



SHE
STOOD
UP
AND
WALKED

HEALING AFTER LOSING YOURSELF

Jasmine R. Batiste Griffin

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Dedication

To every mother who has ever doubted herself but kept going anyway—this is for you. To the warriors walking through dark days with tired hearts and hopeful eyes, I see you. To my children, who have unknowingly taught me strength, resilience, and unconditional love—you are my why. To the friends and family who stood quietly beside me, even when they didn't have the right words—thank you. And to the women who feel broken but still rise each day: may you find healing, purpose, and peace in these pages. This book is your mirror, your reminder—you are not alone.

– Jasmine R. Batiste Griffin

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Chapter 1: I'm Already Doing This

She used to wake up early as a teenager, long before any alarm went off. The sun wouldn't be fully out yet, but she was already making her bed, already checking the time, already running through a mental list of things to do: be good, sound smart, stay calm, look pretty, make no mistakes. That was how her mornings started back then in high school, not just on school days or workdays, but every day. Even on weekends, the pressure stayed. She didn't know how to be still. She didn't know how to just be.

Her room was always neat. Not because she loved order, but because she needed space to think. The basketball posters on the wall were straight, her sneakers lined up under the bed in pairs, and her practice jersey always folded on the chair. The notebooks stacked on her desk were color coded. Her closet had only hangers of one color. These small details made her feel like maybe she was in charge of something, at least in her space. But even inside that room, she felt like she was being watched. Not literally, just the feeling that someone was always expecting something.

She looked in the mirror that morning, not just to check her face, but to see herself. She stared long and hard. Her edges were laid, lashes naturally curled, earrings —she loved those big hoops—but they still made her feel elegant. From the outside, she looked ready, calm, polished, confident. But her eyes said something else. Her eyes said she hadn't rested in years. Her eyes said, "I don't know how much longer I can do this."

She touched her chest with her fingers and whispered to herself, "I'm fine. You're fine. You always get through it."

But this time, the words didn't stick.

She thought back to high school, sweat drying on her skin, her basketball bag at her feet, staring out the window in the back seat of her dad's car after every game. If she had good stats from the game, she would wait for the words: "I'm proud of you." If he didn't say it right away, she'd bring up something small, a rebound, an assist, just to remind him she played hard. Sometimes he would nod. Other times he would say, "You could've done better." It didn't sound harsh to her—just familiar. She believed he expected a lot because he believed in her, and somewhere along the way, she started expecting it from herself too.

That need followed her. Into college. Into friendships. Into relationships. She didn't even notice it anymore, the way she shifted her tone to match who she was with. The way she dressed a little plainer for family, a little louder for attention, a little softer for him. Whoever he was.

She thought about the first time they met. He smelled expensive. He spoke clearly, like every word he said came out practiced. She was impressed. Not just by the suit, or the way he held the door open, but by how he looked at her like she mattered. No one had looked at her like that in a long time. Maybe ever.

When he asked her to dinner, she didn't even think. She said yes quickly, too quickly. Not because she felt ready, but because someone finally wanted wine and dine her. Someone saw her.

They sat at a restaurant with white plates and folded napkins. She didn't know which fork to use. He laughed a little when she reached for the wrong one, but he didn't correct her. He said, "You're different. I like that." And she smiled. Even though she didn't know what he meant.

On the fourth date, he kissed her cheek and said, “You’re the kind of girl a man marries.” Her heart skipped. It felt like winning. Like she had passed a test.

She told her mom about him. Her mom smiled, asked if he went to church. She said yes. Her mom nodded again. That was enough.

But late that night, she sat on the floor by her bed. She held her phone and stared at the screen. She wanted to feel excited. But something small inside her asked, “Is this what you want? Or just what you think you should want?”

She didn’t answer the question. She turned off the light and got in bed. She figured the answer would come later.

When he started talking about forever, it didn’t feel like a surprise. It felt like the next box to check. “Here,” he said, handing her a Target bag with chocolates and a ring box. She didn’t hear the question though. There wasn’t one. It was more like, “We’re doing this.”

She nodded. Smiled. Said okay. But inside, something was missing.

*I didn’t realize it then, but silence was my first answer.
And silence would become my loudest mistake.*

On the day they were supposed to marry, she held her dad's arm. They took a step outside where they saw the aisle, the crowd, the officiant, and him. Her dad looked at her, eyes soft, and whispered, "Are you sure you want to do this?"

She gave a tiny smile. "I'm already doing this, Daddy."

Even now, I can still hear the tremble in my own voice.

That tremble was the truth I didn't want to face.

She stepped forward like invisible doors had opened.

She stepped in.

Her dress was beautiful. Her hair done. Her smile soft. Her legs were steady, but her heart was not. She walked slowly, hearing the music, hearing the whispers, feeling the stares. She saw him at the end, standing tall, in a suit she helped pick. He looked calm.

Inside, she felt a storm.

As they said their vows, she repeated the words with her lips, but not her full heart. The words felt like someone else wrote them.

That night, in the hotel room, she sat on the edge of the bed in silence. He was in the bathroom. She took off her pearls, then her shoes. Her feet touched the carpet. It felt cold.

She said to herself quietly, “This is it now. I’m a wife.”

But the word didn’t land right.

“What if I made a mistake? We were just arguing last night and he hung up on me.”

She shook her head.

“No. Too late. It was just an argument. Everyone saw. Everyone’s happy.”

She laid down beside him, not close, just beside. And stared at the ceiling.

The contrast to her parents’ marriage was sharp. She had grown up watching her mom and dad work through disagreements with patience and mutual respect.

Her dad would say, “Alright, let’s step outside for a minute,” and her mom would follow.

They’d come back twenty minutes later, calmer, talking things through at the kitchen table.

“Yes, they argued,” she thought, “but they never left each other stranded, physically or emotionally.”

“They separated only to cool off, then came back to talk, solve, and protect their relationship. They weren’t perfect, but they were committed. They respected each other. They loved each other in a way that made me believe marriage could last forever.”

Now, standing in her own marriage, she saw how far hers was from that example.

Early on, she couldn’t decide if the changes after moving in together were good or bad. In the so-called “honeymoon” phase, she kept hoping for a spark—something that would remind her why she agreed to this marriage at all.

One afternoon, she looked at him and asked, “Do you ever think about why we’re doing this?”

He smirked and said, “Because I said we would. And we are, you’re my wife now.”

She half-laughed, half-frowned. “You didn’t even ask me... you just told me.”

“Same thing,” he said, not looking up from his phone. “And you’re happy, right?” The words weren’t a question. They

were instructions, a reminder of what she was supposed to feel.

And so, off to Vegas she went.

Vegas had been a dream of hers for years. The lights, the hotels, the way the city never stopped moving—she had pictured it all since she was a teenager.

But the excitement faded fast.

On the second night, she whispered, “I just want to go home.”

He looked confused. “We are home. Anywhere we are together is home.”

She shook her head. “No. I mean my parents’ house.”

She smiled in pictures for social media, but inside she felt hollow. One night, after another argument, he walked off, leaving her standing on the strip surrounded by strangers.

She pulled out her phone and called her best friend. “He just... left me here.”

Her friend’s voice was sharp. “On your honeymoon?”

“Yeah. I don’t even know what I’m doing anymore,” she said, tears slipping down her face.

I wish I had believed myself the first time I said those words out loud.

They even talked about ending the marriage once they returned ‘home’.

“I’ll call my lawyer friend,” he told her.

“Maybe we just... try for a couple more months,” she said, though her voice was small.

From that moment, she realized how much of herself she’d have to hide to keep the peace—not just with him, but for the eyes of friends, family, the church, and even strangers.

A few weeks later, someone at church pulled her aside. “You look like a bride. You look so happy.”

She smiled and said, “Thank you.”

Several nights she would sit in her car in the parking lot for forty-five minutes before going inside. Her hands on the steering wheel, music low. She whispered, “What did I get myself into?”

The silence always answered her.

She went inside anyway.

She made dinner.

She washed dishes.

She folded towels.

She kissed him goodnight.

But that small voice inside her, the one she ignored so many times, started getting louder.

