don't have to fix everything.

There is no glory in pretending you don't feel the weight.  
The strength is in carrying it anyway.  
And letting yourself set it down  
without shame  
when your arms are tired.

She had to remind herself  
that letting go is not the same as giving up  
that choosing peace is not the same as quitting  
that her softness is not weakness  
that her boundaries are a form of worship.

Hope is heavy  
but so is her spirit  
and it is strong enough to hold both the sorrow and the song.

Even when she felt hollow  
even when she doubted herself  
even when the world gave her every reason to sit down and be quiet  
she didn't.

Because something in her knew  
the world needs women who hope like this  
who hold futures like sacred things  
who carry light in their bones



even if no one sees it  
even if it burns.

And when they ask her one day  
what kept her going  
what made her stay  
what made her believe in something better  
she will not quote books  
or prophets  
or programs.

She will say  
I carried hope  
because I had no choice.  
Because it was mine.  
Because it was theirs.  
Because if I didn't,  
who would?

Hope didn't arrive with light.  
It arrived through labor.  
It came crawling through the cracks in her bones after everything else had already  
left.  
And still, she reached for it.  
Even when it trembled.  
Even when it whispered instead of roared.  
Even when it asked her to believe again when belief felt like betrayal.

There were days she hated hope.  
Because hope required her to show up  
when she had nothing left to offer but breath and memory.  
Hope didn't rescue her.  
It required her.  
It sat in the room like an uninvited guest  
daring her to rise one more time.

She carried hope like a second spine.  
Not because it was light  
but because it was sacred.  
Because she remembered the women who carried it before her  
through war

through exile  
through silence  
through systems that stripped them of everything but breath  
and they still held on.

Hope doesn't mean she believed everything would get better overnight.  
It meant she believed in the worth of trying anyway.  
It meant she believed in planting seeds  
even if she would never sit under the trees.

It meant she raised children with fire in their names.  
It meant she created when the world told her she had nothing to say.  
It meant she stayed alive  
on days when survival itself was a radical act.

And when the world called her naive  
when they laughed at her softness  
when they said she was too much  
too tender  
too angry  
too loud  
too hopeful  
she just looked back at them  
tired but unshaken  
and kept going.

Because hope was not what made her fragile.  
It was what made her dangerous.  
To hope in a world that profits from your despair  
is to commit a holy kind of rebellion.

She carried the kind of hope that doesn't get written in textbooks.  
The kind passed between women in glances and prayers.  
The kind spoken in kitchens and birthing rooms  
in protest chants  
in gospel and grief  
in every moment she said  
I will not give in to this  
I will not forget who I am  
I will not let them teach me to abandon myself.

And so she carried it  
this heavy, breathing thing  
this wounded promise  
this seed that refused to die  
through heartbreak  
through burnout  
through silence  
through forgetting  
through remembering again  
through collapse  
through rebuilding  
through the long nights that begged her to give up.

She did not.

Because some part of her still believed  
in joy  
in justice  
in a tomorrow that would thank her for not giving up  
when it would have been so easy to.

That is what hope looked like.  
Not the absence of fear  
but the refusal to surrender to it.

Heavy is the hope.  
But heavier still is a life without it.

And she was done putting anything down  
that gave her breath.  
Even if it asked for everything in return.

## Chapter 6

### The Weight of Tomorrow

She held tomorrow like a bruised child  
gently  
but ready to fight for it.

Not with blind hope  
but with steady hands  
with a heart that had been broken enough times to know exactly how to protect  
something fragile.

Tomorrow was not promised to her.  
It never had been.  
But she claimed it anyway.  
She said, this too is mine.  
Even if I never see it.  
Even if I have to carry it through blood and fire.  
Even if it refuses to come quietly.

She didn't believe in easy futures.  
She believed in earned ones.  
In futures built bone by bone  
breath by breath  
choice by unyielding choice.

No one told her how much it would cost  
to hold a future while living in a world that kept trying to hand her only survival.  
They gave her warning signs  
they gave her statistics  
they gave her fear dressed as advice.  
But no one handed her blueprints.  
No one said  
this is how you raise a new world inside the ruins of an old one.

So she taught herself.  
She learned by doing.  
By loving.  
By failing.

By rising again and again  
each time with a little less apology  
each time with a little more fire in her belly.

