



MOTHER. MONSTER. MACHINE.

SONIA BENJOYE

Mother. Monster. Machine.

From Womb to War: A Feminist Rebirth

Sonia Benjoye

Copyright © 2025 by Sonia Benjoye

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations used in reviews, critical articles, or other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law.

This is a work of creative nonfiction. Some names, identifying characteristics, and details may have been changed to protect privacy.

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

benjoye21@gmail.com

Dedication

For every woman who was told to shrink.
For every mother who became the monster to survive.
 For every body turned battlefield.
For every scream that turned into silence.
And for the silence that learned to speak.

This is for you.

Table of Contents

1. The Making of a Girl
2. Bloodlines and Blueprints
3. Body Politics
4. The Woman Who Refused to Be Soft
5. Monster
6. Wombs as Weapons
7. Machine
8. Grief in the Gendered Body
9. I Am All Three
10. The Politics of Becoming
11. This Is a Birth Scene
12. Rage. Resurrection. Revolution.

Chapter 1

The Making of a Girl

They started calling me girl before I had the language to ask what that meant. Before I could speak, they wrapped me in pink and smiled with a kind of relief, like they already knew who I was. As if a girl is not a person but a role that has already been written. The world decided for me before I took my first breath. They decided soft. They decided obedient. They decided pretty and delicate and small. I had not yet opened my eyes but my life was already being narrowed into something they could recognize and manage.

No one tells you when it begins, this making of a girl. There's no single moment. It's slow and quiet and everywhere. It starts with how they talk to you, the way their voice changes like you're a fragile thing. It's the toys you're given, the stories you're read, the way you're told to be nice, to share, to forgive before you even know what an apology is. It's in the praise you get for being helpful and in the silence that meets your anger. It's the way your body is commented on like it doesn't belong to you. It's the way your curiosity is redirected and your boldness is treated like a problem. You start to notice what earns love and what gets punished. You start to notice that your worth is tied to how comfortable you make others feel.

You are taught early that being good means being quiet. That being liked means being small. You learn to notice what people want from you and then you give it. You learn to fold yourself without anyone having to ask. You begin to confuse being needed with being loved. You become skilled at disappearing just enough to survive.

They call it girlhood but it felt more like preparation for a life of disappearing. A life of enduring. A life of performing safety for people who have power over you. You learn to say thank you when you are uncomfortable. You learn to smile when you feel sick. You learn that your no does not carry weight unless it is gentle, unless it is soft, unless it comes with a reason that makes sense to someone else. You learn to say no in ways that still sound like yes. And when you finally stop saying anything at all, they praise you for being mature. They say you're growing up well.

But inside you know something is wrong. Even before you can name it. Even before you have the words. There is a slow-burning ache that lives just beneath the surface. A kind of tiredness that has nothing to do with sleep. It's the exhaustion of pretending. Of holding yourself together. Of never being fully seen and always being watched. You start to feel like a stranger in your own body. You hear yourself speak and don't recognize your own voice. You don't know when it started to sound like someone else's expectations instead of your truth.

There's a moment that comes for every girl who refuses to stay small. It might come quietly or it might come like fire. But it comes. It is the moment you decide you will not keep betraying yourself to belong. The moment you choose not to apologize for existing. The moment you stop asking for permission to be real. It does not come easily. The world resists

a girl who decides she wants to live on her own terms. But once the decision is made, something shifts. You begin to hear yourself again. You begin to feel the edges of your own becoming.

The girl they tried to make me into was polite, well-behaved, well-liked, and half-asleep. But the girl I actually was had questions, had rage, had hunger, had dreams that did not fit in the spaces I was given. She was loud. She was tired of being told to smile. She wanted more than safety. She wanted truth. And truth is dangerous for a girl.

The making of a girl is not just about gender. It is about control. It is about shaping someone into something that makes other people feel powerful. But there comes a time when the shaping stops working. When you start to grow in directions no one predicted. When your spine refuses to bend the way it used to. When your voice no longer waits to be invited. And then the world calls you difficult. They say you've changed. They say you used to be sweet. But they don't understand that sweet was survival. And survival is not the same as living.

I was not born to be small. I was not born to be palatable. I was not born to decorate the dreams of others while mine were buried beneath shame. I was born with a voice that remembers itself. A body that carries both wounds and wisdom. A soul that never stopped asking why.

This is the story of how I began to come back to myself. Not the girl they made. Not the one who smiled to survive. But the one who watched it all and waited. The one who always knew there was more. The one who is writing this now.

There is something violent about being told who you are before you've had the chance to ask. Before you've lived enough to feel your own edges. They gave me rules before I ever knew I had a choice. They told me what to wear, how to sit, how to walk, how to speak. They didn't just teach me manners. They taught me fear. They trained my body to flinch before the danger came. They raised me with a smile and called it love while they prepared me for a world that would take without asking. I was supposed to be grateful for this preparation. I was supposed to be proud of how well I adapted.

They measured my worth by how well I could disappear into other people's needs. By how well I could anticipate hurt and avoid it. By how little trouble I caused. By how gracefully I could carry pain. That was the currency of girlhood. Endurance. They praised me for being quiet. They praised me for being low-maintenance. They told me I was easy to love. What they meant was that I did not require anything that made them uncomfortable. I did not take up more space than they were willing to offer. I said thank you for crumbs and learned to call it a feast. I did not scream when it hurt. I made pain sound poetic.

But inside me something was building. Not bitterness. Not rebellion. Something older. Something that had no name in the language I was raised with. Something that remembered freedom. It showed up in the small moments first. In the way my shoulders tensed when someone touched me without asking. In the way I hesitated to answer questions that tried to define me. In the way I started dreaming about running, about leaving, about burning the script and writing my own. It showed up in silence. In restlessness. In shame that wasn't mine but stuck to me like second skin.

There are entire years of my life that I do not remember clearly because I was not really living. I was watching myself perform. I was adjusting constantly to make others feel safe. I was folding myself in every direction hoping someone would finally say this version is enough. I don't think I ever believed them when they did. Because deep down I knew they were not loving me. They were loving the version of me they created. The version I had become just to be allowed to stay.

There is grief in that realization. A heavy, breathless grief. When you begin to see how much of your life was shaped by fear. How much of your personality was shaped by survival. You start to wonder who you would have been without the warnings. Without the punishments. Without the stories told to keep you small. Who would I have been if no one had ever told me to be a good girl. Who would I have become if someone had looked at me and said, you are already whole.

It took years to unlearn the silence. Years to stop apologizing for my own presence. Years to believe that taking up space was not something I needed to earn. I still carry the echoes of that early training. I still sometimes hesitate before I speak. I still ask myself if I'm being too much. But I no longer treat that voice as truth. I know now that being too much only ever meant being too real for people who were invested in my performance. I know now that my fullness is not a threat. It is a return.

The making of a girl was never just about what they gave me. It was also about what they took. They took certainty. They took safety. They took the rawness of my emotions and told me they were wrong. They made me question my own instincts. They made me mistrust my own body. And then they told me I was free. But freedom without autonomy is another form of captivity. Freedom without the right to say no is not freedom at all.

I think about all the girls walking through this world right now, still being shaped into something they never chose. Still being asked to smile through discomfort. Still being asked to give more than they have. Still being told that softness is their value and sacrifice is their purpose. I want to speak to them. I want to hold their faces in my hands and tell them the truth no one told me. You are not wrong for wanting more. You are not ungrateful for needing rest. You are not broken for refusing to bend. You are not too much. You are not too loud. You are not too complicated. You are just not finished.

Because the making of a girl is not the end of the story. It is the beginning of a question. And the answer is not obedience. The answer is not quiet. The answer is not pleasing. The answer is not pain worn like a badge of honor. The answer is remembering yourself back to life. The answer is taking your name out of their mouths and putting it back in your own. The answer is becoming.

Becoming what. That is up to you now.

Chapter 2

Bloodlines and Blueprints

There are things we inherit before we understand what inheritance means. Some of them live in our faces. The curve of a cheek. The shape of a brow. The way our laughter echoes someone we have never met. But some of it goes deeper. There are blueprints inside us. Not drawn by us, not designed with our consent, but embedded all the same. Passed down through generations, sewn into the fabric of our names, our families, our silence.

I grew up thinking family was where love came from. That blood meant something unbreakable. That home was a place of safety. That the people who raised you would always want what was best for you. But it did not take long to learn that family can be a battlefield. That sometimes the people who love you are also the people who harm you. That sometimes what they call love is control. And sometimes what they call tradition is trauma.

No one tells you how much of yourself is shaped by people you didn't choose. You are born into a story already in progress. A story that tells you who you are, what you owe, what your role is. And if you are a daughter, the story is older than memory. It is full of rules no one writes down, but everyone follows. It is full of expectations passed through the body like muscle memory. You learn what your mother was taught, even if she never says it out loud. You carry what she could not heal. You wear what she could not name.

I come from women who endured. Women who stayed when they wanted to leave. Women who held families together with their bare hands. Women who put themselves last and called it duty. Women who made silence into survival. Women who never got to become who they truly were. I carry their stories, even the ones I was never told. I carry the ache they swallowed. I carry the questions they never asked. And I carry the warning that was never spoken but always felt: do not be too free. Do not be too loud. Do not leave the path. Do not shame the name.

But what they did not know is that their survival planted something in me. Not just their fear, but their fire. I am not just made of their wounds. I am also made of their resistance. I am what they never had the chance to be. I am the voice they buried to protect me. And now I must decide what I will keep and what I will break. Because inheritance is not just what you receive. It is what you refuse. It is what you unlearn. It is what you lay down because it no longer fits.

There is guilt in this process. The guilt of walking away from patterns that shaped the people you love. The guilt of questioning the things that kept them alive. The guilt of saying no to a story they needed to believe in. But love should not require your silence. Family should not demand your disappearance. Blood is not a justification for pain. And a name is not more sacred than a life.

I still love them. I still feel the pull of belonging. I still want to be held by people who knew me before I knew myself. But I no longer believe that loyalty means self-abandonment. I no longer think tradition is more valuable than truth. I no longer carry the weight of other people's decisions like they are mine to fix. I am learning that I can honor where I come from without staying bound to it.

We are not responsible for the wounds we were born into. But we are responsible for what we do with them. Do we pass them forward or do we begin to heal? Do we replicate or do we reimagine? Do we say this is just how things are, or do we ask why they were ever that way in the first place?

The blueprint is not destiny. It is only the first draft. I am not here to repeat the script. I am here to rewrite it.

There is power in looking at your own bloodline and saying no. No to the silence. No to the shame. No to the story that says a woman is only valuable when she sacrifices everything. No to the idea that love is something you have to earn by disappearing. I will not inherit submission. I will not inherit smallness. I will not pass on a legacy of broken wings.

I want to be the interruption. The one who says this ends here. The one who builds something new with her bare hands. Not because she thinks she is better. But because she knows that pain is not the only thing that can be passed down. Healing can be inherited too. Freedom can be taught. Voice can be gifted. Boundaries can be holy. And a woman can be many things, daughter, survivor, truth-teller, builder without choosing one at the cost of the others.

Blood may connect us. But I get to decide what I make sacred. I get to decide what I carry forward. I get to decide which parts of me are mine.

