

JUSTICE FOR MY INJURED "SHE"

She is me and I am her.

For all these years, she has packed these experiences away and has tried not to speak of them - unless asked - as for a long time in the circles she was in - lived in, worked in - it was considered too unsavory to talk about.

Although amongst her own people of course she could speak freely and also **listen** in order to bear witness.

She was __ years of age and living in contemporary times, post-George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, when everyone says they care now, when businesses are changing their practices as a result - it is the thing to do, after all. But she has also lived through the time before "diversity and inclusion" was a thing and you had to take your chances with your given HR department.

She takes a deep breath and exhales. Slowly. And again.

"I can't breathe."

All those collective experiences, the flashbacks, began to pull at the seams in her - she could feel it happening, and could no longer hold it back. The heat of emotion washed over her. The flesh. As if she were suddenly overcome with fever. The sickness of it all. She felt like she could scream until she didn't have a voice anymore.

Age 16. Summertime. Driving with her friend in her friend's new convertible. Black and shiny. The most popular car that summer. Her friend's mom was a judge and they were very well off, But that didn't matter to the LAPD. They just saw two Black teenage girls, living their best life, driving down Ventura Boulevard playing music, laughing, being young...but in a very nice car.

We were pulled over.

The male officer walked to the driver's side of the car. The female officer to my side. Both officers were white.

"License and registration." The male officer wasn't even back to the police car to check my friend's driver's license before the female cop said to me,

"Get out of the car."

There was no use in protesting. And before patting me down said, in mocking faux urban slang:

"You got any knives, girl?"

Me? Hardly. A shy, awkward 16 year old who was too shy to speak up in the classroom? No. No knives on me.

And then it happened. After the pat down. After the female officer asked me to put my hands behind my back and I heard and felt the cold metal.

Click.

I was in handcuffs.

It was as if it was all happening in slow motion. She walked me to the front of my friend's car. The male officer had done the same with her, made her get out of the car, didn't answer when she asked him whether he had checked her license, said she lived just up the street, that this was her neighborhood, her registration had not not expired, please, there shouldn't be an issue.

But he didn't say anything at all. Until.

Until she was next to me in front of and facing her car and he said to both of us:

"Bend over. Slowly."

So we did. Two frightened teenage girls. Bending over the hood of her car as slowly as we could. Our hands cuffed behind our backs. The summer heat on the black paint of the hood combined with the heat of the engine burned our stomachs through our t-shirts. Asses in the air. It was as if we were about to be physically violated.

As our humanity and dignity already had been.

It seemed as if we were like that, bent over the hood of the car for ages. My friend's head facing mine, turned away from the street, as this was a residential area and cars were passing by, people were walking their dogs and these were her neighbors. People who knew her and her mother, the judge. Tears of rage, frustration, fear and embarrassment streamed down her face. I closed my eyes so it wasn't as if I was looking at her too.

I was then snatched up and the female officer walked me to the patrol car and put me in the back seat. I asked what was happening and why I was being put in the back of their car. But all I got was:

"Shhhh..."

More minutes that felt like eternity passed and we could hear something come through over the police radio.

The back door opened as I was helped out of the car and the handcuffs were removed. The same for my friend, who had still remained bent over the hood of the car the entire time. The female officer was laughing and said that everything checked out and we were free to go.

Our angry, sweaty, tear-streaked faces glared at them and before heading back to the patrol car, the male officer looked at us, chuckled and then sneered:

*"You're **lucky** I didn't have you **spread eagle** on the pavement. Hot day like this."*

And then he walked away.

She is me and I am her.

When these things happen - **against** you, *perpetrated* against you - you haven't done anything wrong. But you FEEL so ashamed. And *they* (you know which *they* I mean) - *they* look at you like you SHOULD BE ashamed. They even think they have the right to be embarrassed looking at you and your shame.

In the years between that incident and now, she had a myriad of experiences in her chosen profession, which, as it so happened, was not the most diverse area of that industry.

Microaggressions escalated to macroaggressions. Bullying. Abusive language and behavior from the juniors who didn't want to have to report to her. Uncollaborative colleagues. Disrespect. Unequal pay. Racial fetishization and sexual harassment. A lack of equal opportunities to advance and grow.

Slurs whispered or said to her face and delivered with a smile:

"It's not going to be easy. They don't want you here."

"All Black people are thieves, you know."

"I will not have her as my boss. I'll just go over her head."

"Black bitch."

"I hate her."

"She must be sleeping with the CEO."

"I just don't like you. That's why I behaved that way."

"Oh, in person you look different from how I pictured you from talking on the phone. You speak so well."

"You're incredibly accomplished, but you're just not quite the right fit for this job."

"Golliwog."

"Nigger."

Late at night, she watches a television show about people from all races and backgrounds living out their Hollywood dreams - and she weeps. The nouveau allies. Her industry standing up against systemic and institutional racism. The hypocrisy she knows of but cannot speak of. The black boxes across everyone's social media (even those who terrorized her over the years). **BLM**. All are triggers.

Sometimes she thinks she will never succeed or go further than where she is right now. Despite talent. Despite hard work. Despair has now overtaken her. She can feel her mental health unravelling.

Every single slur. Every slight. Each disrespectful act. Feels like:

Bending over the hood of the car. Slowly. Hands cuffed behind her back. Bending over in slow motion.

The **humiliation**.

Sometimes she thinks she should just blow her brains out, she got so far away from herself. She couldn't see anything she had done right. She just saw and heard the trauma. But she also didn't want to give them the satisfaction of seeing her fail.

She struggled to hold her head up...but did it anyway.

And I watched.

And I thought.

And I weeped.