She did not dream for herself alone.  
She dreamed for the daughters she hadn't met yet.  
For the soft-eyed rebels who would one day read her name in a book  
and know that someone fought for their breath  
before they ever took it.

She knew she was planting seeds  
not trees.  
And some days  
that made her tired.  
Some days  
she wanted to stop building things she might never live long enough to enjoy.  
Some days  
she wished the weight of tomorrow didn't fall so squarely on her back.

But even on those days  
she kept going.  
Because something in her spirit whispered  
you are not alone.  
Because the same fire that lit her mother's eyes  
now burned in her hands  
and it asked her to carry it forward.

The weight of tomorrow wasn't just in policy  
or protest  
or plans.  
It was in how she spoke to the children.  
It was in how she named herself.  
It was in how she chose joy  
in a world that told her rage was the only appropriate response.

It was in how she listened.  
In how she stayed soft.  
In how she held space for pain  
without letting it swallow her.

It was in the poems she didn't post  
the prayers she whispered before sunrise  
the decisions she made in secret  
to be better  
to be braver  
to be something her ancestors would look at and say  
yes  
this is what we were dreaming of  
when they tried to break us.

She did not believe that everything would be okay.  
She believed that it could be different.  
And sometimes  
that was enough.

Tomorrow is heavy  
but so is she  
and she was never afraid of weight  
only of wasting it.

So she picked it up  
again  
and again  
and again  
until it became part of her posture  
part of her rhythm  
part of her name.

She carried tomorrow in her walk  
in the way her feet kissed the earth with purpose  
not arrogance  
not perfection  
just presence.  
A sacred kind of groundedness that said  
I know where I come from  
and I will not pretend I do not know where I am going.

Some people live for today.  
She had to live for something more.  
Because today did not always welcome her.  
Because today was not always safe.

Because today was built on foundations she never agreed to  
and still had to survive within.

So she looked forward.  
She studied the shape of mornings  
and asked herself  
What do I want my name to mean  
to a girl who has never met me  
but will one day find her fire  
in the language I dared to speak aloud?

It wasn't about being remembered.  
It was about making space.  
It was about tearing open the world just wide enough  
that someone softer  
or freer  
or wilder  
could walk through it without bleeding.

She made decisions most people didn't notice.  
She refused things that would have made her richer  
if it meant staying small.  
She protected her time like it was holy.  
She said no more often than yes  
and each no carved a path toward a future that would not cost her soul.

Tomorrow lived in how she told the truth  
even when it shook her voice.  
Tomorrow lived in how she stood beside women  
not in front of them  
not above them  
but with them  
even when they were falling apart.

She learned to stop waiting for permission.  
Because the world rarely gives permission to women like her.  
To be soft.  
To be sharp.  
To be full of contradictions.  
To be sovereign and still needing.



To be brilliant and still broken in places.  
To be both warning and miracle.

She carried tomorrow by letting herself feel again.  
By refusing numbness.  
By choosing connection over performance  
intimacy over image  
integrity over attention.

The weight of tomorrow didn't just rest on her shoulders  
it pulsed in her blood.  
It kept her awake at night  
not with fear  
but with fierce imagination.

And even though she didn't know what the future would become  
she chose to love it anyway.  
To feed it.  
To protect it.  
To speak to it like a child at her feet  
needing gentleness  
and protection  
and belief.

She did not trust the world to get better on its own.  
But she trusted herself.  
Trusted the women walking beside her.  
Trusted the way the fire in her chest refused to go out  
even on the coldest days.

So when they asked her what she believed in  
she said  
I believe in what we are building  
not because it is easy  
but because it is necessary  
and because someone has to hold it  
before it becomes real.

## Chapter 7

### She Designed Revolutions

She did not stumble into rebellion.

She built it.

Intentionally.

Patiently.

Brick by bruised brick.

Revolution wasn't something she shouted.

It was something she shaped

with her hands

with her choices

with her refusal to disappear.

She designed her revolt like architecture

like a sacred blueprint passed down from women who never got the credit

but always did the work.

It was never about burning it all down.

It was about rebuilding what they said could never belong to her.

Not just breaking the system

but reimagining the world it tried to erase.

They expected chaos.

She gave them structure.

They expected anger.

She gave them vision.

They expected reaction.

She gave them design.

She learned early that noise wasn't enough.

That fire can be wild or it can be guided

and she chose the kind that could forge a future

not just consume it.

Her revolution began in rooms where no one listened.