Sometimes the inheritance is not visible. It doesn't show up in family trees or in framed photos hanging on walls. It shows up in how quickly your stomach knots when someone raises their voice. It shows up in how your hands shake when you try to speak up at the dinner table. It shows up in the way you keep yourself small in rooms where you know you are meant to take up space. Some of the things we carry are not passed down like gifts. They pass like warnings. Like shadows. Like echoes of what no one dared to say but everyone felt.

I grew up watching women teach each other how to survive. They taught each other how to stay quiet to avoid conflict. How to keep peace by sacrificing pieces of themselves. How to smile through insult. How to hide their exhaustion and keep giving. I watched women love men who never knew how to hold them. I watched women raise children alone, holding grief in one hand and groceries in the other. I watched women fold their rage into silence and call it strength. And I believed that this was what womanhood meant. I believed that love was supposed to hurt. I believed that being chosen mattered more than being respected. I believed that suffering was holy.

No one corrected me because they had been taught the same thing. They weren't being cruel. They were repeating what they had been shown. They were surviving in the only way they knew how. But survival is not the same as living. And I refuse to inherit a life of quiet

suffering. I refuse to let tradition kill my joy. I refuse to keep burning myself to keep other people warm.

It took me years to see how deep it went. How even my most personal decisions were shaped by the architecture of someone else's pain. The way I dressed. The way I walked. The way I said yes when I wanted to say no. The way I made myself easy to love so no one would leave. The way I stayed in places that were breaking me just to feel familiar. I thought I was choosing for myself. But I was following blueprints written by fear.

I started asking myself hard questions. Whose voice is this in my head telling me to be quiet. Who told me that my worth is tied to what I can give. Who taught me that I had to earn rest. Who convinced me that my boundaries were selfish. Who made me believe that being a daughter meant being obedient and silent. The answers came slowly. And with them came grief. Because I realized that much of what I thought was mine had never been mine. I had built a life on foundations I did not lay. I had carried beliefs that were never rooted in my truth.

But there is power in seeing clearly. There is power in naming what shaped you. Once you see the blueprint, you are no longer trapped inside it. You can tear it down. You can draw your own. You can begin again.

I am beginning again.

I am learning to trust myself. To make choices not from fear but from freedom. To love without disappearing. To protect myself without guilt. To speak even when my voice shakes. To build a life that does not look like anyone else's, and to know that I am allowed to do so. I am not betraying anyone by becoming more fully myself.

When I imagine my lineage, I no longer see only pain. I see women who survived so that I could have a chance to thrive. I see women who endured so I could choose something different. I see women who gave everything they had so I would have more than they were given. I honor them by healing. I honor them by breaking patterns they were too tired to fight. I honor them by saying it ends here.

There is no shame in rewriting your life. There is no shame in choosing peace over tradition. There is no shame in walking away from what breaks you. There is no shame in choosing yourself. The shame is in pretending. The shame is in silence. The shame is in allowing the same harm to keep moving through generations simply because no one had the courage to interrupt it.

I am the interruption. I am the one who stopped and asked why. I am the one who said no more. I am the one who looked at everything I was told to be and said I will not carry this weight for one more day. I will not pass it forward. I will not build my life on top of pain just because it is familiar.

Blood makes us relatives. But choice makes us family. And I choose myself now. I choose honesty over performance. I choose freedom over fear. I choose to live a life that feels like mine.

The blueprint ends here.

Chapter 3

Body Politics

They started talking about my body before I even understood I had one. Before I knew how to name my own hands or recognize my reflection. Before I felt safe inside my own skin. The world had already claimed me. Strangers reached out to touch my hair. Adults commented on how I was growing. Girls were told we were blossoming, as if our bodies were gardens to be picked. As if growing up was something that happened for other people's enjoyment.

I was taught early that my body was not mine alone. It belonged to the culture, to religion, to men, to the eyes watching me in silence and the voices that whispered instructions I never asked for. I learned that modesty was protection and exposure was danger. I learned that my skin was either too much or not enough, and that someone else always got to decide which. I learned that if something bad happened to me, I was supposed to ask myself what I had done to invite it. I learned to blame my body before I blamed the world.

No one told me that it was possible to live in a body and also feel alienated from it. That it was possible to wake up every day inside your own skin and feel like a trespasser. That shame could live in your chest like a second heartbeat. That being seen could feel like a kind of violence. That love could come with conditions written in invisible ink and stuck to your skin like warnings.

As a girl I was not taught to know my body. I was taught to manage it. To shrink it. To make it appealing without making it powerful. I was taught to be attractive but not sexual. To be desired but not demanding. To be admired from afar but never too available. There were rules and they were always changing. If I spoke too loudly I was difficult. If I wore too little I was asking for it. If I grew too confident I was arrogant. If I gained weight I was careless. If I lost it I was trying too hard. No matter what I did, my body was always on trial. I could never win.

And yet the body carries everything. It remembers what the mind forgets. It holds the fear. It holds the ache. It holds the resilience. It carries the truth even when you try to bury it. The body is never just a body in this world. It is a statement. It is a battlefield. It is currency. It is territory. It is controlled, judged, praised, punished. And still it breathes. Still it walks. Still it rises every day carrying the weight of every expectation and every violation. Still it reaches for healing.

There was a time I treated my body like a problem to solve. Something to sculpt. Something to discipline. Something to silence. I believed that worth came from beauty and beauty came from suffering. I praised myself for hunger. I praised myself for not needing too much. I praised myself for fitting in, for being wanted, for being looked at like an object and mistaking that for love. I thought I was in control but I was following a script that was never mine.

It took pain to return to my body. Not the quiet pain of shame but the loud, undeniable pain of breaking. The pain of no longer being able to perform. The pain of being stripped of the illusion that if I was perfect I would be protected. I learned that discipline does not equal peace. That being admired is not the same as being safe. That being desired is not the same as being loved. And that loving myself was not a destination but a long and brutal process of unlearning what the world taught me to believe about my own skin.

I began asking different questions. What does it feel like to take up space. What does it feel like to rest. What does it feel like to want something and not apologize. What does it feel like to move for pleasure instead of punishment. What does it feel like to befriend your own body. What does it feel like to come home to yourself.

My body is not perfect. It was never meant to be. It is not an offering. It is not a trophy. It is not an apology. It is not a symbol. It is not a project. My body is the record of my life. Every scar. Every curve. Every stretch. Every shiver. It is the evidence that I am here. That I have survived. That I have felt joy and pain and loss and hunger and anger and longing. That I have lived.

There is nothing radical about hating yourself in a world that profits from your insecurity. What is radical is staying. What is radical is listening. What is radical is refusing to abandon your own body when the world tells you it is too much or not enough. What is radical is saying this is mine and I will no longer negotiate my existence for comfort, approval, or belonging.

I am not here to be palatable. I am not here to be perfect. I am not here to make others comfortable. I am here to be whole. I am here to belong to myself.

And my body, in all its aching glory, belongs to me.

I did not always know I was allowed to belong to myself. That this body, this skin, this shape, this weight, this walk, this voice, this scent, this rhythm of being that all of it could be mine without permission. I thought the world got to decide first. I thought approval came before peace. I thought that before I could love myself, someone else had to say I was lovable. That I needed to be chosen to matter. That my body needed to be seen and wanted by someone else to be real.

But wanting to be seen is not the same as being safe. Being looked at is not the same as being understood. Desire can be a language of violence if it is not rooted in care. I learned this the hard way. I learned it through the silences that followed when I said no. Through the excuses made for men who crossed lines I was taught not to name. Through the way pain was normalized and even romanticized if it happened in the name of femininity. I learned that my discomfort was less important than someone else's attention. That if I did not want it, I was ungrateful. That if I said something, I was dramatic. That if I kept quiet, I was strong.

But silence is not strength when it is built on fear. It is not maturity to swallow harm and pretend it was love. It is not empowerment to let your body become a story told by people who do not know you. The body remembers everything. Even what you try to erase. Even what you convince yourself never happened. The body keeps score. The body keeps watch.

The body carries what the mouth cannot say. And the longer we ignore its language, the further we drift from ourselves.

I have spent years inside a body that did not feel like home. I have dissociated. I have avoided mirrors. I have apologized for how much space I take up. I have judged my softness. I have punished my hunger. I have tried to disappear by controlling what I eat, how I move, how I dress, how I speak. I have feared aging, feared weight, feared desire, feared being seen, feared not being seen. I have chased thinness as if it were salvation. I have looked in the mirror and asked how much more I had to lose to finally be worth something.

This is not vanity. This is not insecurity. This is survival under systems that teach you from birth that your value is tied to appearance and your appearance is never enough. You are never enough. There is always something to change, to hide, to erase, to correct. You are taught to wage war on yourself and then sell yourself back your worth at a price. They tell you to love your body while feeding you a thousand reasons to hate it. They sell you empowerment dressed up as shame. They tell you you are in control while they write the rules you are punished for breaking.

I began to wonder what it would feel like to stop fighting myself. To stop measuring every inch of my body against images that do not even exist in real life. To stop editing myself in conversation. To stop holding my stomach in when I walk into a room. To stop sucking in my truth just to be digestible. What would it feel like to live in a body without performance. What would it feel like to eat when I am hungry. To rest when I am tired. To touch my skin without judgment. To walk into the world without asking it for permission.

I have touched that feeling. Not all at once. Not every day. But I have touched it. I have stood naked and not flinched. I have danced alone and not thought about how I looked. I have said no without explaining. I have let my body speak. I have heard her ask for gentleness, for softness, for slowness. And I have listened. I have felt anger move through my chest and refused to call it ugly. I have cried and not apologized. I have bled and not cursed my body for it. I have begun to understand that this body is not wrong. It is only tired of being treated like a battlefield.

This body is mine. Not because I am flawless. Not because I have reached some perfect version of self-acceptance. But because I am still here. Because I wake up every day inside this skin and try again. Because I do not owe anyone beauty. Because I do not exist to be admired. Because I am more than what I look like. Because this body is the site of every miracle and every memory. Because this body has survived every storm. Because this body has never stopped fighting for me, even when I turned against it.

We talk about loving ourselves like it is a destination. As if one day you wake up and all the lies disappear. But the truth is that love is practice. It is choosing not to punish yourself for existing. It is choosing not to measure your worth in pounds or in stares. It is choosing to stay when the mirror feels cruel. It is choosing to wear what you want and move how you please and say what you need without shrinking. It is choosing to stay inside your body when the world tries to pull you out of it.

My body is not political by choice. It is political because of what it means to live in a body that is read before it is known. It is political because I have been taught to see myself through someone else's gaze. It is political because the world made me believe I was a problem to be fixed. It is political because I choose not to be ashamed.

But I am not only a body. I am a person. I am a life. I am a story that begins in blood and breath and continues in every moment I refuse to disappear.

I will no longer negotiate the terms of my existence.

I live here.

This is my home.

And I am not leaving myself again.

The journey back to the body is not linear. Some days I still flinch at my own reflection. Some days I still forget to eat. Some days I still carry myself like I am a burden. I do not always feel safe here. But I have learned that healing is not about arriving. It is about staying. It is about choosing to return, again and again, to the place you once tried to escape. It is about learning to look at yourself with eyes that do not seek fault but presence. It is about building a relationship with the self that is not rooted in performance or punishment but in listening.

This is not a declaration of victory. This is not a story that ends with a neat resolution. This is a living process. Some days I forget that my body is sacred. Some days I remember. And in the remembering, something softens. Something loosens. Something finds breath. That is enough.