She brushed her teeth one morning, looked in the mirror again, and saw the same face.

But now the tired didn't just sit in her eyes, it sat in her bones.

She whispered, "I miss me."

That morning, she put on leggings and a hoodie, no makeup. She ran to the park near her apartment, the wind brushing her face and her shoes hitting the pavement in a rhythm that helped quiet her thoughts.

Birds flew past. A mom ran by with her toddler. A couple held hands across from her.

She took out her phone and opened Notes.

Typed:

“I feel like I’m living a story someone else wrote.”

She stared at it for a long time.

Then added:

“I don’t even know what chapter I’m on.”

She saved it. Closed her phone.

Looked up at the sky and said, “God, if I’m doing this wrong... please stop me.”

But nothing stopped.

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.” Philippians 4:6 NLT

She ran back home.

Her steps were slow leading up to the door. The kind you take when you want to turn back but you know you won't. Her hoodie sleeves were stretched past her palms, and she kept tugging at the ends, almost like she was trying to shrink herself into something smaller. She passed a woman pushing a stroller and smiled politely, even though her face didn't feel like smiling anymore.

By the time she got home, the apartment was quiet. He wasn't there. She dropped her keys on the counter and sat on the couch without opening the blinds. Her phone buzzed. A message from her best friend: "*Girl, married life treating you right?*"

She stared at it.

Typed: "Yeah, it's good."

Deleted it.

Typed: "*I'm surviving.*"

Deleted that too.

Finally just sent a red heart emoji. It was safe. It said something without saying anything.

She threw the phone face down and laid on her back, staring at the ceiling fan going in lazy circles. That fan had more direction than she did. Her eyes drifted to the framed wedding photo on the bookshelf. Her in white. Him in black. Both of them smiling like they knew something about forever.

She whispered to the ceiling, “You know we looked happy. I think we even believed it that day.”

But now, most of her days felt like a dress rehearsal. Get up. Smile. Perform. Repeat.

She didn’t remember when it started to feel like a job, but somehow she was always clocked in. Even when she was alone.

She walked into the bathroom and flipped on the light. The mirror greeted her, as always, with a version of herself that felt unfamiliar. She leaned in close, looked at her own face like she was studying a stranger.

“You good?” she asked her reflection.

No answer.

She nodded anyway, like that counted.

Back in the kitchen, she made tea. Not because she wanted it, but because it felt like the kind of thing people do when they're figuring stuff out. She stood by the window, blowing gently on the steam. Across the way, a couple sat on their balcony sharing a bowl of popcorn and laughing at something on a screen.

She looked away.

Her tea sat on the counter getting cold while she scrolled on her phone, pretending to care about things that didn't matter. Pictures of babies. Travel reels. A woman announcing her pregnancy. Another one showing off her new house. Someone posting their three-year anniversary and calling their partner "my peace."

She turned her phone off.

"Why does it feel like everyone else has it figured out and I'm just pretending?" she muttered.

She used to be proud of herself. Back when she was focused on school. Back when she made the Dean's List and no one clapped for her but she clapped anyway. Now she couldn't remember the last time she did something just for herself.

Marriage had become a performance. She was the lead actress, director, and stagehand, but nobody clapped at the end.

The next morning, she sat at the breakfast table while he talked about work. She nodded and “mhmm’d” in all the right spots, but her mind was still in the wind from the previous run.

He asked, “You listening?”

She blinked. “Yeah, yeah. Just thinking.”

“Thinking about what?”

She shrugged. “Nothing really.”

He accepted the answer and went back to his coffee.

She wished he’d ask again. Press just a little. Not to nag her, but to show her he could see she wasn’t okay.

But he didn’t.

He left.

And she sat there, alone with her half-eaten toast and thoughts that never stopped spinning.

By the time afternoon rolled around, she decided to clean out the closet. It wasn't dirty, but she needed to do something that felt like progress. She pulled out shoes she hadn't worn in months, dresses with tags still on them, and boxes of stuff she had forgotten about.

In one of them, she found a notebook from college. The cover was bent and faded. She opened it.

First page: "*Goals: Graduate. Travel. Love myself. Speak up more. Laugh often. Never lose me.*"

She laughed out loud. Not because it was funny, but because she had forgotten she ever wrote that.

She sat on the floor and flipped through the pages. It was like reading someone else's diary. This girl, this younger version of her, had fire. She wasn't scared of saying what she wanted. She dreamed out loud and believed she deserved joy.

Now? She couldn't even order what she wanted at a restaurant without second guessing it.

She whispered, "Where did you go?"

She closed the notebook and held it to her chest for a while.

When she got up, she didn't put the notebook back in the box. She left it on the dresser, right next to her perfume. She wanted to see it every day.

Over the years, there were dinners with friends where she showed up in new dresses, smiled when he complimented her in front of everyone, and said thanks like it was all fine.

Their friends asked questions like, "So how's married life?" and "When are y'all having kids?"

She laughed. She answered politely. She said what she was supposed to.

But in the car ride home, she stared out the window in silence.

He asked, "Everything okay?"

She nodded. "Just tired." Especially because having kids was a huge obstacle for them and she was on many hormonal pills because they made her believe that she was the problem.

He turned up the radio.

She rested her head on the window and whispered to herself, "I'm always tired."

At home, she peeled off the dress and tossed it onto the chair. She stood in the mirror wearing just a tank top and shorts. She looked softer now. Less put together. More honest.

She ran her hand down her own arm and said, “We used to be happy, right?”

No one answered.

She climbed into bed and faced the wall. He was already asleep.

She stared into the dark and let one tear roll down her cheek.

That was the only thing that felt real that day.

And yet, she knew tomorrow she would do it all again.

Because when people think you’re happy, it feels harder to admit you’re not.

And when you’ve said yes to something that looks good from the outside, you start to believe you can’t back out without looking ungrateful. Or “because it would be ungodly”.

But every day, her soul kept asking, “Are you living or just not quitting?”

She sat up suddenly. Reached for the notebook again.
Opened it to the next blank page.

She wrote:

“I’m disappearing, and no one sees it. Not even me some days. But I want to find me again. And I will. Slowly, loudly, quietly, angrily, bravely. I will.”

She underlined the last two words.

Closed the notebook.

Exhaled.

And for the first time in years, she felt something shift. It was small, but it was there.

A part of her, the part that had been quiet for too long, finally spoke.

And this time, she promised she’d listen.

Chapter 2: The Performance

The next morning, she stood in front of her closet trying to pick an outfit. Not because she cared about the clothes, but because she was supposed to look like someone who had it all together. It wasn't something he ever directly told her — it was an unspoken, understood expectation. She was meant to be a trophy, and he had even called her that before. Her fingers slid over hangers, pausing on a dress he said he liked once. She didn't feel like wearing it, but she put it on anyway.

Her hair was already done. Straight and flat, the way he preferred. She added a soft lip gloss, sprayed a little perfume behind her ears, and checked herself in the mirror. She didn't recognize the woman staring back, but she smiled at her anyway. A practiced smile. Not too big, not too small. Just enough.

They were going to a dinner party. Church people. His coworkers. The kind who say things like "y'all are so perfect together" and mean it. People always talked about how great she looked with him and would say she looked so happy with him. And the best one — "he's so funny and entertaining, how do you do it?" Her answer was always, always,

ALWAYS, “he doesn’t act like this at home.” She quickly realized no one was really hearing her. They were laughing, but they weren’t listening. The jokes they loved were just a mask over her reality. Once again, she was trapped between appearances and truth.

The house they entered smelled like cinnamon and candles. Music played quietly in the background, and someone hugged her as soon as they walked in. She smiled. Laughed. Gave compliments. Said all the right things. She knew the script by now.

Someone handed her a glass of sparkling cider. She held it with both hands like it gave her balance. He stood across the room telling a story. Everyone was laughing. Someone clapped. He pointed at her and said, “My wife, y’all. She keeps me in line.”

They all turned to look at her. She smiled and shook her head like, *what am I going to do with him?* But inside, she rolled her eyes so hard she could feel it in her bones.

Looking back, I realize they weren’t laughing with me at all — they were laughing with the version of me I had created to keep the peace.