In emails no one answered.

In boundaries no one respected.

In policies she rewrote in her head  
before anyone else dared to question the rules.

She started by designing a life where she didn't need to shrink.  
A life where she could rest and still be worthy.  
Where softness wasn't punished.  
Where her rage had purpose  
and her joy didn't require apology.

They thought revolution needed loud voices  
but hers came in rituals.  
In tea made for tired friends.  
In spreadsheets that freed other women's time.  
In organizing birthday gifts for the ones who always felt forgotten.  
In making sure no one stood alone at the edge of the room.

Her revolutions were made of details.  
Of making space at tables that were too small.  
Of holding the door open longer than she needed to.  
Of reminding people that power doesn't have to crush  
it can cradle  
it can create  
it can nourish.

She wore her resistance like fabric.  
Not flashy.  
But always present.  
You could see it in her eyes when she said  
no  
you cannot have that part of me.  
You could hear it in her laugh  
sharp and free  
in rooms that tried to make her shrink.  
You could feel it when she walked away from anything  
that demanded her silence as payment.

She didn't just fight to survive.  
She fought to remake the world.  
To make it a little wider.  
A little warmer.  
A little less cruel for the next girl who walked into it carrying fire.

She knew revolutions weren't always televised.  
Sometimes they looked like healing.  
Sometimes they looked like staying.  
Sometimes they looked like walking away.

But always  
always  
they looked like her.  
Tired.  
Brilliant.  
Unshakable.  
And still designing.

She didn't want to be a symbol.  
She wanted to be real.  
Not an icon, not a myth, not a brand of rebellion for others to quote and forget.  
She wanted to live the kind of life that didn't require a slogan.  
She wanted freedom to feel like breath, not performance.

Her revolution was slow and sacred.  
Not the kind that made headlines, but the kind that lasted.  
The kind that refused to vanish when the spotlight moved on.  
The kind built in kitchens, in waiting rooms, in WhatsApp groups at 2am  
where women planned escape routes out of systems that were never made to love  
them.

She knew the world didn't just need louder voices.  
It needed better questions.  
It needed those who could imagine tenderness as power.  
Those who could organize under pressure  
love under erasure  
and still show up when the fight had gone quiet.

Her strength was not in how much she could carry  
but in what she chose to set down.  
She refused to inherit pain that wasn't hers.  
She refused to keep legacies of silence alive.  
She refused to make herself small for anyone's comfort  
not even her own.

She rewrote the rules  
not out of rage  
but out of necessity.  
Because playing fair in an unfair system was no longer noble.  
Because being good had never saved her.  
Because she understood that change begins where obedience ends.

They didn't see her as a threat.  
And that was their mistake.  
Because she was never louder than she needed to be  
but she was always listening.  
Always building.  
Always noticing the cracks in the foundation  
and quietly planning how to take the whole thing apart.

She knew that revolution wasn't always about fire.  
Sometimes it was about water  
and knowing when to flow  
when to erode  
when to drown the whole thing in something softer than they ever expected.

She was not raised to believe she had time.  
So she moved with urgency  
with grace  
with purpose  
never rushing  
but never waiting for permission either.

She took what she needed and left the rest.  
She asked better questions.  
She built bridges.  
She burned altars.  
She planted futures in places where nothing was ever supposed to grow.

And still, she gave.  
Even when it was thankless.  
Even when it was quiet.  
Even when the world pretended not to see.

Because she wasn't designing revolution for applause.  
She was designing it for the ones who would come after her

who would never know her name  
but would walk freely in the space she made  
and breathe easier because she stayed long enough to change the air.

## Chapter 8

### Carved From Burden

She didn't choose the weight.  
It was handed to her.  
Folded into her skin like birthright.  
Given to her in glances, in rules, in responsibilities that came without asking.  
You're the strong one.  
You'll figure it out.  
You always do.

They called it strength.  
They called it resilience.  
But she knew what it really was.  
Inheritance.  
Burden passed down like story.  
Like warning.  
Like expectation.

She was carved from it.  
Not born whole but shaped by pressure.  
By grief no one admitted out loud.  
By decisions made for survival, not softness.  
By love that had to stretch too thin over too many people  
and still show up every day.

They didn't see how much she carried  
because she didn't drop it.  
Because she smiled.  
Because she knew how to stay calm while unraveling.  
Because she learned how to wear grace like armor  
and exhaustion like skin.