The world will keep trying to define this body for me. To name it. To shame it. To shape it. But I know better now. I know that this skin, this shape, this voice, this pain, this power — it is mine. I know that being at home in myself is a kind of rebellion. I know that tenderness is a form of resistance. I know that I do not need to be perfect to be free. I only need to be present. I only need to stay.

So I stay.

Even when it is hard.

Especially when it is hard.

Because this body is my beginning.

Because this body is not a site of war anymore.

Because this body is not a metaphor.

Because this body is not an apology.

Because this body is my own.

And I have finally come back to it.

Chapter 4

The Woman Who Refused to Be Soft

They warned me early. Be careful not to be too hard. Be careful not to intimidate. Be careful not to speak in a way that makes others uncomfortable. Be careful not to want too much. Be careful not to look too proud. Be careful not to forget you are a woman. And what they meant was be soft. Be small. Be quiet. Be agreeable. Be graceful. Be easy to love and even easier to manage. Wear your strength like perfume. Subtle. Hidden. Just enough to be interesting but never enough to disrupt anything.

But I was not born to be soft in the way they meant it. I was not born to swallow my voice to protect their egos. I was not born to hold back my hunger just to make someone else feel full. I was not born to be calm while the world burned around me. I was not born to be silent when I saw harm. I was not born to live half a life in exchange for approval. I was not born to keep others comfortable while I slowly disappeared.

They mistook softness for femininity. They built an entire narrative around the idea that a woman is beautiful only when she bends. That her power is only safe when it is hidden. That her wisdom must be dressed in humility or else it becomes arrogance. That her ambition must be disguised as gratitude or else it becomes a threat. That her strength must be laced with apology or else it becomes unloveable.

But I do not owe anyone softness at the expense of my truth. I do not owe anyone comfort at the cost of my voice. I do not owe anyone my silence just because they fear the sound of a woman who knows who she is. I do not exist to make the world more pleasant. I exist to make it more honest.

I became the woman who refused to be soft not because I wanted to prove something but because I had no other choice. I grew tired of shrinking. I grew tired of explaining. I grew tired of watching men celebrated for the same traits I was punished for. I grew tired of being palatable. I grew tired of pretending that my strength was an accident.

It was not an accident. It was built. It was earned. It was chosen. It was carved from years of surviving what I could not name. It was shaped by all the times I bit my tongue. It was sharpened by all the times I was told to smile when I wanted to scream. It was forged in the fire of being underestimated, overlooked, misread, and still standing.

I am not hard. I am clear. I am not cold. I am focused. I am not aggressive. I am unwilling to lie to make you feel better. I am not angry without reason. I am angry because there is reason. I am not impossible. I am whole. And I will not soften what is honest just because you are not ready to hear it.

They will tell you that your strength is too loud. They will tell you to calm down. They will say you are bitter. They will say you are broken. They will say you are too much. What they mean is that you are no longer easy to control. What they mean is that they can no longer

mold you into what they need. What they mean is that they are afraid of a woman who does not flinch.

There are days I still feel the pressure to soften. When I enter a room and sense the discomfort. When my truth changes the atmosphere. When someone pulls away not because I have harmed them but because I have stopped performing. There are days I am tempted to hold back. To smooth the edges. To make myself easier to receive. But then I remember the cost of that softness. I remember the weight of being loved for who I was pretending to be. I remember the pain of being praised while I was disappearing. I remember that I was never meant to be easy to swallow. I was meant to be felt.

And what if we stopped asking women to be soft. What if we asked the world to be stronger. What if we asked the world to grow up. To stretch. To listen. To hold space for the truth in all its fullness. What if we stopped calling women difficult just because they tell the truth without dressing it up. What if we called that clarity. What if we called that leadership. What if we called that power.

I am not afraid of being misunderstood anymore. I am not afraid of being alone. I am not afraid of losing people who only stayed because I kept myself small. I am not afraid of walking away from tables where I had to pay for belonging with silence. I am not afraid of what it means to be too much. Because I am no longer asking for permission to be whole.

Let them say I am too strong. Let them say I am too bold. Let them say I am too loud. Let them say I am too clear. Let them say whatever they need to say to protect the idea that women must be soft to be worthy. I do not need to be worthy in their language. I have learned to speak my own.

I became the woman who refused to be soft. And I do not regret it.

I became the woman I needed when I was a girl.

And that woman saved my life.

The softness they wanted from me was not tenderness. It was surrender. They wanted a woman who said yes before she knew what she wanted. A woman who forgave before the apology came. A woman who smiled to calm the room. A woman who offered understanding before she asked for any. A woman who waited. A woman who gave. A woman who bent and folded and adjusted until nothing of her remained except the outline of someone easy to love.

But I have grieved enough versions of myself to know that being easy is not the same as being whole. Being agreeable is not the same as being at peace. I have lived in the quiet of compliance and it almost killed my spirit. I know what it means to be praised for patience that is really silence. I know what it means to be called wise when you are really just exhausted. I know what it means to be told you are strong when all you've done is learn how to survive without asking for anything.

I was once the woman who made herself smaller in conversations. I was once the woman who edited her thoughts so the room would not shift. I was once the woman who ignored her own discomfort so no one else would have to feel theirs. I smiled through offense. I laughed at what hurt. I swallowed what I wanted. I made my needs a footnote. I called it maturity. I called it love. But it was fear. Fear of being left. Fear of being misunderstood. Fear of being too much for the people I had been taught to please.

And then one day I asked myself what would happen if I stopped performing. What would happen if I told the truth without softening it. What would happen if I let myself be seen in the full size of who I am. Not just the nurturing part. Not just the gentle part. Not just the parts that serve others. But the parts that rage. The parts that want. The parts that demand. The parts that say no. The parts that need. The parts that refuse to explain.

And slowly I started telling the truth. At first it was quiet. Then it got louder. Then it became my default language. And the world around me shifted. Some people walked away. Some called me cold. Some tried to remind me of who I used to be. But others looked at me with something close to recognition. Like they had been waiting for someone to say what they were afraid to say. Like they had been holding their breath. Like they were watching a door open and realizing they had the key too.

There is nothing more dangerous to a system built on control than a woman who is no longer performing softness for the sake of belonging. A woman who no longer believes that her power must be packaged in sweetness. A woman who refuses to earn love by abandoning herself.

I do not miss the old version of me. I do not long for the days when I was easy to digest. I do not grieve the relationships that ended when I stopped pretending. I do not regret choosing truth over peace. Because that peace was never real. That peace was a transaction. That peace required me to disappear and call it growth. That peace was suffocating.

Softness is not the problem. The problem is being told that softness is the only way a woman is allowed to exist. The problem is being punished when your tenderness is matched with strength. The problem is being expected to be nurturing even when you are bleeding. The problem is being asked to open when the world has not earned your trust. The problem is being told that your hardness is unattractive when it is the only thing that has kept you alive.

I am still capable of love. I am still capable of care. I am still capable of softness. But it is mine to give. It is no longer a requirement. It is no longer the default. It is no longer the currency I use to survive. My softness is now sacred. My softness has boundaries. My softness is no longer given to people who only know how to take.

The woman who refused to be soft is not bitter. She is awake. She is not hardened by hate. She is sharpened by truth. She has cried. She has forgiven. She has let go. But she has also remembered. She has remembered who she was before the world told her to be quiet. She has remembered what it feels like to walk without explaining. To speak without preparing to be misunderstood. To live without apology.

This woman is not asking for less pain. She is asking for more truth. She is not waiting for permission. She is not bargaining for freedom. She is not molding herself into something easier. She is here. She is whole. She is not soft in the way you want. She is soft in the way the earth is soft after a fire. Rich. Wild. Ready.

She is not afraid of being called too much anymore.

She is afraid of going back to the version of herself who called survival love.

And she will never return there again.

There are women who walk into a room and do not shrink. Who do not lead with apology. Who do not ask permission to speak. Who do not cover their clarity with nervous laughter. Who do not lower their gaze to make others feel taller. And when I was younger I did not know what to make of them. They were called difficult. They were called arrogant. They were called too much. But something in me recognized them. Even before I could name it. Something in me wanted what they had. Not their confidence. Their self-belonging.

It is not that they never hurt. It is not that they never questioned. It is that they chose not to build their lives around the fear of being misunderstood. It is that they finally understood that being palatable is not the same as being safe. It is that they understood the cost of constant softness. That it robs you of truth. That it keeps you performing long after the show is over. That it teaches you to become likable before you become honest.

I had to unlearn the praise that came from pleasing. I had to learn that love that depends on my silence is not love. I had to learn that loyalty to my truth is more sacred than loyalty to comfort. I had to teach my body that it does not need to brace itself before every word. That it does not need to soften every sharp edge to be worthy of belonging. That I do not need to be small to be held. That I do not need to be soft to be loved. That I do not need to be quiet to be right.

The woman I have become no longer explains herself to stay in the room. She no longer waters herself down to remain invited. She no longer hides her anger just to keep the peace. She no longer sees softness as survival. She sees it as a choice. Her choice. Something she offers when she wants to. Something she withholds when it is no longer safe. Something sacred, not expected.

There is still softness in me. But now it lives beside the steel. It lives beside the voice that no longer whispers. It lives beside the woman who walks into a room and does not shrink. It lives beside the woman who knows that softness means nothing if it is built on erasure.

I am not less of a woman because I stopped performing ease. I am not less of a woman because I chose boundaries over approval. I am not less of a woman because I do not bend for comfort. I am not less of a woman because I raised my voice. I am not less of a woman because I walk like I know exactly where I am going.

I am more of myself now. Not harder. Just clearer. Not colder. Just awake. Not cruel. Just unwilling to disappear.

I am not the woman they warned me not to become. I am the woman they never imagined was possible.

And I belong to no one but myself.

Chapter 5

Monster

There comes a point when they stop calling you a girl and start calling you a problem. A point when the praise turns sour. When the curiosity turns to caution. When the admiration turns to distance. You say what you mean too clearly. You take up space without apology. You do not blink when they try to correct you. And suddenly you are not a woman anymore. You are a warning.

They do not say it out loud. They shift in their seats. They flinch when you speak. They label you difficult. They call you intense. They call you angry. They tell others to be careful with you. They say you are unpredictable. They say you have changed. What they mean is that you no longer play small. What they mean is that you are no longer manageable. What they mean is that you are no longer afraid of what they think. And in their language, that makes you a monster.

At first I tried to disprove them. I tried to be softer. I tried to repackage my strength in a more acceptable tone. I tried to smile while saying hard things. I tried to seem grateful for being misunderstood. I tried to explain that I was not dangerous. That I was not a threat. That I was still safe to love.

But I grew tired of shrinking for comfort I did not even feel. I grew tired of performing peace when what I felt was rage. I grew tired of pretending to be digestible. I grew tired of making myself easy to handle while no one handled me with care.

So I stopped.

And something happened when I stopped apologizing for the sharpness. When I stopped trying to prove I was good. When I stopped trying to convince them I was harmless. I found my power in the very thing they feared. I found my truth in the place they called too much. I found my freedom in the part of me they called monstrous.

I am not a monster because I am angry. I am angry because I have spent years being told that I must be gentle in the face of harm. That I must be polite in the presence of injustice. That I must smile while being erased. That I must not react too loudly to pain. That I must be gracious while being misunderstood. That I must take it all and say thank you.

I do not owe the world that kind of peace.

I do not owe the world softness that costs me my voice.

I do not owe the world beauty that depends on my silence.