He wasn't funny. Not to her. Not anymore.

But laughing was easier than explaining. Smiling was safer than honesty. They didn't know. They didn't know that the night before, she had been crying hysterically at 3 a.m., like she had been for weeks. They didn't know her heart felt like crumbles of burnt toast most days. They didn't think he would masturbate with his phone in one hand, in the same bed while she lay next to him sleeping, and that when she confronted him, he denied it, even though she saw it, heard it, and felt it.

They didn't know she felt like she was never enough — not for him, not for anyone. They didn't know she hated it when he talked about her body in front of others, but he barely touched her at home. They didn't realize that intimacy was often one-sided. They didn't know she was losing her social life because she was made to feel guilty for leaving the house. They didn't think she worked three jobs just to avoid going home. They didn't know that even the version of him they saw wasn't entirely real.

On the way home, he asked, "You were quiet tonight."

She shrugged. "I'm just tired."

He nodded and turned up the music.

Back at the apartment, she went straight to the bathroom and locked the door. She sat on the edge of the tub and took off her heels. Her toes hurt. Her heart hurt more. What she didn't realize at the time was that she had been assuming everyone else should somehow know what was happening behind closed doors. But they weren't going home with her so because of that, she couldn't blame them. She was afraid to reach out for help in those moments, embarrassed because she didn't understand how she had ended up here, and why she was still here.

She looked at her reflection in the small mirror above the sink. Her lip gloss had faded. Her eyes looked tired again. She ran water from the tap and splashed her face. Not because she was hot, but because she needed to feel something.

She whispered, "Why does everyone think I'm happy?"

Because I taught them to. That is what hurt the most.

She didn't expect an answer. But it still stung to say it.

In bed, she laid on her side facing the wall. He climbed in behind her and turned out the light. She could hear him breathing deeply within minutes. Sleep came fast for him.

She stared into the dark. Blinking slow. Waiting for her brain to shut off. It didn't.

By 3am, she was in the kitchen drinking water straight from the jug. She didn't care. It was her only quiet moment of the day.

Her phone buzzed with a notification. A post from someone she followed. A selfie with the caption: "*Woke up next to my best friend again. Grateful.*"

She sighed. Whispered, "Good for you." Then she laughed. A short, dry sound. That's all she could offer tonight.

She opened the fridge, stared at the light, closed it again.

Back in bed, she laid flat on her back and stared at the ceiling. Her thoughts ran wild. She tried to name them. Sad. Angry. Confused. Numb. Numb won.

By morning, her alarm buzzed like nothing had happened. Like she hadn't just spent half the night wondering how she got here. She got dressed, made toast, and handed him a cup of coffee and his breakfast sandwich. He kissed her cheek and said, "You're the best."

She smiled. But she didn't feel anything. Not even the warmth from the coffee mug. She was so lost and so hurt that she could no longer identify who she was anymore. At this point, she felt like a master at being fake. He no longer looked at her with love or paid attention to her. Deep down, she believed he was sorry for the pain he caused her early on, but he never apologized, never understood the damage, and simply brushed it off. She felt like nothing.

He would laugh when she cried, when all she needed was to be held. He once told her to schedule cuddling time, and when she did, he would have her for five minutes and then say, "Okay, done." He was uncomfortable with being comfortable, and she realized she was too, after learning this about him. She felt so small, so unseen. Was it because she always put on this fake smile?

Later that year, they went to another event. More people. More compliments. Someone hugged her too long and said, "You're glowing." She forced a laugh. "I'm just happy."

She heard herself say it and wanted to scream.

That night, she wrote in her notebook. Not a lot. Just one sentence: "*They love the version of me that doesn't exist.*"

Beyond a name (written in 2014)

Do you really know my name

Nobody really knows

What's behind it, underneath

Do you wish to know

I thought there was more to me

Than just arguing, sexing and loving

For thirty here

And there

I just thought there was more to me

Just one thing I want

Is for you to know

What's behind my name

Just one thing

That's underneath

Beyond what the eye can see

Smile on my face

But what really underlies

Hurt, pain, sadness, grief

Those are the feelings you can't see

Hidden behind the happiness

That only you believe

Too good to see what is behind

My brown eyes

I can't get you to see

Or say what I want to hear

What should be simple, ain't

I continue to hurt behind my smile

Just one thing I want

Is for you to know

What's behind my name

Just one thing

That's underneath

Beyond what the eye can see

Things are always looking up

A compliment for me

*Beyond my "attractive curves" and "fascinating
body"*

Just a gentle word

Some company

To touch me

Beyond what the eye can see.

The next day, she went grocery shopping alone. She walked through the aisles with a list. Tossed in things she knew he wanted her to buy. Most of the time there was nothing for her. She stopped in front of the ice cream and stared for five full minutes. She used to love mint chocolate chip.

She picked it up. Held it in her hands. Put it back. Walked away.

She didn't even know why. Maybe because it felt selfish. Maybe because he once said it tasted like toothpaste.

It seems so small now, but that was another way I abandoned myself. I kept putting back the things that brought me joy.

Weeks later, they had friends over. He made drinks, told jokes, and kept everyone laughing. She laughed too, not because it was funny, but because it was easier than looking uncomfortable.

She smiled for the camera. Danced like she cared. When it was over, she walked to the bathroom and locked the door again. He had told her before, "stop locking the door and keep it cracked." But she needed space. She needed silence.

She sat on the closed toilet seat and let her head fall into her hands. Her breathing was quick. Her stomach tight.

She whispered, “This can't be life.”

She didn't know who she was anymore. Not off-camera. Not when the lights were off. Not when the doors were closed.

The applause from others had become a trap. A trap she clapped for too, because saying anything else would mean starting over. And she didn't know if she had the strength for that.

Later, she sat on the edge of the bed again while he scrolled on his phone. He laughed at something and tried to show her. She looked. Nodded. Laughed quietly.

With tears in her eyes, she asked, “Do you think I'm happy?”

He looked confused and chuckled. “What do you mean?”

“Like, do I seem happy to you?”

He paused. “I mean... yeah. Are you crying? He laughed. Why are you crying?”

“No reason. Just wondering.”

She got up, grabbed her lotion from the counter, and walked into the bathroom without another word.

With tears in her eyes and sometimes just wanting to disappear, she stared at her reflection again. It was becoming a routine now. She stared and waited for something to click.

She tilted her head a little and moved closer to the mirror. Her skin looked the same. Her eyes looked dull. Not tired, just quiet. She rubbed lotion into her arms without really thinking. The smell used to comfort her, now it barely registered. She paused mid-rub and whispered, “You still in there?” but her voice barely reached her own ears.

She used to take pictures of herself just to see if her smile looked real. Now, she didn’t even open the camera. Her selfies had stopped months ago. Every photo looked like someone playing a part. Someone who was showing up to things but wasn’t *in* them.

He called from the bedroom, asking if she turned off the hallway light. She said she didn’t know.

When she came out, he was already under the covers, facing the wall. She climbed in next to him and laid flat on her back. The space between them was wide. It always was now.

She stared at the ceiling and counted her breaths. Slow inhale. Slow exhale. Again. Again.

She decided that night she wasn't going to cry anymore, even though there were still moments when she found herself curled up on the floor in her closet, tears spilling despite her promise. That part of her still felt frozen, like her tears had grown tired of showing up when no one noticed.

Most mornings, she got up before him. She sat at the kitchen table in an old hoodie and slippers, hair in a bonnet, face bare. Her notebook sat in front of her but stayed closed. The pen rested on top. She held her mug with both hands, staring at the steam but not drinking.

She thought about her voice. Not the sound, but the feeling. When was the last time she said something she didn't double-check in her head first? When was the last time she spoke without trying to make it easier for someone else to hear?

She opened the notebook and wrote: "*I don't say what I need. Not because I'm scared to speak. I just don't think it would matter if I did.*"

Then she closed it again.

One afternoon on her way home from work, she called her mom but hung up before it rang. She didn't feel like pretending to be okay. She didn't feel like explaining what she couldn't fully explain. It was easier to just not talk.