Burden taught her how to multitask survival.  
How to comfort others while breaking quietly in the background.  
How to finish everyone else's sentences  
then go home to her own silence  
and make a meal out of it.

She didn't resent the burden.  
But she was tired of pretending it didn't hurt.

Because no one ever asked  
what it cost her to hold everything together.  
To be the strong friend  
the reliable daughter  
the one who always comes through.

They assumed her strength was limitless.  
They treated her care like a resource  
always available  
never questioned.  
And she let them.  
For a while.

Until her body started speaking in ways her mouth would not.  
Until her joy started slipping through the cracks.  
Until her mirror became a stranger.  
Until she couldn't remember the last time someone held her without needing  
something in return.

She realized then  
she had been carved, yes  
but also crafted.  
Formed by burden  
but not defined by it.

There was a kind of beauty in how she held it all  
but there was also danger  
in never setting it down.

So she began  
slowly  
quietly  
to unlearn.  
To put the burden down, piece by piece.  
To say no without guilt.  
To cry without apology.  
To admit that the strong one needs rest too.



She learned to ask for help.  
Not because she was weak  
but because she was human.

She stopped calling everything a lesson.  
Some things were just heavy.  
Some things just hurt.  
And not everything needed to be redeemed to be released.

Still, she honored the burden.  
Not because it was sacred  
but because it shaped her.  
Because she came through it.  
Because she carried it with grace  
even when no one clapped.

But she would not let it become her identity.  
She would not build a life around surviving.

She would make something new.  
A life with softness.  
With space.  
With silence that did not ache.  
With joy that did not feel stolen.

She would become more than what the burden made of her.

And that  
that would be her liberation.

The burden wasn't always loud.  
Sometimes it came in whispers.  
In the pause before she said yes  
when she wanted to say no.  
In the smile she gave  
when her soul begged for silence.  
In the way she showed up  
even when no one showed up for her.

She thought love was carrying without question.  
She thought healing was never complaining.

She thought being whole meant being useful  
even when she was breaking.

But over time  
the weight began to speak.

It showed up in her back  
tight and unmoving.  
In her sleep  
shallow and restless.  
In her voice  
quieter than it used to be.  
In her laughter  
which started coming less often  
and leaving too soon.

She didn't recognize herself in mirrors anymore.  
She didn't feel safe in her own body.  
She couldn't remember the last time she was touched  
without tension  
without expectation  
without needing to hold someone else up in return.

The burden taught her how to anticipate everyone's needs  
except her own.

She didn't resent the ones she carried.  
She loved them.  
But she had started to disappear behind that love  
and she realized  
if she vanished, no one would notice until something stopped working.  
Until she stopped working.

That was the moment she knew  
she had to choose herself  
not in selfishness  
but in survival.

Because choosing herself meant she could still exist in ten years  
not just function.  
Not just be strong.  
But live.

Breathe.  
Laugh and mean it.

She didn't want to be thanked for her labor.  
She wanted it to stop being invisible.

She wanted someone to notice the way she always kept everything running  
even when her body screamed for stillness.  
She wanted someone to say  
You don't have to do it all.  
You are allowed to be held too.  
You deserve softness  
without needing to earn it.

So she began to rewrite the contract.  
Started resting before collapse.  
Started asking herself  
Do I want this?  
Or am I just afraid to let it fall?

She no longer performed resilience.  
She practiced boundaries.  
She reclaimed the parts of her that didn't need to be useful  
to be valuable.

The burden carved her, yes  
but from that carving  
she created art.  
She built altars to peace.  
She made space inside herself that no one else could fill.

She realized her strength was not in what she carried  
but in what she finally laid down.

And there  
on the other side of exhaustion  
she met herself again.

Not the version molded by duty  
but the one who dreamed before the world taught her to perform.

And she whispered to that self,  
You're safe now.  
We're not carrying what was never ours again.

## Chapter 9

### Futures Written in Flame

She stopped waiting for the future to be handed to her.  
She picked up the match.  
She wrote it herself.

Not in pencil  
not in ink  
but in flame.  
Because paper could be erased  
and memory could be rewritten  
but fire?  
Fire tells the truth.

The future they imagined for her was small.  
Manageable.  
Pretty around the edges.  
A life of compromise, of convenience, of keeping her mouth shut  
in exchange for safety that never really belonged to her.