They say monster like it is a curse. But I hear it now as a turning point. The moment a woman refuses to be tamed. The moment she sees clearly that she will never be loved fully

by those who only value her when she is silent. The moment she understands that her wholeness will cost her the approval of people who were never rooting for her healing. The moment she decides that becoming fully herself is worth more than being liked.

They do not know what to do with a woman who is no longer afraid of being alone. They do not know what to do with a woman who does not ask for forgiveness just because she is powerful. They do not know what to do with a woman who keeps showing up in the fullness of her truth even after they called her unkind.

They are used to control. They are used to compliance dressed up as kindness. They are used to women who know how to smile through their erasure. They are not used to women who name what they see. Who disrupt what is accepted. Who speak without smoothing their edges. Who do not need to be loved to believe they matter.

Let them call it monstrous. Let them name it too much. Let them say it is ugly. Let them fear it. They have spent generations trying to sculpt women into something easier. Now they can learn to live in a world where we sculpt ourselves.

This is not a costume I wear for protection. This is not armor I put on when it is time to fight. This is not rage for the sake of rebellion. This is the result of becoming honest. This is what it looks like when a woman finally chooses herself. Fully. Publicly. Permanently.

I did not become a monster. I became free.

They were not afraid of my rage. They were afraid of what my rage revealed. Because when a woman stops apologizing for her anger, the room has to reckon with what made her angry in the first place. And for too long, anger has been called ugly on a woman. Loud. Unbecoming. Unfeminine. They teach us early to be ashamed of it. To swallow it. To call it something else. Sadness. Confusion. Sensitivity. But anger is not the enemy. It is not chaos. It is not destruction. It is the sound truth makes when it has been ignored for too long.

I stopped hiding mine.

I let it rise. I let it burn through the lies I had been taught. I let it sharpen my voice. I let it guide me to the root. I let it name things I had been too afraid to say out loud. And once I let it in, I realized I had been starving myself of a vital truth. That anger is not cruelty. That anger is not weakness. That anger is a sign I still care enough to want something better. That anger is the pulse of justice. That anger is sacred.

They were afraid because my anger was not wild. It was not irrational. It was not scattered. It was precise. It was clear. It was directed. It was earned. It did not need to raise its voice to be heard. It only needed to stop asking for permission.

I was taught to fear being called angry. Just like I was taught to fear being called difficult. Emotional. Hard. Intimidating. Harsh. But now I understand those words are not reflections of who I am. They are reflections of how the world responds to a woman who will not submit. They are not insults. They are confessions. They are admissions of discomfort in the

face of someone they cannot control. They are the language of systems that require obedience to function. And I am no longer fluent in obedience.

I do not need to be manageable to be worthy.

I do not need to be sweet to be safe.

I do not need to be soft to be human.

I do not need to be palatable to be real.

They can call me monster all they want. I no longer hear it as an insult. I hear it as a signal. That I have crossed the boundary of acceptability. That I have stopped waiting for approval. That I have stopped fitting into their narrow script. That I have stepped into something wild and unshaped. That I have become the woman they warned each other about. Not because I am cruel. But because I am no longer willing to live inside someone else's comfort zone.

Being called a monster is what happens when a woman decides to live without shrinking. When she makes herself the main character in her own life. When she names harm instead of absorbing it. When she sets fire to the image they built for her and chooses truth instead of perfection.

This is not about rebellion for its own sake. This is about survival. This is about clarity. This is about choosing to become what the world never planned for you to be. This is about what happens when a girl grows up learning that being sweet is safer and then one day chooses safety in selfhood instead. This is about the moment you realize that you have tried being good and it almost killed you. And now you are choosing to be whole instead.

I am not interested in being liked by people who only value my silence. I am not interested in being praised for being polite while I suffer quietly. I am not interested in being close to anyone who needs me to shrink for the relationship to survive. I am not interested in playing roles that keep me contained. I am not interested in performing womanhood in a way that makes others comfortable and myself invisible.

Call me monster if you must. I have been called worse. I have called myself worse. But not anymore. Because I see now what they mean when they say it. They mean I am not easily loved by people who only know how to love things that do not challenge them. They mean I am not quiet enough to protect their denial. They mean I am no longer playing by the rules that kept me silent. They mean I have become dangerous. And they are right.

I am dangerous to a world that thrives on small women. I am dangerous to anyone who mistook my kindness for compliance. I am dangerous to the systems that need my shame in order to keep functioning. I am dangerous to the idea that I must be saved when I am the one who did the saving. I am dangerous to the story that says my power must be earned through pain.

Let them talk.

Let them twist the narrative.

Let them call it monstrous.

The truth is, I did not become a monster.

I became free.

And freedom was never meant to look polite.

I did not wake up one day and decide to become a monster. I became one slowly, over years, through silence. Through betrayal. Through watching myself disappear in rooms I stayed in too long. Through carrying stories I never got to tell. Through praise that felt like suffocation. Through applause that only came when I was performing. Through being chosen only when I was convenient. Through being told that my voice was too much and my pain too loud and my truth too sharp to ever be lovable.

They called me a monster when I stopped letting them explain me to myself. When I stopped softening my no. When I stopped reaching back for the people who kept letting me bleed alone. When I stopped accepting crumbs and pretending it was enough. When I started asking questions no one wanted to answer. When I started telling the truth without asking for permission. When I stopped waiting to be rescued and rescued myself instead.

And yes, something changed in me. Something broke and never went back the same. But not in the way they think. Not into something evil. Not into something cruel. But into something alive. Something whole. Something that could not be quiet anymore. Something that had finally had enough of disappearing in the name of being loved.

They call it monstrous because they are not used to women who know their own power. They are not used to women who stop apologizing. They are not used to women who speak without softening. They are not used to women who are not afraid to walk away. They are not used to women who say what they mean and mean what they say. They are not used to women who know what they are worth and are willing to lose everything to protect it.

The girl I used to be was never the problem. She did the best she could with what she knew. She survived with grace in her silence. She kept the peace because she thought it was the price of love. She made herself small because the world told her it was safer. But I am not her anymore. And I do not need the safety of silence now. I do not need the approval of people who only loved the version of me that agreed to vanish.

I am no longer trying to be understood by those who are committed to misunderstanding women like me.

I am no longer trying to be soft enough for hands that never learned to hold anything sacred.

I am no longer trying to become beautiful in a language that does not know how to describe women like me without fear.

I am not a monster.

I am the mirror.

And when they look at me and flinch, it is not because I am too much.

It is because for the first time, they are seeing themselves clearly.

And I do not need to look away.

Chapter 6

Wombs as Weapons

They do not just fear our power. They fear its source. They fear what we can create. What we can carry. What we can birth. And what we can choose not to. The womb is not just a biological space. It is a spiritual one. A political one. A place where lineage begins and control tries to enter. They want it governed. They want it shamed. They want it claimed by law. By doctrine. By culture. By anything but the woman who lives inside it.

From the time I was a girl they told me my worth was rooted in what my body could give. They called it sacred but treated it like currency. They wrapped it in language about destiny and duty and divine purpose. They said womanhood was about nurturing. About sacrifice. About becoming a mother whether you chose it or not. They taught me that my womb was not mine. It belonged to the future. To the family. To the man who would marry me. To the children I had not yet met. To the generations that expected me to follow their script.

No one asked me if I wanted to carry anything. No one asked me what it felt like to be born into a body that was claimed before I could speak. No one asked me if I wanted to bleed each month in silence while being told not to talk about it. No one asked me how it felt to be raised in a world that treats fertility like obligation and barrenness like failure. No one asked me if I wanted to be more than a vessel.

I have carried many things. But not all of them were children. I have carried grief. I have carried rage. I have carried silence. I have carried stories that were not mine to hold. I have carried shame inherited from women who were never given the language to heal. I have carried the weight of expectation. The burden of being told that if I do not create life, I have wasted mine.

But I know better now.

I know that my womb is not a debt I owe to tradition. I know that I do not have to make myself a mother to prove my purpose. I know that creation is not limited to childbirth. I know that women build whole worlds with their voices, their art, their protest, their vision, their refusal to disappear. I know that I can birth transformation. I can birth movements. I can birth truth. I can birth my own freedom.

They have used the womb as a weapon. They have used it to keep us tethered to roles we never chose. They have used it to write laws about our bodies. They have used it to justify violence. They have used it to reduce us. To limit us. To define us by what we can produce and punish us when we cannot or will not.

But the womb is not a battlefield. It is not a threat. It is not a prison. It is not a metaphor unless we choose to make it one. It is not shameful. It is not fragile. It is not dangerous because it bleeds. It is dangerous because it remembers. It is dangerous because it cannot be owned. It is dangerous because it is ours.

I have felt the ache of being seen as nothing more than potential. Potential mother. Potential wife. Potential caretaker. I have felt the loneliness of knowing that people love you more for what they hope you will become than for who you already are. I have felt the pressure to prove my femininity by giving something that costs me everything. I have felt the eyes of a world that expects you to open without asking if you are ready. Without asking if you want to. Without asking if you have healed from the last time.

But I am no longer interested in proving anything. I am no longer interested in being someone else's ideal. I am no longer interested in shrinking my identity to fit inside roles that do not hold my whole self. I am no longer willing to be ashamed of my body because it does not behave the way the world wants it to. I am no longer afraid of being too loud, too clear, too certain when I say my body is mine.

Some women will choose to carry children. Some will not. Some will never be given the choice. And some will grieve that. Some will find power in motherhood. Others will find it in saying no. Some will carry their creativity in their hands, their minds, their mouths. Some will write. Some will build. Some will organize. Some will rest. Some will not survive the pressure. Some will rise from it. All of it is womanhood. All of it is holy. All of it is enough.

They can no longer use our wombs against us. They can no longer tell us that the power to give life must come at the cost of our own. They can no longer write laws over our bodies and call it protection. They can no longer name us only by what we produce. They can no longer ask us to sacrifice ourselves and call it love.

I am not afraid of what my body can do. I am not afraid of what it refuses to do. I am not afraid of choosing. I am not afraid of saying no. I am not afraid of defining motherhood on my own terms or rejecting it completely. I am not afraid of being misunderstood. I am not afraid of being alone. I am not afraid of owning what was always mine.

This is my body.

This is my voice.

This is my womb.

And no one else gets to write its story.

They have always feared what they cannot control. And the womb has never truly belonged to the woman in their eyes. It was handed over before she had language. Before she could say no. Before she even knew what it was. A transaction written into her body without her consent. Religion wrapped itself around it. Government claimed it in policy. Families bound it in duty. And by the time she begins to understand herself, she is already told she owes it away.

And not just to children. But to ideas. To cultures. To legacies. To redemption stories. To names that will not be hers. To a future she never agreed to build.

They do not teach us to ask questions. They teach us to endure. They teach us to prepare for sacrifice. To find identity in pain. To find pride in silence. They teach us to believe that bleeding quietly is noble. That carrying what we do not want is strength. That breaking ourselves open to meet someone else's expectations is womanhood. And if we resist, we are told we are ungrateful. Selfish. Cold. Lost. Or worse, unnatural.

What they really mean is that we are no longer useful.

But usefulness is not the same as value. And being used is not the same as being loved.

I have had to separate the two with my own hands. I have had to peel back layers of expectation placed on me by people who said they were protecting me. I have had to ask myself what it means to belong to myself when everything around me was built to make me give myself away.