She scrolled through her messages and saw all the check-ins she never replied to. *"How are you?"* *"Miss you!"* *"You've been quiet."*

She read them like old letters from another life.

He came home most evenings and asked what was for dinner. One particular evening, she had made pasta and garlic bread. She said it was on the stove. He kissed her on the forehead, said "You're the best," then sat on the couch with his phone.

She served him. Sat across from him. Ate in silence. This was normal.

He talked about work. He laughed at something he saw online and showed her the screen. She smiled without seeing it.

He didn't notice.

After dinner, she cleaned the kitchen alone. He went to watch a football game. She didn't mind. She preferred the quiet now. At least the dishes didn't expect anything from her.

While washing the last glass, she said out loud, "I don't even think he sees me anymore."

She turned off the faucet and stood there, water dripping from her hands. She didn't dry them right away. She just stood still.

When she walked back into the bedroom later, he was already asleep. Again.

She got into bed slowly. As if she might wake him just by breathing too loud.

She turned her back to him and pulled the blanket up to her chin.

"I feel like a ghost," she whispered into the dark. "I live here. I walk around. I even talk sometimes. But it's like I don't exist. And what I have to say does not matter."

The next morning, she made a list in her phone while brushing her teeth. Not a to-do list. A list of things she missed.

Laughing until my stomach hurt

Late-night talks

Being touched with love

Feeling safe

Being seen

Being heard

Being known

Being me

She stared at the last line for a while. Then added one more.

Feeling real

At work, her coworker asked if she was okay. Said she seemed “off” this week.

She smiled. “Just tired.”

“Yeah, same,” the coworker said, then moved on.

Another chance to say something. Another moment passed.

During lunch break, she sat in her car with the windows up. She turned the music off. Closed her eyes.

Her silence had become her armor. If no one heard her, then no one could ignore her either.

She used to be louder. She remembered being that girl. She spoke up in class. She danced without caring. She wore layers of lipgloss and her lips were never dry.

Now she double-checked everything. Even her breathing felt careful.

Back at home, she scrolled through her camera roll. The photos were full of smiles and events and posed moments. But she couldn't remember how she felt in any of them.

She clicked on one from a sorority event they went to last fall. She wore a black dress with a high split. People said she looked stunning. She remembered the compliments. She missed her sorority sisters.

She didn't remember what they talked about that night.

She didn't remember if he held her hand.

She didn't remember laughing. She did remember how he was worried about how he looked standing next to her in the picture. He didn't smile in pictures. It was always hard to tell if he wanted to be standing next to her. Sometimes it felt like they went to events together only for him to monitor and restrict her—like she couldn't dance a certain way, she couldn't laugh too hard with other people, her smile needed

to be simple, not too happy. Not unless he was in control of that moment.

She closed the app and tossed her phone onto the couch.

Then she said out loud, “Maybe love isn’t supposed to feel like work every day.”

She paused. Then answered herself, “Or maybe it’s not supposed to feel like nothing.”

She walked into the kitchen, grabbed her journal, and opened to a blank page.

She started to write, but stopped. Her hand hovered over the page.

Instead, she scribbled. Just messy lines and loops, until the page looked like chaos.

She stared at it. The page looked like how she felt inside.

Then flipped to a clean one.

She wrote, *“I’ve made myself so small to fit into this space, I forgot I wasn’t born small.”*

She underlined it.

She looked up and saw herself in the microwave reflection.

She walked over to the mirror again.

“I see you,” she said softly.

“I’m still here,” she whispered.

Then her eyes drifted to her reflection in the microwave.

Without realizing it, she noticed the word “happy” stretched across her shirt—it read “because I’m happy.” The irony hit her, and she let out a small laugh. She lifted her phone, snapped a selfie with no smile, just a blank face and the trace of a frown. She posted it anyway. It was her silent message to the world that she wasn’t happy at all. People reacted with likes and comments telling her to smile, but she knew this one was real.

And for a moment, that was enough.

Chapter 3: Who Is She?

She sat on the small couch in the counselor's office. The room smelled like lavender and cleaning spray. The couch cushion made a soft noise every time she shifted. A box of tissues sat on the side table like it already knew. She glanced at the clock and then at the woman sitting across from her. The counselor had soft eyes and a notebook she hadn't opened yet.

"So," the counselor said gently, "tell me about you. Who are you?"

Her mouth opened, but no words came out. She blinked. Thought. Waited. She tried to grab something from her mind. A label. A job title. A role. Anything. But nothing came. She looked down at her hands.

"I don't know," she said after a few seconds.

That was the first time I admitted it out loud – and the scariest part was that I was not lying.

The words felt strange in her mouth. She had never said that out loud. Not even to herself. She always had answers. Not deep ones, maybe, but quick ones. I'm a wife. I'm a hard

worker and basketball coach. I'm organized. I'm busy. But today, those answers didn't show up. Only silence.

The counselor nodded like she understood. She wrote something down. That part always made her nervous. She never knew what got written on those yellow pads.

When the session ended, she walked back to her car slowly. She sat behind the wheel, hands on her lap. She looked in the mirror but didn't start the engine. Her reflection stared back, eyes tired, lips pressed. She whispered, "Who are you?"

No one answered.

She drove home with the music off. The silence stayed with her the whole way.

At home, she dropped her keys in the bowl by the door. The lights were off. The apartment was still. She kicked off her shoes, then stood in the living room without moving. Her arms hung by her sides. Her chest felt heavy.

She sat on the floor, right there in the middle of the room, her dog walked over and joined. The carpet was warm from sunlight. She didn't cry. She just sat. Still. Quiet.

Later, she took a shower. The water hit her skin and rolled down her back. She stood under it too long. Her fingers wrinkled. Still, she stayed. The steam filled the air around her, and she rested her forehead against the wall.

“I don’t know who I am,” she whispered again. “I think I’ve been pretending so long I forgot.”

She turned off the water. Wrapped herself in a towel. She didn’t dry off right away. Just stood there. Damp. Bare. Real.

She went to the bedroom. He wasn’t home. She sat at the edge of the bed and opened her notebook. Her pen hovered. She finally wrote:

“I’m tired of being an actor for a role I didn’t sign up for. I’m tired of pretending to be okay.”

She stared at the sentence. Then wrote again.

“I don’t even know who I am outside of this role. I’m not even sure I know what okay is supposed to feel like.”

The next day, she called off work. She said she was sick. She wasn’t. Not in the way they meant. She needed space. She needed quiet.

She stayed in pajamas all day. She didn't clean. She didn't cook. She didn't answer messages.

She sat on the balcony and looked at the sky. A bird flew by. It didn't matter what kind. She didn't care. She just watched it move.

She thought about love. What she thought it would be. What it turned out to be. She thought about the kind of love that listened. That asked questions. That noticed small things. She had never felt that. Not really.

Love-A Powerful Emotion (written in 2015)

The most powerful emotion

It's more than a simple devotion

It controls our minds and thoughts

And blinds us as we get caught

In the middle

Trying to move on

But it keeps pulling you back

Like a drug, You need your fix, feeling all snug

But the reminders

Come creeping back on you

Like a change in temperature

From hot to cold

Your soul isn't sold

On your minds decision and your hearts intention

The emotion that has caused so much tension

Taking your heart to another dimension

The attention that you need

Can not be found in this love

The affection that you want

Does not exist in this love

This love is an emotion

That you feel

But this love is dark and can not be real

Your heart is heavy

This love isn't steady

It's rocky and you thought you were ready.

There is no balance

You have let it control

Manipulate,

And take advantage of you.

Your beauty deserves a better love

Will you meet this love?

Like a dove, it comes

At your darkest hour

Brings soft rays of sunlight

Into your night

It shines...

The power

That power, that you feel from him,

That is not love.

He loved her the way he knew how. Maybe. But it wasn't enough. It didn't see her. It didn't reach her. It left her feeling like she was always too much or not enough. Sometimes both at once.

She needed more. Not things. He was obsessed with things like shoes and cars. Treated them better than her. She did not want big gestures. Just presence. Kindness. Safety. Someone who stayed curious. Curious about her. Someone who saw her, even when she wasn't smiling.