But she was never going to fit inside that story.  
She was never going to make herself smaller just to be digestible.  
She was not born to be someone else's lesson in humility.  
She was born to be the reason someone else dared to live differently.

Her future didn't come with instructions.  
It came with sparks.  
Flickers of possibility  
whispers from her ancestors  
visions in dreams she couldn't always explain  
but always trusted.

She lit her path with what she knew:  
Her pain.  
Her joy.  
Her lineage.  
Her voice.

And even when the way forward looked like smoke  
even when the path was charred and unfamiliar  
she kept walking.

Not because she was certain  
but because she refused to go back.

There is a power that comes when you stop asking for direction  
and start asking better questions.

What do I want to leave behind?

Who do I want to become?

What am I willing to set fire to  
so something new can live?

She knew fire destroys.

But it also clears the land.

And she was tired of planting futures in soil full of rot.

So she burned what was no longer hers to carry.

Burned the shoulds

the shame

the outdated blueprints that asked her to disappear just to be loved.

Burned the systems that said her softness made her weak

that her passion made her unstable

that her clarity made her dangerous.

They weren't wrong about the last one.

She was dangerous.

To every cage.

To every small story.

To every lie dressed as tradition.

Her future was not a rescue.

It was a reckoning.

It didn't knock politely.

It kicked the door down

and asked her

Are you finally ready to stop surviving?

Are you ready to live like you mean it?

And she was.

Even if it meant walking through fire.

Even if it meant losing people who only knew how to love her when she was quiet.  
Even if it meant starting over with ash on her hands.

She would rather build something new  
than inherit a lie.

Because she was not just healing.  
She was blueprinting.  
She was designing what freedom could look like.  
She was imagining futures where Black girls didn't have to bleed just to be believed.  
Futures where softness wasn't punished.  
Where brilliance wasn't buried.  
Where legacy wasn't just survival  
but celebration.

She didn't wait for a savior.  
She became her own beginning.

And now, when she speaks,  
the fire listens.  
The future listens.

Because it knows  
she is not afraid to burn for what matters.

They called her too intense.  
Too fast.  
Too forward.  
But that's what happens when you stop pretending time will wait for you.  
She had spent enough years standing in lines she never agreed to.  
Enough years sitting at tables built to feed everyone but her.

She didn't want a seat anymore.  
She wanted her own house.  
Her own land.  
Her own map.  
One that didn't erase her  
or shrink her  
or call her ambitious like it was an insult.

The future she carried was inconvenient to the world.  
Because it made demands.

Because it required people to grow.  
Because it refused to be polite while people suffered in silence.

She didn't want a legacy of endurance.  
She wanted a legacy of becoming.  
Of choosing joy while the world still burned.  
Of building family where blood had failed her.  
Of daring to look forward without waiting for permission.

The stories written before her said  
stay small  
stay grateful  
stay quiet  
and maybe  
you will survive.

But survival was no longer the goal.  
She wanted wonder.  
She wanted revolution in her mornings.  
She wanted art that could break curses.  
She wanted futures that did not ask her to bleed just to enter them.

So she wrote them.  
In flame.  
So they couldn't be forgotten.  
So they couldn't be revised.  
So no one could pretend they didn't see her coming.

And she didn't write them alone.  
She wrote them in conversation  
with every woman who had ever said  
I'm tired  
but I'm still here.  
She wrote them beside every friend who had nothing left  
but still chose love.  
She wrote them with the hands of every ancestor  
who never made it out  
but gave her the fire anyway.

She was not the end of their story.  
She was the continuation.



She was the bridge between what was stolen  
and what could still be born.

And yes, she was scared.  
But she didn't let fear hold the pen.

She wrote her future anyway  
in the dark  
in the noise  
in the teeth of systems built to erase her  
and she wrote it in fire  
because fire doesn't ask  
it announces.

She no longer asked  
Can I have this?  
She declared  
This is mine.

This joy.  
This land.  
This breath.  
This future.  
Mine.

And no, she may not live to see all of it bloom.  
But when they trace the smoke back to where it started  
they'll find her.  
Torch in hand.  
Heart on fire.  
Writing a world  
that refused to forget her name.