I have known women who were never asked if they wanted to be mothers. Who were given a child and told it would fix everything. I have known women who were told that pain was a rite of passage and that refusing it made them less of a woman. I have known women who were robbed of their wombs by illness, by surgery, by violence, and then forced to mourn silently because their grief was invisible to a world that only sees worth through reproduction.

I have known women who wanted children but never got to have them. I have known women who never wanted children and were told they would regret it. I have known women who became mothers and lost themselves. I have known women who became mothers and found themselves. I have known women who are tired of being asked to explain. Tired of being asked to justify. Tired of being asked to carry more than their share. Tired of being told that their bodies are only holy if they serve others.

The womb is not sacred because it can bring life. It is sacred because it belongs to her.

Her pain is sacred. Her no is sacred. Her emptiness is sacred. Her choice is sacred. Her refusal is sacred. Her absence of desire is sacred. Her silence is sacred. Her clarity is sacred. Her yes is sacred only when it is freely given. Her story is sacred no matter how it ends.

They try to make the womb a symbol. They turn it into metaphor. Into myth. Into battlefield. Into stage. Into canvas. Into altar. Into proof. But it is not a symbol. It is a place. A real place. And it holds not just potential but memory. It holds trauma. It holds grief. It holds resilience. It holds the echoes of generations who were not allowed to say no. It holds the softness that survived. It holds the fury that was buried. It holds the dreams that were silenced before they were spoken. It holds the voices of the girls who were never asked what they wanted.

I am no longer afraid of the fullness of my story. I am no longer afraid of disappointing people who never cared to hear it in the first place. I am no longer afraid of saying that this body is mine. That this life is mine. That this space inside me belongs only to me. Not to a role. Not to an ideal. Not to a tradition. Not to a man. Not to a myth.

And if they call that selfish, I will not flinch. I will not correct them. I will not explain. Because self-possession has always been dangerous to those who benefit from your confusion. Because clarity in a woman is a threat. Because power without permission is the one thing they never prepare for.

They prepared me for pain. But they did not prepare me for choice.

They prepared me to serve. But they did not prepare me to say no.

They prepared me to give. But they did not prepare me to guard what is mine.

They prepared me for shame. But they did not prepare me for pride.

I have had to teach myself everything they were afraid I would know.

I have had to become everything they tried to keep out of reach.

And now I look at my body not as something broken or lacking or failing or empty. But as something whole. As something sovereign. As something complete with or without giving anything away.

My womb is not a weapon unless you try to take it from me.

And I do not bleed to prove I am alive.

I am alive because I finally stopped letting anyone else write the meaning of my body for me.

Chapter 7

Machine

They never said it out loud but they trained me for it early. Be efficient. Be reliable. Be productive. Be helpful. Do not complain. Do not break down. Do not stop. Do not need too much. Do not take too long. Do not ask for help unless it is absolutely necessary. Do not rest unless you have earned it. Do not feel unless you can keep working while you do. And if something hurts, learn how to hide it.

I was raised to perform like a machine. Smile while moving. Succeed while suffering. Appear strong while crumbling. Produce more than I have energy for. Give more than I have time for. Be good. Be responsible. Be useful. Be better than tired. Be better than broken. Be better than human.

They do not need to use chains when they can use expectations. They do not need to lock the door when they convince you it is selfish to leave. They do not need to silence you when they teach you to silence yourself. Work hard. Stay grateful. Ask for less. Do it all. Do it well. Do it quietly.

I have been that woman. The one who keeps showing up no matter how much she is carrying. The one who does what needs to be done. The one who picks up the pieces without being asked. The one who takes on the weight because she knows no one else will. The one who smiles while she is falling apart because she knows the world is not gentle with women who fall apart in public.

I have been the woman who earns rest by nearly dying. Who earns softness by first proving she can survive anything. Who earns love by first being indispensable. Who earns belonging by disappearing into usefulness. I have been the woman who burns out and still keeps going. Who is praised for her strength and secretly prays for a moment she can fall apart without losing everything.

This is what they forget. Machines do not cry. Machines do not get sick. Machines do not need touch. Machines do not get overwhelmed. Machines do not bleed every month. Machines do not carry trauma in their bones. Machines do not collapse in the shower and pretend they are just washing their face. Machines do not wonder if anyone would notice if they stopped performing.

But I am not a machine.

And I am no longer willing to live like one.

I am allowed to stop even when the world keeps going. I am allowed to fall apart without apologizing. I am allowed to not answer the call. I am allowed to leave the message unread. I am allowed to disappoint people who expect too much. I am allowed to say no. I am allowed

to cancel. I am allowed to sleep. I am allowed to rest before I am destroyed. I am allowed to say I am tired without explaining why.

There is nothing holy about exhaustion. There is nothing noble about depletion. There is nothing strong about suffering in silence. There is nothing impressive about pretending to be fine when you are drowning. We were not made to be machines. We were not made to be consistent at the cost of our humanity. We were not made to carry it all without breaking. We were not made to sacrifice our bodies to meet someone else's standard of worth.

I want to live in a world where women do not have to shatter to be heard. I want to live in a world where burnout is not normal. Where collapse is not expected. Where we do not have to choose between being loved and being rested. Between being useful and being well. Between being respected and being honest.

They taught me to be the strong one. The capable one. The one who has it all together. The one who makes it look easy. But I do not want to be the woman who makes it look easy anymore. I want to be the woman who tells the truth. I want to be the woman who stops when she is tired. I want to be the woman who asks for help before she reaches the edge. I want to be the woman who is brave enough to be seen in her limits.

This world is not gentle with women who stop performing. But I would rather be called lazy than live in constant burnout. I would rather be called difficult than keep giving past my capacity. I would rather be misunderstood than destroy myself to be approved. I would rather be alive and whole than efficient and invisible.

I am not a machine.

I do not run on command.

I do not belong to your schedule.

I do not exist to meet expectations that never asked how I feel.

I do not want a life that looks good and feels like death.

I want a life where I am allowed to be real.

And real is not always useful.

Real is sometimes tired. Real is sometimes unsure. Real is sometimes tender. Real is sometimes late. Real is sometimes still. Real is sometimes quiet. Real is sometimes nothing at all.

I want that kind of life.

And I no longer need permission to live it.

There were days I could not get out of bed and I still answered the phone. Days I had nothing left but I still gave a little more. Days I could feel the tension rising in my chest like a

storm and I still smiled at strangers. There were nights I cried in the shower so no one would hear me. Nights I clenched my teeth in the dark to keep from screaming. Nights I wondered if I had anything in me that wasn't already owed to someone else. And still I showed up. Still I performed. Still I gave answers. Still I made the deadlines. Still I said yes. Because that is what I thought made me good. That is what I thought made me safe.

They do not always tell you directly that your worth is tied to what you produce. Sometimes they just look at you differently when you say you are tired. Sometimes they make a joke when you say you need a break. Sometimes they withdraw their warmth the moment you stop making things easier for them. And over time you learn that love is earned through usefulness. That rest is weakness. That softness is failure. That silence is only acceptable if it makes others more comfortable.

I have been called superwoman like it was a compliment. Like it was something to be proud of. Like it was a goal. As if holding everything together while quietly falling apart is something we should celebrate. As if being needed by everyone is the same thing as being cared for. As if being able to do everything means you should. But strength is not the ability to carry it all. Strength is knowing when to put it down. Strength is being honest about what you can no longer carry.

I was not born to be a resource. I was not born to be the solution to everyone's crisis. I was not born to answer every call. I was not born to prove my value through resilience. I was not born to constantly bounce back. I was not born to be everything for everyone else while forgetting how to be anything for myself.

Rest is not a reward. It is not a prize for having survived. It is not something we earn by suffering long enough. It is a right. It is a form of resistance. It is a form of remembering that we were never meant to grind ourselves into the ground. That we were never built for endless output. That we were not designed to be on all the time. That we were not created to be functional at the cost of our aliveness.

I do not want to wake up every morning already behind. I do not want to measure my day by how much I completed. I do not want to be praised for pushing through what I should have healed. I do not want to be honored for surviving what I should have never had to endure. I do not want to be expected to recover quickly, move on quickly, perform normally, just because my grief or my burnout or my pain makes other people uncomfortable.

I want to build a life where rest is not an interruption but a rhythm. I want to build relationships that do not fall apart the moment I say I cannot do it today. I want to live in a world where women are not expected to sacrifice their health to be taken seriously. I want to stop performing strength and start practicing care. I want to stop glorifying endurance and start listening to my body when it tells me the truth.

There is nothing radical about needing sleep. There is nothing weak about needing time. There is nothing broken about feeling overwhelmed. There is nothing wrong with choosing stillness over speed. There is nothing shameful about saying I cannot do more today. There is nothing disappointing about choosing yourself when everything else tells you not to.

I have lived too many years on empty. I have kept going when my body begged me to stop. I have ignored headaches. I have ignored heartache. I have ignored the quiet voice that whispered this is not how it has to be. And for what. For the approval of people who did not care about my recovery. For praise that only came when I was in pain. For belonging that disappeared the moment I stopped being useful.

I am no longer interested in being impressive. I am interested in being alive. Fully. Softly. Honestly. Without pressure to perform. Without pressure to pretend. Without pressure to prove I am enough by burning myself to ash.

They taught me to survive. But I am teaching myself to live.

And in this new life, I no longer ask if I am doing enough.

I ask if I am still connected to myself.

I ask if I am breathing deeply.

I ask if I am feeling anything at all.

I ask if I can hear my own voice over the noise.

I ask if I can sit still without guilt.

I ask if I am willing to stop.

Because that is where freedom begins.

Not in the moment you finish everything.

But in the moment you realize you were never supposed to do it all.

There is nothing left for me in the life that told me I had to become steel just to survive. There is nothing left for me in the expectations that only love me when I am productive. There is nothing holy in exhaustion. There is nothing divine about disappearing. There is no prize for staying quiet while you fall apart. There is no crown for being everything for everyone and nothing for yourself.

Let this be the last time I apologize for needing rest.

Let this be the last time I explain my fatigue to people who will never slow down for me.

Let this be the last time I feel guilt for stepping away from a world that only knows how to take.

Let this be the last time I measure my worth by how well I kept performing while my soul was screaming to stop.

Let this be the last time I wear strength like armor when all I want is softness.

Let this be the last time I betray my own body in the name of being dependable.

I will no longer speak about survival like it is a goal.

I will no longer glorify the woman who never stops.

I will no longer aim for resilience when what I need is rest.

I will no longer wear burnout like a badge.

I will no longer carry everything just to prove I can.

I am not the machine you made me into.

I am a living thing.

I am a breathing thing.

I am not here to be efficient.

I am here to be free.

And if my freedom makes me slower

If my healing makes me softer

If my boundaries make me harder to reach

Then so be it.

Let the woman who never stopped be buried with the version of me that believed
disappearing was the cost of being loved.

I do not want to be useful anymore.

I want to be alive.

Chapter 8

Grief in the Gendered Body

Some of the grief has no name. It shows up as tension in the shoulders. As a stomach that flinches before the insult lands. As a jaw that stays clenched long after the threat is gone. As fatigue that sleep cannot touch. It lives in the curve of the back. In the space between breaths. In the way the body stays alert even in silence. It lives in the places we learned to hold still. The places we were taught to shrink. The places we were told to numb just to stay safe.