She stood up and walked inside. Made toast. Buttered it slowly. Ate it at the kitchen table, one bite at a time.

Her phone buzzed. A message from someone she used to talk to. Not a friend, not really. But someone who once listened without asking for anything in return.

“Hey. Just thinking about you. You good?”

She stared at the message. Typed, “*Yeah.*” Then deleted it.

She thought about it. Thought about honesty. Thought about safety.

She typed again. “*Not really. But thanks for asking.*”

She hit send.

He replied almost right away. “*Wanna talk? I’ll just listen.*”

She felt her eyes sting. She wanted to cry. But not today. It was the fact that someone offered, just offered, made her pause.

They talked later. Nothing deep at first. Just small things. The weather. Music. Jokes. But he listened. Really listened.

It wasn’t him I craved – it was the way being seen felt like oxygen.

She didn’t plan to lean on him. She didn’t plan to open up. But it happened. Slowly. Without force.

She didn’t plan anything that followed either.

One night, after another long silence at home, she sent a message. “*You free?*”

He said, “*Always.*”

They met in a parking lot near a coffee shop. Sat in her car. Talked for hours.

He didn’t touch her. He didn’t try to fix her. He just let her be.

When she got home that night, she felt something she hadn’t felt in a long time. Seen. Not adored. Not admired. Just seen.

She laid in bed next to her husband, wide awake. His back turned. His breathing deep. She stared at the ceiling.

“I didn’t mean to find comfort somewhere else,” she whispered. “I just didn’t know where else to go.” When she tried to get it from her husband she was met with resistance or questioned about why she felt the way she did.

She closed her eyes and hoped sleep would come quickly. It didn’t. Her mind wouldn’t stop. She replayed the conversations from earlier, the way someone else’s words had felt like safety, like air. It was strange how fast she felt pulled

toward someone who simply listened, someone who didn't try to talk over her or correct her or tell her to smile.

It scared her how quickly that comfort became something she needed and yearned for. One reply turned into a longer thread. A voice note turned into a late-night call. She hadn't planned for any of it, but she also hadn't stopped it. And it wasn't about the person—it was about the fact that she could breathe when she talked.

She turned to her side and looked at the back of her husband's head. The pillow under him was full, clean, the sheets tucked tight like always. Everything in the room looked perfect. Not a picture out of place. Not a sock on the floor. The kind of room people post online and call "blessed."

But what does it mean when your room looks right, and your heart doesn't?

The next morning, she stood in the kitchen wearing a shirt two sizes too big and socks that didn't match. She sipped her coffee and stared out the window. He walked in behind her and said, "You sleep okay?"

She lied. "Yeah. You?"

“Out like a light.”

She smiled small and nodded.

They didn’t talk about anything important. Just what to buy from the store, what time his meeting was, if she remembered to pay the rent and gas bill. She answered. She smiled. She moved. But she felt stuck.

Later that week, he told her he found a house and that they were moving. She asked why, and he simply said, “Because I always wanted to live in that neighborhood.” She smiled and nodded, but inside, something pulled tight. Her commute would turn into an hour, he didn’t think about that. She never visited the house before the decision was made.

She wasn’t asked for input. She wasn’t invited to see it. He signed the loan and deed alone. She refused to sign the contract. Her name was not on anything. He didn’t care. She walked through the rooms slowly after the decision had already been made, listening quietly as the agent talked about the backyard and the large closet, but she already knew—this wasn’t hers. It was his and she was his roommate. None of it felt like home.

“This closet is great for you,” he said, pointing with a grin.

“More space for all your stuff.”

She laughed because she was supposed to. And she knew she only needed a corner of the closet because he had more “stuff” than she did.

When they left, he asked, “You like it?”

She nodded. “Yeah, it’s nice.”

But inside, her stomach twisted. A new house wouldn’t fix this. It wouldn’t fill the silence between them or patch the cracks that had formed long ago.

Later that night, he pulled out a small box and placed it in her hand.

“I know the old ring was bothering your finger. I wanted to get you something better.”

She opened it.

The ring sparkled.

He smiled proudly.

She looked at it. Turned it in the light.

“It’s beautiful,” she said.

But something in her chest tightened. She wanted to feel happy. She wanted this to be a new start. But all she could think was, this is nice, but it’s not enough.

She hugged him. Said thank you. Put the ring on. They rarely kissed, and when they did, it was literally just a peck. He would follow it with a sarcastic, “Ok, thank you,” or “Good job,” that left her feeling smaller each time.

That night, she sat in bed and stared at her hand. The ring caught the light every time she moved.

She whispered, “You can’t fix love with jewelry or a new house.”

You can build a house, buy a ring, sign a deed – but you can’t buy belonging. And without belonging, it’s all just stuff.

The next week, she walked into her therapy session with a polite smile. The same smile she gave to everyone.

The counselor asked, “How are you feeling today?”

She said, “I’m okay.”

Then sat down. Crossed her legs. Pulled at a loose thread on her sleeve.

They talked. She nodded a lot. She avoided eye contact.

The therapist asked about the last week. She gave short answers. She avoided the truth.

Because even in that space, she was hiding.

She didn't want to sound ungrateful. Or broken. Or foolish.

When the session ended, the counselor said, "You don't have to hold it all in here."

She smiled. "I know."

But she still walked out with the weight on her chest.

In the car, she sat with the engine off for five minutes. Then she pulled out her phone and typed a note.

"I go to therapy and still pretend. Even in the safest room, I'm afraid to be seen."

She hit save. Then drove home.

Later, she walked into the kitchen and saw dinner already on the stove. He smiled. “Made your favorite.”

She thanked him. They sat down to eat. This would happen from time to time, moments that felt almost normal. Couples therapy had been a quick fix sprinkled throughout the marriage, and oddly, those sessions were some of the only times she truly felt seen and heard.

He talked about something funny from work. She laughed. Not because it was funny, but because she was trying. He casually asked about her therapy session. She said it was eye-opening and was challenging her to figure out who she was. He gave a half-interested nod and said, “Hmm, I see. Why do you need to figure that out?” like the whole thing didn’t matter.

Mid-bite, she paused and thought, maybe he just didn’t care to understand. Maybe I am too much after all.

That thought came often now. Not just during arguments or silence. It showed up in the quietest parts of her day — in the middle of brushing her teeth, walking the dog, or folding laundry. She didn’t yet realize that happiness was something she needed to create within and for herself.

For so long, she hadn't known it was even possible to reach a place of peace because of what she had lived through. The emotional and mental abuse left wounds deeper than anything physical could. Words clung to her like glue, circling in her mind and reminding her of who she was to him. Over time, she started to believe them. He had made her feel like she was the primary issue, like something was wrong with her.

And when she finally decided to seek counseling for herself — a space to figure out who she was again, even that was invaded. He would question what she shared, digging for details from sessions he wasn't part of. Counseling was supposed to be for her, a safe place to heal, but it became another arena where she felt watched and dissected.

The idea that maybe she was broken. Maybe she expected too much. Maybe nothing would be enough.

She got up from the table early that night. Said she was tired. Went to bed first.

Lying there in the dark, she whispered to herself, "What if I'm the reason this doesn't feel right?"

Her chest hurt. Not from sadness. From confusion.

She didn't want to be this version of herself.

She missed the girl who laughed freely. Who said what she thought. Who danced without music. Who lived because life was worth living.

But that girl felt far.

Now she measured every word. Every look. Every step all to avoid arguments.

She didn't cry that night. She just stared at the ceiling again.

When he came to bed, she pretended to be asleep.

She stayed still while he got under the blanket.

She breathed slow and steady.

Even though her thoughts were spinning. Even the thought of dying that night.

And it was in that moment, in that quiet room, she made herself a promise.

She didn't speak it out loud. She just thought it.

I will figure out who I am again. No matter how long it takes. Even if I have to do it quietly.

Because deep down, even if no one else saw it, she was still worth knowing.

Chapter 4: Can We Still Have Sex?