## Chapter 10

### She Never Dropped the World

Even when they blamed her for gravity  
she held on  
and still  
she rose

She carried it all  
the silence  
the expectation  
the future no one planned for but everyone demanded

She carried it without flinching  
not because it didn't hurt  
but because she had forgotten how to ask for help  
forgotten what it felt like to be held  
without needing to earn it

They looked at her and saw strength  
they clapped for her resilience  
they called her the one who never breaks  
and she almost believed them  
until her own body started whispering  
enough

They saw grace  
but not the grit beneath it  
the bleeding she kept hidden in her smile  
the nights she curled into herself  
with nothing but breath and memory to keep her warm

She did not drop the world  
even when it trembled in her arms  
even when it begged to be set down  
even when her knees buckled under the weight

She adjusted  
she adapted

she kept going  
because somewhere deep inside her  
was a knowing older than language  
a vow she didn't remember making  
but lived by anyway

She would not be the one to let it fall

And still  
there came a day  
quiet and holy  
where she looked at the pieces she was carrying  
and asked  
what of this is actually mine  
and what have I been taught to hold because no one else would

She did not drop the world  
but she began to set it down  
slowly  
intentionally  
without apology

She unlearned urgency  
she unlearned martyrdom  
she unlearned the lie that her value lived in her labor  
that love meant carrying what broke her

She started putting her name back on her time  
started saying no like it was a door and a prayer  
started choosing rest not as reward but as right

And she kept rising

Not because she was unshakable  
but because she knew now  
that her softness was not a weakness  
that her boundaries were not cruelty  
that her life was not a burden to explain

She rose with less on her back  
but more in her chest

she rose with joy not earned but claimed  
she rose with love that asked nothing in return

They asked her how she held it for so long  
how she didn't fall apart  
how she never dropped it

And she looked them in the eye and said  
I almost did  
but I remembered who I was  
and I learned that survival is not the same as wholeness

She never dropped the world  
but she did begin to reshape it  
into something that could hold her too  
into something that didn't require her to disappear in order to matter

She never dropped the world  
but one day  
she finally asked it to meet her halfway

And somehow  
that was the beginning  
of a life she didn't have to carry alone.

## Closing Note

If you made it here  
thank you

Thank you for holding this book in your hands  
for letting the words meet you where you are  
for not turning away from the fire  
or the softness  
or the parts that felt too close to home

This was not a book made for comfort  
It was made to open something  
to name what has been left unnamed for too long  
to remind you  
that survival is not the end of the story  
and that you are allowed to want more  
even while you're still healing

Every page was written from the body  
from memory  
from fury  
from grace  
from all the places I tried to hide  
until I couldn't anymore

If these words held you  
if they burned you in the right way  
if they echoed something you didn't know had language  
then we are already in conversation

There is no perfect ending here  
only continuation  
only breath  
only the quiet, brave choice to keep living out loud

So take what you need  
leave what you don't  
and remember  
your voice has power  
your story has worth

and you were never too much for the world  
the world was simply not enough for you  
as it was

But you  
you were always enough  
and now  
you are becoming even more

Thank you for meeting me here  
exactly as you are

To the women who carried the weight of generations  
without ever being asked if they wanted to.

To the mothers, midwives, rebels, builders, dreamers—  
you held it down so we could rise up.

This book is stitched from your blueprints,  
from your blood, your brilliance, and your backbone.

— Sonia Benjoye

## About the Author

**Sonia Benjoye** writes like survival, like truth that refuses to stay quiet. Her work lives at the intersection of protest, poetry, power, and memory often shaped by what has been silenced, stolen, or set on fire.

She is the author of *What It Took*, *The Paradox Of Passion*, *Woman. Weapon. Work.*, *This Is The Season For Guts*, *God Was Never The Problem*, *Mother. Monster. Machine.*, and many more. Each of her books is a reckoning, a prayer, a mirror, a refusal. She writes for the ones who were never meant to survive and did anyway. She writes for herself. She writes for you.

Sonia's words are soaked in resistance and rooted in a deep desire to create spaces where softness is not punished, where rage is not pathologized, and where Black women can take up space without apology.

When she is not writing, she is dreaming. When she is not dreaming, she is designing new ways to exist outside the limits of what was handed to her.

She believes in voices that shake the room. She believes in silence that holds truth. She believes in language as liberation.

And she's just getting started.

## Connect With the Author

For speaking  
Publishing  
Collaborations  
Or conversations  
Reach out

Email: [benjoye21@gmail.com](mailto:benjoye21@gmail.com)

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

Instagram and Substack coming soon