I did not know I was grieving until I stopped moving long enough to feel what had settled into me. Until I stopped explaining my pain. Until I stopped convincing myself that I was over it. Grief has always worn disguises. Sometimes it looks like tiredness. Sometimes it looks like control. Sometimes it looks like perfectionism. Sometimes it looks like forgetting. Sometimes it looks like a smile that arrives too quickly. Sometimes it looks like strength.

The grief of being born into a body they tried to name before I had language. The grief of being touched before I gave consent. The grief of being told what to wear. What to hide. What to reveal. The grief of hearing my voice ignored. Of seeing my no treated like a negotiation. Of being praised for being quiet. For being agreeable. For being small.

The grief of learning that beauty is a currency and I am expected to spend myself for the sake of acceptance. The grief of being punished when I don't. The grief of hearing stories from other women that sound too much like mine. The grief of knowing this is not unique. The grief of knowing we still call it normal.

And there is the deeper grief. The inherited kind. The kind passed down in silence. The kind no one talked about at the table. The kind buried in the bodies of the women who raised me. The kind carried in their spines. In their softness. In their survival. The grief they never had time to name. The grief they swallowed just to keep going. The grief that now lives in me, uninvited but familiar. As if the body knew long before I did that the pain was not just mine.

Grief is not weakness. Grief is not failure. Grief is not something to rush through on the way to healing. Grief is a room. A long one. A quiet one. A necessary one. I have lived in that room. I have sat in it with the lights off. I have rocked myself through the nights when I could not explain the sadness. I have wept without words. I have remembered without warning. I have apologized for my tears when no one was watching. I have grieved what I lost. I have grieved what I never had. I have grieved the girl I could not protect. I have grieved the woman I became just to survive.

This body is not a machine. It is a graveyard. It is a garden. It is a map of every memory I tried to forget. It is the evidence. It is the witness. It is the place where everything that was never spoken still lives.

And still I rise. And still I carry it. And still I wake up in this body and call it home even when it trembles. Even when it aches. Even when it remembers. Even when the grief is louder than the joy. Even when I do not feel brave. Even when I want to escape it all.

I am learning to hold the grief without needing to explain it. Without needing to rush it. Without needing to make it beautiful. I am learning to let the sorrow have space without turning it into a story. I am learning to stop apologizing for feeling what the world insists I hide.

Grief is not the enemy. Silence is. Numbness is. Denial is. Perfection is.

Grief is what honesty looks like when there is nothing left to say.

Sometimes grief feels like absence. Not the loud kind. Not the kind that tears the house apart. But the kind that moves in silently and rearranges the furniture in your chest. The kind that takes up space without speaking. The kind that follows you into a room and waits at the edge while you try to act normal. The kind that makes you forget who you were before the weight arrived.

I used to think grief only belonged to death. But now I understand it belongs to everything we lost but never buried. I have grieved the moments I silenced myself in conversations where I should have spoken. I have grieved the opportunities I gave away because I believed someone else deserved them more. I have grieved the nights I said yes when I wanted to say no. I have grieved the years I spent performing joy so the world would not question my survival. I have grieved how long I called that survival strength.

There are memories I cannot touch without trembling. Not because they are distant. But because they live so close to the surface of my skin. Because my body does not forget what my mind tries to rename. Because every time I was told to be quiet something inside me stopped growing. Because every time I was told to be grateful when I was hurting something inside me learned not to trust joy. Because every time I cried and was told I was too sensitive I stopped believing my own pain.

And I still feel it. Even now. In places I cannot always name. In the way my body hesitates before joy. In the way I expect to be interrupted when I speak. In the way I rush through softness because I do not know how to be touched without preparing for harm. In the way I hold back tears even when I am alone. In the way I smile through pain because it has become a habit not a choice.

Grief is not just sadness. It is recognition. It is the moment you realize how much of yourself you gave away just to be safe. It is the moment you stop pretending that your silence was your decision. It is the moment you admit that you never felt safe enough to be whole. It is the moment you see the price you paid to belong. And the moment you decide you will not pay it again.

This body remembers every time it was told it was too much. Every time it was told to sit still. Every time it was expected to perform softness without ever being held. This body remembers the classroom. The church. The street. The family. The lover. The friend. This

body remembers the touch that was not asked for. The stare that turned skin into threat. The moment the innocence fell apart. The moment the voice retreated. The moment the heart stopped believing it deserved gentleness.

And still this body rises. Still it wakes. Still it breathes. Still it hopes. Still it aches and dreams and longs for something softer. Still it moves through the world carrying grief like an inheritance. Like a prayer. Like a promise that this pain will not be wasted.

I do not want to carry this grief in silence anymore. I do not want to dress it up in metaphors. I do not want to call it something else just to make others comfortable. I want to name it. I want to hold it. I want to tell it I see it. I want to let it breathe. I want to stop pretending that being numb is easier than being honest.

Grief does not go away. But it changes. It becomes less sharp. Less sudden. It softens. It hums instead of screaming. It becomes part of the landscape. A shadow that no longer frightens. A voice that does not need to be silenced. It becomes something you live beside. Something you can name without flinching. Something that reminds you how much you have felt and how deeply you still can.

This is what it means to grieve in a gendered body. To know that some of your pain was not personal. That it was cultural. That it was generational. That it was systemic. That it was scripted before you were born. To know that what you feel now is not just yours. It is the ache of every woman who was told to be quiet. Every girl who was never believed. Every body that was touched without consent. Every story that was never told.

And yet this grief is mine. Even if it is shared. It lives here. In this breath. In this heartbeat. In this skin. It lives with me. But it does not own me.

Because I am more than what I mourn. I am more than what I lost. I am more than what was taken from me.

I am not broken.

I am becoming.

And even in grief

I am still growing.

Chapter 9

I Am All Three

There was a time I thought I had to pick. To choose which version of me was the real one. The girl who wanted to be loved. The fighter who learned to protect herself. The body that carried both. I thought becoming meant cutting away the pieces that were too soft or too angry or too complicated to fit inside someone else's idea of woman. I thought healing meant choosing one self and abandoning the rest.

But I am not here to be simplified. I am not here to be palatable. I am not here to be arranged into someone else's idea of whole. I have grown tired of editing my truth for people who only love the version of me that stays small.

I am not just the girl who cried herself to sleep. I am not just the woman who walks into rooms like a storm. I am not just the silence. I am not just the scream. I am not just the prayer. I am not just the protest. I am not just the soft. I am not just the steel.

I am all of it. And I am not sorry.

I am the tenderness that still believes in love even after being broken. I am the fire that refuses to burn for anyone who does not bring warmth. I am the cracked voice learning to sing again. I am the scar that no longer needs to be covered. I am the rage that has nowhere else to go. I am the calm that comes after truth is spoken. I am the one who was hurt. I am the one who healed. I am the one who still bleeds sometimes even when no one sees it.

For years I tried to erase the parts of me that made people uncomfortable. The softness that seemed weak. The strength that seemed threatening. The grief that felt too heavy. The clarity that made others squirm. The refusal to apologize. The refusal to perform. The refusal to stay silent just to keep the peace. I tried to erase the girl who was called too sensitive. The woman who was called too much. I tried to become less for the sake of being loved. But that was not love. That was fear in disguise.

Now I know better.

I know the girl who used to cry is not a liability. She is a historian. She remembers everything. She held my story when no one else would. She kept my hope alive when the world grew too heavy. She is not a weakness. She is a witness.

I know the fighter in me is not angry without reason. She rose from the places where no one showed up. She taught me boundaries. She taught me how to stay alive. She is not a threat. She is a sanctuary. She is the part of me that decided I was worth defending. I do not owe anyone an apology for her.

And I know the body is not a burden. Not a curse. Not a question mark. Not an inconvenience. Not a weapon unless you try to take it from me. This body is the place where

every version of me has lived. The child. The warrior. The artist. The lover. The woman. This body has carried it all and still has room for joy. This body has been home even when it hurt to be here. And now I choose to stay in it.

I am not here to split myself into fragments anymore. I am not here to be half-truths. I am not here to abandon one version of myself just to be understood. I am not here to explain away my contradictions. I am here to claim them. I am here to honor the whole. I am here to say yes to the chaos and the clarity and the softness and the storm.

I am the girl. I am the weapon. I am the machine that stopped running. I am the woman who broke open and found fire inside. I am the memory. I am the now. I am the choice to continue even when nothing makes sense. I am the prayer that survived the silence. I am the voice that came back louder. I am the ache that turned into purpose. I am the yes that came after every no.

I am not too much. I am not too loud. I am not too soft. I am not too late. I am not what they told me to be. I am not a fraction. I am not a function. I am not a costume. I am not a label.

I am all three. I am all of me. And I am finally staying.

They told me I could not be everything. That I had to choose. That I had to pick one version and stay there. That to be loved I had to be predictable. That to be worthy I had to be consistent. That no one could hold a woman who changed her shape depending on the room. But I have never been just one thing. Not even for a moment. I have been all three since the beginning. And it nearly destroyed me to pretend otherwise.

I have been the girl who only wanted to be seen. Who bent herself into kindness. Who swallowed her own voice just to be invited in. Who called it love when someone finally stayed, even if they never looked closely enough to notice she was fading. I was told that girl was too emotional, too tender, too dependent. But she was the first version of me that wanted truth more than protection. And I will never call that weakness again.

I have been the woman who turned silence into steel. Who turned abandonment into armor. Who learned how to stop needing before she ever got a chance to be held properly. I have been the version of myself that said nothing gets to break me. Nothing gets to touch me. Nothing gets to claim me unless I say yes. And when they called that woman difficult or angry or closed off, what they really meant was they could no longer manipulate her. What they really meant was they missed the version of me that let them in even when it hurt.

I have been the machine too. The one who produced love instead of receiving it. The one who made herself useful so she would never be discarded. The one who measured her worth in tasks completed and boundaries ignored. The one who didn't cry unless no one was around. The one who didn't rest unless collapse was near. The one who didn't ask for help because needing felt like failure. I became so good at surviving I forgot what it felt like to simply exist without performing.

For so long I believed these were different people. I thought the girl had to die for the woman to rise. I thought the softness had to be buried so the rage could protect me. I

thought the brokenness had to be hidden so I could be called strong. But I was wrong. None of them ever left. They just waited. Waited for me to be brave enough to stop pretending I could be whole by cutting myself apart.

The girl still lives in me. She shows up in the way I hope. In the way I laugh without guarding it. In the way I cry when music feels like memory. In the way I still want to be held, even when I do not ask for it. She is the one who reminds me to believe in softness. To not give up on wonder. To look for magic in the middle of mess.

The woman still burns in me. She shows up in the way I say no. In the way I do not explain my boundaries. In the way I know what I deserve and will not settle for less. In the way I defend my joy like a revolution. In the way I speak with the fire of every woman who was ever told to sit still. She is the one who reminds me to take up space. To fight when I must. To be unafraid of being too much for those who never intended to love me fully.

And the one who endured it all. The one who kept moving even while bleeding. The one who kept showing up even when abandoned. The one who kept loving even without being loved back. She is the bridge between them. She is not my shame. She is my evidence. She is the one who kept everything running when no one noticed I was unraveling. And now she rests. Not because she gave up. But because she survived enough. She did what she had to do. And now she hands the body back to me. Fully. Gently. Completely.

I am not choosing between them anymore. I am not choosing between softness and fire. I am not choosing between being held and being fierce. I am not choosing between needing and knowing. I am not choosing between the past and the present. I am not choosing between the pieces. I am collecting them. Calling them by name. Honoring what each one held when I could not hold myself.