On July 11th, she stood in the bathroom again, but this time the light above the mirror was flickering. She reached up, tapped it once, and it stayed steady. The glow washed over her face. Her skin looked broken... pale. Not sick—just tired. She let her towel drop to the floor and stared at her body. Not in a confident way. Just quiet. Just present.

She knew she had to prioritize her safety. Her mental and emotional safety had been at stake for so long. She hid her true feelings behind a smile during the day and marinated herself in tears or thoughts of suicide at night.

Already so broken, she tried to keep her head above water—literally. Certain words said, an apology nor an explanation could ever fix.

He had looked at her one night after they separated and said:

"Can we still have sex? Do this for me."

In that moment, she realized he had lost all respect and boundaries for her. He still was being selfish. She was numb and angry with herself for allowing it to get this far.

She was now looked at as an object—something to be used. Sex was the last thing she wanted anymore.

"Does everyone look at me this way?" she wondered.

Had she created this object of a woman who was once an aspiring Proverbs 31 woman? She questioned her worth even more now.

She broke down and stood her ground. But deep down inside, at times she just stayed under the covers. She hid. She drank. She cried.

She often reflected on a text message she received After they separated, on Mother's Day, 2017:

"You would've been a great mom."

The message had come a couple months back, but it still landed like a weight she couldn't put down. She whispered:

"This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it." — Psalm 118:24 (NLT)

Her body used to feel like hers. Now, it felt like something she just carried around. She used to wear certain dresses and feel something. Now, even her reflection didn't bring anything up. No spark. No pull. Just skin and silence.

She touched her stomach and whispered, "Why do I feel so far from me?" She looked at her hips, her arms, her chest. All the parts she used to treat with care. Now they just felt like pieces she had to hide or hand over when asked.

He knocked once. Then opened the door halfway.

"You coming to bed?" he asked.

She didn't turn around. "No we are done."

He waited. Then said, "You okay?"

"Yeah," she lied. "Stop acting like you care now"

He nodded, not pushing.

The door closed again.

She picked up her towel, wrapped herself again, and sat on the edge of the tub. The cool tile touched her feet. She sat still. Her heart wasn't racing, but it was heavy.

Back in the bedroom she was sleeping in, the lights were off. He knocked on the door and said "please just one more time, I want to remember," in a whiny voice.

She said "I said no, leave me alone". He continued knocking on the door and pleading. She laid there, staring at the wall.

That no wasn't just for him. It was the first yes I gave myself in a long time.

Her body didn't feel like hers anymore. But she was not going to give in.

It felt like something she gave up along the way.

She reflected on the times she said yes just to avoid the fight. The moments she gave in just to keep the peace. The times she laid there and waited for it to be over so she could roll to her side and sleep.

She whispered into the dark, "What if I only said yes because I forgot how to say no?" But she said no that night, and she was proud.

The next morning, she looked at herself in the mirror again. Tied her robe tight. Her skin looked dry. Her eyes felt hollow.

She touched her neck, her jawline, then her collarbone. She used to be in love with her own body. Not in a loud, show-off way. But in a way that felt warm. Now, she wasn't even sure she liked being touched.

Later, she wrote in her notebook: *"I don't want to be touched unless I'm being seen. I don't want to be seen unless I'm being loved. I don't want to be loved unless it's real."*

She stared at the words for a long time. Then added another line: *"Am I only useful when I'm giving something away?"*

I see now that asking this question was the beginning of reclaiming myself.

That question stayed with her.

She closed the journal and opened a folder she hadn't touched in years. It was there — something she had written one night in a dark kitchen, barefoot, heartbroken, waiting for the test to say yes. She read it slowly. This time, without shame.

A Mother (written 2016)

This seems so impossible

Will I ever become someone's mother

This is really going to break my heart

Trying — it's my fault

Time after time and there's no connection

To be a mother

To be your mother, sweet baby

To be your first love

To be a mother

To hold you as you cry

Rocking you early morn n night

Kissing your forehead, cheek and thigh

Blocking the bright light

Keeping you warm

Holding you so tight

As you look into my eyes

Baby look at your smile shine so bright

To be a mother

To be your mother, oh my baby

To be your protector — I'm praying

To be a mother

I've been trying for so long

*Years — and damn nothings baking
It's empty inside and they're swimming*

*Trying to find a place to settle
Baby come home to me*

*It's my season
I am your destination*

Not these other strangers

*To be a mother
To be your mother*

To be there forever, until never

*To be a mother
I'm not hating on you*

But to have five and abort one

*You deserve none
But I won't give up*

I want you in my life

*My unborn child
I won't give up on you*

*Do you hear me calling your name
Hear me, listen to my heart beat*

*As we sync in harmony
You can call me mommy.....*

When she finished, her eyes were swollen, but dry. Her hands were still, not shaking. For the first time in years, she didn't feel like she had to run from that version of herself. She just nodded and whispered, "You're still here."

That evening he saw her in the kitchen and he asked if she wanted to plan a weekend trip. Maybe get away. He said it like a peace offering. She smiled and said, "Sure." But inside she wondered if he just wanted a weekend to reset the routine. Get back to what they used to be. But they weren't that anymore. He often used his friends as a getaway and that weekend they ended up at a friends house where she had to fake it again. She didn't like that he was acting like they were good and not just planning who was getting what in the divorce papers.

That night, he touched her back. She didn't pull away this time. But she didn't move closer either.

He leaned in and kissed her neck. She stayed still.

He whispered, "I miss you."

She whispered back, "I'm right here."

But both of them knew that wasn't true.

He asked, "Can we still be us?"

She looked at the ceiling and didn't answer. Instead, she thought, *Can we still have sex if I don't feel safe in my skin? Can we be close if I feel far from myself?*

She rolled away again.

He didn't ask again that night.

A few days later, she sat on the porch of her friend's house. The sky was soft with sunset. They sipped iced tea and talked about nothing for a while. Then the conversation turned quiet. Her friend asked, "Are you okay?"

She said, "I don't know."

Her friend waited. Let the silence hold space.

Then she said, "I feel like I have been used, and no longer know who I am. I can't prove it."

Her friend nodded. "You don't need proof to trust your instincts and body."

That hit her harder than she expected.

That night, she retook a long shower. Not to clean. To just be. To touch her arms and legs and feel like they belonged to her.

She remembered the day she started hoping for a baby. How she imagined names. How she looked at tiny shoes in stores. She used to get excited over the idea of being a mom. Now she avoided pregnancy tests. The hope turned into fear. Every month that passed throughout the marriage, made her feel like her body was failing her.

She sat on the bathroom floor in a towel and whispered, “Why does it feel like punishment?”

She pulled her Bible close and flipped to Psalms. She didn’t know where to start but let her eyes land on **Psalms 118** and read it out loud:

“The Lord is my strength and my song; he has given me victory. Songs of joy and victory are sung in the camp of the godly. The strong right arm of the Lord has done glorious things! The strong right arm of the Lord is raised in triumph. The strong right arm of the Lord has done glorious things! I will not die; instead, I will live to tell what the Lord has done. The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not let me die. Open for me the gates where the righteous enter, and I will go in and thank the Lord.” (Psalm 118:14–19, NLT)

She read it again, slower this time. Her voice cracked when she said, "*I will not die but live.*" That line stuck to her ribs.

She wiped her tears with the edge of her towel.

The next morning, she journaled again.

"I want to be a mother, but not like this. Not in this version of me. I want to be loved through it. Not pressed. Not pressured. Not shamed."

Later, she opened her phone and read another verse.

Proverbs 10:12 flashed across her screen:

"Hatred stirs up quarrels, but love makes up for all offenses." (NLT)

She read it a third time. She didn't want more conflict. Not in her body. Not in her heart. She wanted to be covered in something real.

That night, she told him she didn't want to be touched. Not tonight. Maybe not for a while. Or ever.

He asked why. She just looked at him. He said, "So you don't want me?"

She shook her head gently. “I told you I am done. You will not use me for sex”. He sighed. Didn’t speak. Went to his room and closed the door.

She stayed sitting up in bed. She reached for her journal and wrote: “My body is not a reward. It is not a fix. It is not a promise. It is mine. And I want it back.”