I am the girl who wanted love more than anything. I am the woman who now knows she deserves it. I am the survivor who kept going long enough to reach this sentence. And all of them are worthy. All of them are sacred. All of them are still here.

So when I say I am all three, I do not mean it metaphorically. I mean I am finally whole. I mean I can speak and still be soft. I mean I can rest and still be powerful. I mean I can need and still be enough. I mean I can cry and still be respected. I mean I can rage and still be held. I mean I can break and still belong.

I do not need to be simple to be understood. I do not need to be silent to be safe. I do not need to be small to be seen. I am not here to perform anymore. I am here to exist. As I am. Without apology. Without reduction.

I am all three. I am still becoming. And I am not asking for permission.

Chapter 10

The Politics of Becoming

Becoming is not always a beautiful thing. Sometimes it looks like unraveling. Sometimes it looks like saying no for the first time and watching everything fall apart. Sometimes it looks like walking away from people who called your pain an exaggeration. Sometimes it looks like being alone with the version of yourself you used to silence. Becoming is not about glow. It is about grief. It is about telling the truth when the truth costs you everything.

I used to think healing was personal. That all I needed to do was fix myself. Unlearn my shame. Find my voice. Stop abandoning my needs. But I was wrong. Healing is not separate from the systems that broke me. My silence did not happen in a vacuum. My shame did not grow on its own. My exhaustion was not a personal flaw. My body did not become a battlefield without cause. I carry this pain not because I was weak but because the world is violent in ways it refuses to name.

They told me to stop being angry. To be more forgiving. To let it go. But becoming means I no longer shrink my rage just to be palatable. Becoming means I let the anger speak because anger is not the enemy. Silence is. And there is nothing dangerous about a woman who feels too much. The danger lies in the world that taught her to feel nothing just to survive.

This body is not political by choice. It is political by design. My skin was marked before I could speak. My gender was judged before I could think. My name was questioned before I understood its meaning. Everything about me has been scrutinized, categorized, punished, praised, expected, rejected. I have been taught who I should be and who I must not be. I have been punished for both.

So when I say I am becoming, I do not mean I am fixing myself. I mean I am stepping into a self that was never allowed to breathe. I mean I am building something that does not exist yet. I mean I am refusing to disappear just because it makes the room more comfortable. I mean I am rejecting every script I was handed. I mean I am choosing to speak when silence was expected. I mean I am living as an act of defiance.

There is nothing neutral about healing. Not in a world that profits from your insecurity. Not in a world that depends on your obedience. Not in a world that rewards your silence and punishes your truth. When a woman stops apologizing for who she is, the world calls it a crisis. But it is not a crisis. It is a beginning.

Becoming is about building a life outside of permission. Becoming is about softness without shame. Anger without punishment. Identity without explanation. Love without performance. Becoming is about choosing the kind of joy that does not ask for approval. The kind of power that does not dominate. The kind of peace that does not come from perfection but from presence.

This is not self-help. This is self-return. This is self-rescue. This is the slow unlearning of everything I was taught to believe about being enough. This is where I stop measuring myself by how easy I am to handle. This is where I stop trying to make myself understandable to people who never cared to listen. This is where I stop needing to be liked more than I need to be real.

I am not here to be digestible. I am not here to be manageable. I am not here to be palatable or pretty or praised. I am here to be whole. And wholeness will not always look like what the world calls success. Wholeness will not always be neat. Sometimes it will be messy. Sometimes it will be loud. Sometimes it will be inconvenient. But it will always be honest.

To become is to make room for truth.

Even when truth shakes the walls.

Even when truth disrupts the table.

Even when truth costs you love that was never love at all.

Even when truth leaves you standing alone but fully intact.

I will not be quiet just because I finally found my voice.

I will not tone it down just because the world prefers women soft and silent.

I will not shrink my power just because it makes others feel exposed.

I will not perform survival just to make oppression look graceful.

I will live loudly.

I will heal publicly.

I will choose myself and call it sacred.

Because my becoming is not a personal journey.

It is a political act.

And I am no longer asking for it to be understood.

I am asking for it to be respected.

Becoming is not a transformation. It is not a soft journey toward a more beautiful version of yourself. It is not an aesthetic. It is not a timeline. It is not a brand. It is not a hashtag.

Becoming is grief. Becoming is rebellion. Becoming is a fight with the mirror and the memory and the myths you were given. Becoming is standing in front of everything that has broken you and saying I am still here and I will not disappear just to make you comfortable.

The world has never been neutral to me. It has always had rules for my body. For my voice. For my tone. For my clothes. For my hair. For my silence. For my rage. I was told what a good girl sounds like. I was told how a proper woman behaves. I was told who to serve. Who to please. Who to obey. I was taught to measure my worth by how much of myself I could subtract. How little space I could take up. How well I could endure without complaint.

And I did. For years I did. I became small. I became sweet. I became agreeable. I became nice. I became good. I became easy to love. I became impossible to recognize.

Becoming now means unlearning all of that. It means walking away from the woman they celebrated and stepping into the one they warned me about. The one who speaks without waiting for permission. The one who leaves when she is not being loved properly. The one who cries without shame. The one who laughs too loud. The one who rests without guilt. The one who no longer folds herself to fit. The one who says no and does not explain. The one who says yes only to what makes her feel more alive.

They say personal growth is powerful but they forget to mention that it will cost you everything that was built on your silence. Your relationships may shift. Your reputation may bend. Your circles may shrink. The roles you used to play may no longer fit. But none of that is a loss. It is a return. A homecoming. A recovery of everything you were before you were shaped into something else.

There is no way to separate personal healing from political consequence. When a woman stops apologizing for her existence the ground beneath her begins to shake. Because everything in this world was built on her doubt. Her fear. Her labor. Her submission. So when she becomes, truly becomes, the systems around her will tremble. Her freedom will not be met with applause. It will be met with resistance. But that is not a reason to stop. It is proof that she is finally touching the edge of something real.

I do not want to become the best version of myself if it means returning to a system that depends on my erasure. I do not want to become more confident if it means performing productivity for a machine that never loved me. I do not want to become whole if it means being palatable to people who only liked me when I stayed broken. I want a becoming that is honest. That is disruptive. That is human. That is loud and quiet and soft and sharp. That is not something you can sell. That is not something you can brand. That is not something you can contain.

My becoming is messy. It is unfinished. It is uncomfortable. It does not look like a timeline of victories. It looks like learning to rest without guilt. Learning to speak even when my voice shakes. Learning to walk away from love that requires my disappearance. Learning to stop apologizing for the way my body feels. Learning to hold both grief and joy in the same breath. Learning to not need to be understood to still be valid.

I used to think healing was about fixing what was wrong with me. But I see now it is about remembering what was stolen. It is about seeing clearly that the shame was never mine to carry. That the silence was taught to me. That the fear was planted. That the guilt was inherited. That the disconnection was not natural but imposed. That the rules were never for my safety. They were for my control.

To become is to break allegiance with those rules. To become is to say I am allowed to exist exactly as I am and I do not owe you my suffering to prove my worth. To become is to tell the truth even when your voice shakes. To become is to stop shrinking so others can stay comfortable in their ignorance. To become is to live in a way that demands justice not just for yourself but for everyone who has ever been told their existence was too much.

This is not self-help. This is self-honor. This is not a phase. This is a refusal to return to the silence. This is not about being better. It is about being free.

I am not becoming to be impressive. I am becoming because I want to live. Because I want to breathe without waiting for permission. Because I want to love without fear. Because I want to rest without guilt. Because I want to speak without apology. Because I want to exist in a body that is no longer shaped by survival but by choice.

And that choice is mine now. Fully. Finally. Fiercely.

Chapter 11

This Is a Birth Scene

They will tell you that becoming is soft. That it is graceful. That it is linear. They will give you clean stories with polished endings. They will give you timelines. They will give you steps. They will give you language that keeps the blood out of it. The screaming. The surrender. The moments when you do not know if you will survive the process of becoming who you already are.

But I know the truth.

Becoming is not a staircase. It is a labor. A slow push through skin and fear and bone and silence. It is a tearing. It is a reckoning. It is a decision made inside the dark. Not just once but over and over. To stay. To fight. To speak. To feel. To live in a body that the world told you to leave behind.

No one talks about the moment before the rise. The moment you are on your knees. The moment you are choking on your own doubt. The moment you are facing the mirror and you cannot recognize your own eyes. The moment the old self begins to break apart and there is nothing yet to replace her. The moment when even breathing feels like betrayal because you are still here and you do not yet know why.

But this is the birth. This is the part that matters. This is the part you do not need to explain. You are not falling apart. You are shedding. You are not failing. You are clearing. You are not lost. You are in the in-between. The sacred middle. The space where all transformation begins.

I have lived here. In this middle. In this breaking. In this ache that has no name. I have screamed into pillows. I have collapsed in showers. I have walked the streets feeling like a ghost inside my own skin. I have loved people who did not see me. I have prayed for peace and found only silence. I have held my own body like a stranger. I have doubted if I would ever come back whole.

But still, something inside me pushed.

Still, something said not yet.

Still, something said you are not done.

Still, something said breathe again.

That is the part no one can take from you. The quiet fight. The invisible labor. The small voice that refuses to die. The breath that returns after heartbreak. The hope that survives disappointment. The fire that lives beneath the ashes. The self that remains even when everything else falls away.

You are being born.

And no one can rush that.

You are being born.

And no one gets to name you this time but you.

You are being born.

And it will hurt. It will be messy. It will take longer than you thought. You will grieve what you are leaving behind. Even the pain. Even the roles. Even the versions of you that helped you survive. You will grieve the old self because she kept you alive. But you will still have to let her go.

Because something bigger is coming.

Not a new version of you.

Not a better version of you.

But the truest version.

The version who no longer fits inside apology.

The version who no longer explains her ache.

The version who knows that softness is not weakness.

The version who knows that rage is sacred.

The version who returns to her body not to control it but to honor it.

The version who carries her past without shame.

The version who says this is who I am and I do not need you to understand me for me to be real.

This is the moment of arrival. But it will not look like what they promised. It will not feel like fireworks. It will feel like stillness. Like a quiet kind of knowing. Like standing barefoot in the ruins of your old life and deciding to plant seeds.

You will not be celebrated for this.

You will not be applauded.

You will not be rewarded.

But you will be free.

And freedom does not come wrapped in ribbons.

Freedom comes with dirt beneath your fingernails.

Freedom comes with your own voice shaking as you use it for the first time.

Freedom comes with the silence of walking away from anything that required your betrayal to stay.

Freedom comes with the decision to stop performing and start living.

This is what birth looks like.

It looks like breaking.

It looks like remembering.

It looks like bleeding and still choosing to move forward.

It looks like not knowing what comes next but showing up anyway.

It looks like love that begins with yourself.

It looks like being full of your own voice and not apologizing for it.

It looks like returning to your body and calling it holy.

It looks like finally being enough just as you are.

This is the birth.

And you are the one being born.

No one tells you that birth and death can feel the same. That in order to come alive, something in you must die. And it will not be graceful. It will not be tidy. You will not always know what part is leaving until it is already gone. One day you will speak, and the old silence will no longer answer back. One day you will laugh, and it will not feel like performance. One day you will reach for joy, and your hand will not shake. But in between now and that day, there will be a thousand small funerals.

You will bury the version of you who said yes when she meant no. You will bury the version of you who begged for crumbs and called it connection. You will bury the one who mistook exhaustion for strength. You will bury the one who became a shape someone else could hold while her own needs dissolved into the background. You will bury the self you wore like armor. And when it is done, when the mourning has softened, you will stand there raw, quiet, real and you will not ask for anyone's approval.

Because you will know.

You will know you have survived something that could have ended you.

You will know your becoming was not a decision made lightly.

You will know that every breath you took in the dark was a declaration that you are not finished.

You will know that no one else can define the shape of your healing.

There will be days when the world tries to pull you back into the body you outgrew. Into the silence you escaped. Into the apology you stopped offering. There will be days when you are tempted to return to what was familiar, even if it was also suffocating. But something in you will resist. Something will rise. Something will say not again. Not this time. Not after all this.

And you will listen.

You will not need a map. You will not need permission. You will not need to be understood by anyone but yourself. You will carry your story not like a scar but like a song. You will walk into rooms as yourself. Fully. Finally. Without asking who you need to be today in order to be loved.

And this too is part of the birth. Not just the rupture. Not just the scream. Not just the ache. But the arrival. The ordinary, holy arrival into your own life.

You will learn to dress for yourself.

You will learn to speak without shrinking.

You will learn that desire is not shameful.

You will learn that boundaries are not barriers to love but pathways to real connection.

You will learn that forgiveness does not mean returning to harm.

You will learn that being held and being healed are not the same thing.

You will learn that being enough is not something you earn. It is something you remember.

You will learn that birth is not about becoming someone new. It is about becoming free.

And in your freedom, you will create.

You will write poems that do not ask to be pretty.

You will tell stories that do not resolve neatly.

You will create language for the parts of you that were never named.

You will speak with the voice you were once told to kill.

You will hold space for your softness and not treat it as a liability.

You will love with a depth that refuses to shrink just to be safe.

You will become the home you spent years looking for in others.

You will walk into the world with your arms open, not to be filled, but to hold what you have already built inside.

This is not inspiration.

This is truth.

This is the deep interior labor of becoming a woman who belongs fully to herself.

This is the work no one sees but everyone feels.

This is the power that cannot be monetized.

This is the birth that comes after every breaking.

And this time, you are not being born into someone else's idea of who you should be.

This time, you are being born into yourself.

And no one can take that from you.

Chapter 12

Rage. Resurrection. Revolution.

I was never supposed to make it here.

Not intact. Not with voice. Not with fire still burning.

They tried to raise me to be small. They gave me rules and punishments. They taught me silence like it was salvation. They carved obedience into my shoulders and called it grace. They mistook my longing for weakness. My softness for surrender. My hunger for shame.

But I am still here. And I am no longer afraid to take up space.

I have buried too many versions of myself to arrive here quietly. I have walked through too much grief to pretend my joy is not radical. I have screamed into too many pillows to whisper now. I have fought too many battles alone to apologize for my anger.

This rage is not dangerous. It is necessary.

It is what rises when you have carried too much for too long. It is what shows up when you are done explaining your humanity. It is what bubbles to the surface when they tell you once again that your pain is a problem and not a prophecy.

This rage is sacred.

Because it does not destroy who you are. It destroys the lie that you were ever meant to disappear.

Let me say it plainly. Your rage is not the opposite of love. Your rage is love that has been pushed past its edge. Your rage is the voice of the self that has been silenced for too long. Your rage is a mirror. A compass. A resurrection.

Do not tame it.

Do not dress it up for public consumption.

Do not shrink it to keep the peace in rooms that were never safe for you.

Use it.

Let it sharpen your truth.

Let it clear what no longer deserves your presence.

Let it carve out space for your becoming.

Let it remind you that your body is not a battlefield. Your body is a banner. A living archive. A record of resistance. Every scar. Every stretch. Every bone. Every breath. All of it proof that you did not vanish.

You remained.

And that is resurrection.

You resurrect every time you say no and mean it.

You resurrect every time you choose rest over performance.

You resurrect every time you stop chasing approval and start choosing yourself.

You resurrect every time you enter a space and do not make yourself small.

You resurrect every time you say I deserve better and walk away.

You resurrect every time you love yourself enough to stay.

And from that resurrection, you build.

You build a revolution.

Not the kind made of slogans and speeches. The kind made of real choices. The kind made of women waking up and refusing to betray themselves another day. The kind made of gentleness that no longer asks for permission. The kind made of boundaries and bravery and breaking generational silence.

This is revolution.

When you return to your body and call it yours.

When you stop apologizing for your voice.

When you name what hurt you and do not flinch.

When you say no more and mean it with your whole life.

When you raise daughters who are not afraid to feel.

When you stop calling your survival a flaw.

When you choose yourself in a world that taught you not to.

That is the revolution.

And it starts here.

Not in the future. Not in the dream. Not in the wish for a better world. But in the decision to be fully alive in this one. To show up as yourself. Loud. Soft. Wild. Whole. And to say I am not waiting to be saved.

I am the one I was waiting for.

They told me rage was a problem. That anger was a failure. That if I wanted to be taken seriously I had to be calm. Gentle. Measured. They told me to breathe through the injustice. To pray through the pain. To smile through the silence. They told me if I wanted to survive I had to be easy to carry. I had to be soft enough to soothe everyone else while setting fire to myself.

And I believed them for a while. I became the woman they could clap for. The one who didn't make anyone uncomfortable. The one who let the world hurt her quietly. The one who made beauty out of betrayal. The one who called it strength when she swallowed her truth just to keep the peace.

But no more.

Because I am not here to be harmless.

I am not here to be neutral.

I am not here to make you feel comfortable while I disappear inside my own life.

My rage is not a flaw. It is a pulse. It is the sound of boundaries finally being built. It is the language of the body when it is done being broken. It is what rises when survival is no longer enough. It is what returns when you have carried everyone else's weight for too long and you decide to put it down. It is what says no more. It is what says I remember what you did. It is what says I deserve to be whole.

Rage is what told me to stop performing forgiveness for people who never asked to be forgiven. Rage is what told me to stop grieving people who were not grieving me. Rage is what told me that silence is not safety. Rage is what told me I am allowed to take up space. Rage is what told me I am not required to be small so that others can feel big. Rage is what told me that healing is not about returning to the person I was before the pain. It is about becoming someone who will never betray herself again.

And still I rise.

I rise not with polished language but with a voice that finally sounds like mine.

I rise not with perfection but with presence.

I rise not to be accepted but to be free.

This is resurrection.

And resurrection is not clean. Resurrection is not a soft light breaking through clouds. Resurrection is not a poem. Resurrection is a fight. Resurrection is standing in the ashes of who you were and choosing to breathe. Resurrection is remembering your name after forgetting it for too long. Resurrection is not about who comes back. It is about who refuses to leave themselves behind again.

Resurrection is every time I say this is my body and I do not need it to be more or less for anyone.

Resurrection is every time I speak without shrinking the sound of it.

Resurrection is every time I rest without guilt.

Resurrection is every time I stop asking for permission to feel what I feel.

Resurrection is every time I tell the truth and let it change me.

Resurrection is the decision to stay alive in a world that teaches women to disappear.

And from this resurrection comes something bigger than a life. It becomes a revolution.

But this is not the kind of revolution that shouts slogans it does not live. This is not the kind of revolution that mimics power by recreating control. This is not the kind of revolution that waits for the world to change before it dares to begin. This is the revolution that begins in the mirror. In the home. In the body. In the breath. In the unlearning. In the rebuilding. In the small, radical act of choosing yourself when everything around you taught you not to.

Revolution is being soft and not ashamed of it.

Revolution is being loud and not punished for it.

Revolution is walking into the room without shrinking first.

Revolution is wanting more and not apologizing.

Revolution is saying I matter even when no one claps for it.

Revolution is staying even when you want to run.

Revolution is being exactly who you are even when it makes no one proud but yourself.

I no longer want to be impressive. I want to be real.

I no longer want to be palatable. I want to be free.

I no longer want to be chosen by a world that taught me to abandon myself.

I want to choose myself and mean it.

Every day I wake up and decide to be here fully is a revolution.

Every time I stay in my body without flinching is a revolution.

Every word I write without permission is a revolution.

Every boundary I set without guilt is a revolution.

Every piece of myself I stop hiding is a revolution.

Every time I say I am worthy without needing to earn it is a revolution.

And if I burn a few things down along the way, let it be the cage they built for me.

Let it be the shame they stitched into my skin.

Let it be the apology they taught me to whisper even when I was right.

Let it be the silence they gave me and called it strength.

Let it be the lie that I had to be anything less than all of me to be loved.

This is not the end.

This is the fire I carry into everything that comes next.

This is not a goodbye.

This is the beginning of a life that will not ask for permission to be lived fully.

This is not the last word.

This is the first word spoken freely by a woman who no longer fears the sound of her own voice.

This is not closure.

This is combustion.

This is not finished.

This is free.

This Is Not the End

You will not go back to who you were
no matter how quiet the world becomes
no matter how sweet the lie of comfort sounds
no matter how tired you get from carrying your own name in full

You are not softening back into silence
you are not shrinking to be understood
you are not asking for less so they can love you more
you are not erasing what it took to become this

You are not too much
you are finally enough for yourself
and that is terrifying to those who fed on your lack

They will call it rage
but it is clarity
they will call it rebellion
but it is return
they will call it broken
but it is born

There is no apology in this voice
no shame in this breath
no reason to disappear again

You are the revolution now
not the metaphor
not the muse
not the symbol
but the whole living thing

You do not owe them your softness
you do not owe them your survival story in a way they can consume
you do not owe them proof of healing to be allowed joy

You are allowed joy now
you are allowed rest
you are allowed boundaries that do not bend
you are allowed to take up all the space your body can hold

You are allowed to be your own
even if they never clap
even if they walk away
even if they do not recognize the woman who emerged
from the one they thought they owned

This is not the end
this is what it looks like when a woman returns to herself
this is what it feels like to rise without performance
this is what it sounds like when silence is finally broken
and the voice that emerges does not flinch

So go
unfold
create without permission
grieve without apology
love without losing yourself
burn what needs to be burned
and become again

This time
you belong only to you

About the Author

Sonia Benjoye is an entrepreneur and the founder of SB CLASSIC
A fashion brand rooted in timeless style and class

With a deep belief in emotional honesty
Self-awareness
And personal growth
Sonia's creative journey extends far beyond fashion
Into the raw and personal landscapes of identity
Healing
And becoming

She writes the way she lives
With truth
With tenderness
And without performance

Her work explores the complexities of rebuilding after hard seasons
Of choosing yourself when it is not easy
And of finding strength in the parts no one sees

What began as private reflections in the midst of personal grief
Became a body of work that speaks to anyone who has ever questioned their worth
Carried invisible weight
Or fought to come home to themselves

Her first book
The Paradox of Passion
Opened the door
What It Took went even deeper
A reflection of what happens when we stop performing and start telling the truth

Now
God Was Never the Problem
Marks a bold turning point
A spiritual unearthing that dares to speak what many feel but are afraid to say

Sonia writes not to impress
But to connect
Her presence offers the kind of permission that is hard to find in a loud world

The permission to slow down
To feel
To begin again.

Acknowledgments

To every woman who sees herself in these pages.
To the ones still becoming.
To the voice that stayed with me through the writing.

Thank you.

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