She closed the journal and held it to her chest. Her eyes stung with memories. That old text popped into her mind again—the one he sent on Mother’s Day: *“You would’ve been a great mom.”* She blinked hard, even though she wasn’t sure why it hurt now. The words felt so cruel; the ache behind them made her cry harder than she expected many times.

Even now, I feel the ache of those words. And yet, as a mom, I stand knowing my worth as a woman has always been mind, not defined by a womb.

Tears rolled down silently in the darkness. She hugged her knees and whispered, “Would’ve been. Would’ve been.” She didn’t know if she wanted to be sad or furious. Probably both. She stayed there, breathing slow, rubbing her arms gently until the storm inside her quieted a little.

The next morning she prayed quietly from her bed. Her faith felt threadbare, like an old blanket with holes. Yet she kept

whispering small scripture verses: “*I will not die but live...*” and “*Love covers over all wrongs....*” That last one echoed in her mind: **Proverbs 10:12.** She repeated it, over and over, until it didn’t sound like words anymore—it sounded like something warm wrapping around her.

She got up and made coffee. Her movements were soft. Not rushed. She let the silence stay. She didn’t feel ready to move yet. Not fully. She chose to stay here a while, just letting time pass so she could figure out how to feel again.

In the afternoon, she pulled out her phone and noticed a message from her friend: “*Want to come over? I've got movies and popcorn.*” She typed back quickly: “*Yes. Please.*”

At her friend’s house, she entered into a living room lit by soft lamps. They watched a movie neither cared about, but the chatter made her heart slow down. Her friend reached over and touched her hand. Just that light tap made her body relax. She leaned in and rested her head gently. No demands. Just kindness.

After the movie ended, her friend asked, “You okay?”

She said, “I am now.”

They sat together quietly for a while. Watching credits roll. She didn't need more than that.

Later that evening at home, she lit a candle and sat by the window. The city lights shimmered below. She whispered, "I want to be held. Gently. Fully. Without agenda." It felt odd to say that out loud, even to herself. But saying it felt like starting to hope again.

In the days that followed, she started saying 'no' more often. No to invitations she didn't want. No to conversations she didn't want. She realized she was tired of being strong all the time. She just wanted to rest.

He asked one night if she wanted to talk. She said she did. She told him about the tears and the text and the way being strong all the time left her empty. He listened, silently, for once. No correction. No solution. Just listening.

That changed something for him but for her it was a reminder that she deserves so much more and deserves to be treated with that type of love every day. She woke up the next morning and felt a small shift inside—a quiet space where conflict used to be. No angry walls. No whispered fights. Just room to draw a breath. He was quiet.

She wrote in her journal later: “*I stopped reacting to hate and conflict. I am making room for peace today and every single day.*”

She felt lighter than she had in months.

She kept leaning into small moments she encountered throughout her day: a greeting or hug that lasted longer, a cup of tea without looking at her phone, a word of kindness to herself in the mirror.

Her faith wasn’t fixed yet, but it felt alive. Fragile maybe, but breathing. She whispered scripture softly in between tears and quiet. She didn’t need loud faith. She needed quiet belief. Her spirit softened, surprised by its own happiness.

She didn’t try to fix everything at once. She just kept taking small steps—staying present, saying no, asking for what she needed, choosing peace over staying silent.

And little by little, something inside her started to soften. She wasn’t whole yet. But she was coming home to herself again.

Chapter 5: She Stood Up and Walked

One morning she looked in the new mirror she had in a new place she would call home and saw a stranger. The face was hers, but her eyes looked haunted, exhausted, and ready to release. She froze and stared until something inside clicked. That moment changed everything. She didn't know when the shift would bring change, but she felt it deep inside.

She grabbed her journal from the dresser and opened it. Her pen hovered over a blank page. Then she began to write an apology to herself. Not for the mistake she made or the things she said, but for all the times she ignored her needs. She wrote: *"I'm sorry I didn't listen to you when you whispered for help. I'm sorry I pushed your pain away so we could look okay."* She meant every word. She felt something soften inside as she read it back.

That was the first time I gave myself the love I'd been missing all along. It hit hard. I was waking up.

The room was quiet except for the slight echo of her pen scratching and her dogs silent snores. She closed her eyes for

a moment and whispered, “*This is the start of coming home.*” She didn’t need fanfare. Just the truth.

She picked up a new journal after that day. The cover was simple. Blank. Inviting. She wrote things she had hidden for years. *I’m scared. I feel lost. I tried to be perfect. I need love that sees me.* She spilled thoughts in simple sentences that felt heavy at first. But writing it down lifted weight off her chest.

She reminded herself of the day she put herself first.

Reflected on July 11th, the day she stood up and walked. She walked away. She walked. Her healing didn’t come all at once. It happened in small choices. She started walking around the new neighborhood in the morning. She made her coffee without sugar to feel something real. She told a friend she wasn’t okay and stayed silent when they listened. She canceled plans that left her drained. She slept an extra hour when she needed to rest.

One afternoon, she wrote about a memory when she looked in a mirror at college and felt proud of herself. She compared it to today’s stranger face. And she said, “*You will find her again.*” She underlined that sentence. It felt like a promise.

She kept writing scripture, too. **James 1:2-4** came to her on a hard day:

“Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.”

(James 1:2–4, NLT)

She read it slowly. Let each word sink in. It reminded her she didn't need to run from hardship. She could face it. And find strength. She whispered to herself,

“Love yourself because your life depends on it, literally. Loving yourself is the definition of self-love, and you deserve it every day.”

She began to build a new life. She built small routines — journaling in the soft morning light, drinking green tea instead of rushing coffee, checking in with her body and asking, “What do you feel?” instead of ignoring it. If her chest felt tight, she allowed tears. If her stomach knotted, she paused. That was healing.

She also began reflecting on things her friends were saying to her now. “I wanted to tell you, but I didn't want to lose our friendship.”

“I always felt uneasy about the whole relationship.”

“I could tell you were unhappy, but I didn’t know what my place was.”

“I started to see sadness on your face. I’m sorry I didn’t say anything.”

Each word sank in differently. They were reminders of what had been seen, what had been missed, and what she had survived.

One night she made herself a small ritual. She sat by her window with a candle. She held her journal in one hand and a cup of tea in the other. She read through old pages where she had tried to speak but stayed silent. Then she tore them out and lit them in the candle flame. She watched the pages burn safely in a bowl. She said, *“I release shame. I release hiding. I welcome love. I welcome peace. I welcome ME.”* She blew out the candle and watched the smoke rise. She felt lighter as she went to bed.

I didn’t know it yet, but that night I set myself free.

From that night on, the tone of her life began to shift. This was the beginning of her life after divorce — a complete makeover. She took seven intentional steps that changed everything.

1. **Journaling.** She reminded herself to write out your thoughts, feelings, and prayers. This journal is your safe space — let it all out. Don't scratch out or erase. What hits the paper is authentic, and it's you.
2. **Attend Counseling and Embrace Vulnerability.** She realized that counseling was a huge part of her healing journey, especially as she began to pull away from relying on the church for support after feeling unseen by its people. She wasn't deeply religious—more spiritual—and counseling became the space where she could be honest without judgment. Being vulnerable mattered. Choose someone you feel comfortable with, and remember you can always change counselors if needed.
3. **Pay attention to warning signs within yourself.** She had been depressed, suicidal, even a bed-wetter, and sought attention outside herself that turned into self-harm. It was time to look in the mirror and address the signs she ignored. To apologize to herself for neglecting herself. She stood before the mirror and spoke aloud:

Dear (her name),

I apologize for ignoring you. I apologize for not giving you the time and space to breathe. I apologize for allowing someone to

treat you poorly. I apologize for letting someone break you down to the point of destruction. I apologize for ignoring your cry for help. I apologize for hating you. I forgive you. I love you. I am here for you. I will heal you.

4. **Get finances in order.** Money stability was part of emotional stability. She faced it step by step. Even if you have to start from \$0, it is better to have nothing than to have everything and feel miserable daily. Money will come, savings will come, credit will be restored.
5. **Express your feelings unapologetically.** This meant losing some friendships and relationships. And she understood — healing required it. Even if they do not understand, she knew that she owed it to herself to be selfish and honest for her and stop caring about
6. **Lean on trusted family and friends.** She allowed the right people in and let the wrong ones fade away.
7. **Permit yourself to live.** Take yourself on dates. Try things you once loved or discover new ones. Smile more because you want to. Spend more time in the mirror and recite affirmations to yourself. Dance to your favorite songs. Go to a workout class. Buy ice

cream! Watch a movie. Lay in bed like a starfish. Blast music loud. And most importantly breathe.

She realized that if you're waiting for the person who hurt you to fix what they did, you're living on their time. Healing meant choosing her own.

Weeks later, she opened her closet and she had a new wardrobe that did not consist of dresses she never wanted to wear. She no longer focused on pleasing anyone. She looked in the mirror and didn't feel shame or guilt or worry. She felt... free.

She wrote in her journal that night: *"I stood up. I walked. I walked away from pain. I walked away from shame. I walked away from people pleasing. I walked away from pretending. I walked away from being a version of myself that was a stranger. I walked away for me. "*

Her healing continued in these small acts. She ate when her body was hungry. She rested when tired. She spoke kindly to herself daily. She set boundaries in conversations that felt unsafe. She cleaned her space and let it breathe. She allowed sadness and joy to both visit when they needed to.

She listened to the little voice inside her head and it guided her. She opened her Bible sometimes. She whispered

scriptures before sleep. She didn't need loud answers. She only needed presence. She held onto James 1:2-4 like a seed that promised growth. She whispered it to herself on days she couldn't move.

One afternoon, she met a friend alone at a coffee shop. She asked for a favorite pastry she used to love. She didn't second guess. She smiled at the flavor. She let herself enjoy it.

That night she wrote: "*Permission is mine. I'll keep choosing me.*"

Her heart beat steady. Her breath was soft. She didn't rush. She didn't fix everything. But she moved forward. She stood up. And she walked—slow, messy, strong.

She learned that love doesn't always come from others, it always starts inside. That morning, she made oatmeal just to nurture herself, not to be praised. She added fresh berries, not because they looked pretty, but because she deserved sweetness. When she tasted it, she felt gentle—a small proof that she could feed herself well.

She created her own peace, and it looked like soft music, open space, and deep breaths. She sat by the window with a playlist of soft songs she hadn't listened to in years. She opened the window and felt the breeze. She closed her eyes

and let the air carry her worries away. No one asked her to be quiet. No one judged. She just breathed and existed.

She no longer lived to prove her worth — she lived like she already knew it. On a Saturday afternoon, she put on sneakers and jogged around the park. Not to burn calories. Not to show effort. She moved because she could. She moved because her body felt alive. She returned to her new home and looked at herself in the mirror with gratitude. Criticism no longer existed.

She remembered the poem she wrote called **A Mother (written 2016)** and let the words echo in her mind:

“A Mother (written 2016)

This seems so impossible

Will I ever become someone's mother

This is really going to break my heart

Trying — it's my fault

Time after time and there's no connection

To be a mother

To be your mother, sweet baby

To be your first love

To be a mother

To hold you as you cry

Rocking you early morn n night

Kissing your forehead, cheek and thigh

Blocking the bright light

Keeping you warm

Holding you so tight

As you look into my eyes

Baby look at your smile shine so bright

To be a mother

To be your mother, oh my baby

To be your protector — I'm praying

To be a mother

I've been trying for so long

Years — and damn nothings baking

It's empty inside and they're swimming

Trying to find a place to settle

Baby come home to me

It's my season

I am your destination

Not these other strangers

To be a mother

To be your mother

To be there forever, until never

To be a mother

I'm not hating on you

But to have five and abort one

You deserve none

But I won't give up

I want you in my life

My unborn child

I won't give up on you

Do you hear me calling your name

Hear me, listen to my heart beat

As we sync in harmony

You can call me mommy.....”

Reading it didn't break her heart again. Instead, it reminded her of how deeply she felt about becoming a mother. She still believed in marriage and knew that both were in her future.. She closed her journal and let herself feel the hope in those words. That longing didn't weaken her. It showed she could still feel. That she was worthy. That was healing.

On Sunday morning, she didn't go to church out of routine—she went to sit on a hill with her dog near her new apartment. She watched people walk dogs, kids run free, and felt no shame in being alone. She talked softly to herself: “I deserve my own soft space. I accept it.” She didn't hear

thunderclaps of matching roles or performance. She just felt simple peace.

She set new boundaries like small building blocks. She told a friend she couldn't volunteer this week because she needed rest. She said no to plans that felt draining. With each no she said yes to herself.

One evening, she opened her closet and saw the corner that had started to feel like a reflection of her life—full of things she no longer needed, clothes she didn't wear, and boxes she kept only to keep up appearances. She stood still for a moment, wiped her tears, and stepped forward with purpose. She began letting go. She moved things, cleared the clutter, and created space not only in her room but in her mind and heart.

Healing wasn't sudden. She didn't wake up perfect. She just kept choosing small things. Each morning, she asked, "How do I feel today? What do I need today?" and she answered honestly. Some days that meant iced tea and a nap. Other days that meant asking someone to sit close. Each answer built trust with herself again.

Her faith began to stretch roots too. **James 1:2-4** became a soft anthem: "Consider it pure joy... whenever you face

trials... because the testing of your faith produces perseverance..." She whispered it when sleep was thin, when tears came slow, when hope felt thin. And she found strength in each quiet breath.

She started smiling in the mirror—not for someone else, but because she felt proud of how far she'd come. She no longer needed applause from people. She clapped for herself. No more permission slips; her curiosity and adventure were the only compass she needed now. Home wasn't a place. It was her soul—a fountain, overflowing. And her spirit? It was finally free."

Her healing came through small acts: a cup of green tea, a cup of iced coffee, a margarita, a song on repeat, a whispered prayer, a journal page, a deep breath. She stood up. And she walked. Step by step. Word by word. Breath by breath.

For so long I was only she—her voice hidden, her presence dim. Telling this story and witnessing my own truth has been the awakening of the women who can finally say... 'I am.'

She looked in the mirror and saw someone she recognized again. Someone unfinished but moving. Someone tender but strong. Someone who walked into herself.

And for that, Jasmine was enough.

“Taking My Life Back (written 2012)

Was it stolen

Was it taken

Is it mine

Taking my life back

Sometimes it hurts

Moments I cry

Why

It is hard work

Feelings hurt

Heart broken

Do you care

Am I a burden

Forward progress

Holding back

Two steps gained

One step collapsed

But today—

*I choose the silence
over your noise*

*I choose the mirror
over your eyes*

*I choose the breath
that fills my own lungs*

Not stolen

Not taken

It was always mine

I am taking my life back

Not without scars

Not without grace

But with both hands

And my own name

Jasmine

Enough

Whole

Home.”

She Stood Up and Walked

In She **Stood Up and Walked**, Jasmine was the girl who smiled on cue, clapped for herself when no one else did, and gave until there was nothing left. From whispered prayers in the mirror to long silences in crowded rooms, she learned how to shrink herself to keep the peace—until peace became a performance.

This is the raw, powerful journey of a woman who thought marriage meant forever but found herself drowning in silence, shame, and smallness. Through late-night tears, hidden journals, and desperate prayers, Jasmine confronts the emotional abuse and soul-wearing loneliness that quietly unraveled her identity.

She Stood Up and Walked isn't a clean-cut redemption story—it's messy, slow, and deeply human. From the aching realization that love isn't supposed to hurt, to the gentle moments of lighting candles and choosing tea over chaos, Jasmine begins to build a new life—one breath, one scripture, one boundary at a time.

It's a story for every woman who's ever stayed too long. For every heart

Jasmine Griffin is a licensed mental health counselor, leader, and founder of TALKwithJB, where she helps individuals navigate life's toughest conversations and reclaim their power through healing and growth.



On her personal journey, Jasmine has faced loss, rediscovered herself, and embraced unexpected joys—finding love again and welcoming her son, her “angel baby,” into the world. Through her writing, she shares lessons of resilience, transformation, and the courage it takes to redefine your life.