

Being seen isn't the same as being understood — especially when you're a Black femme.

Dear women,

We live in a world that swears it's moved on — that we've made it and should celebrate. Women voting, owning homes, running companies, building careers, loving who we love, speaking our minds, taking up space — winning while living our lives unapologetically.

What a luxury, right?

Except... not really. Because even when things change, they don't change equally. These so-called luxuries don't always extend to all women — not fully, not freely. And definitely not to Black, queer, femme-identifying people like me, who are still overlooked by hiring managers, underpaid by corporations that claim diversity, side-eyed by coworkers in “progressive” offices, and scrutinized by strangers who think our bodies and identities are public debate. The people in power — from boardrooms to classrooms — get to decide which women deserve opportunity, and we're rarely at the top of their list. I wish I could tell you why.

I'm expressive. I'm intelligent. I'm animated, even. But those traits don't always feel like power — especially not in a world where being Black and smart gets you labeled “strong” before anything else. Before beautiful. Before soft. Before human.

Because when I'm intelligent, people read me as independent — and somehow that becomes threatening, which makes me undesirable, which leaves me lonely. My intelligence puts me in a box I never asked for: the Strong Black Woman box, where I'm expected to be resilient, self-sufficient, and emotionally bulletproof.

But I'm not stone cold. Even if I play the part well.

And when I *am* expressive? When I show up open and loud and full of feelings? It's a trap. That's when I become *approachable*. That's when I'm easier to consume. Easier to objectify. Easier to stare at like I'm a meal and someone's already halfway through it.

Performing girlhood is exhausting. It always has been. You're told to be delicate. To get dressed up before you go outside. To smell like flowers and speak like a poem. Hair done. Face beat. Waist snatched. Quiet, polite, soft.

But is *that* all it takes to be a woman? Because here's the thing:

I burp loudly in public.

I wear pants.

I live in my bonnet and baggy clothes.

And I haven't worn a bra in weeks (free the nips, truly).

Am I less of a girl because I refuse to contort myself into some Victorian daydream? No. I'm just a girl. Still.

And because I'm *just a girl*, I'm underestimated. That part hasn't changed.

Imagine walking into a computer science class or a film studio full of musty men who assume you don't belong — until you prove otherwise. Over and over again.

Where are my STEM girls? Where are the girls making the cure to cancer or rewriting the rules of AI? Where are my future female presidents? I mean look at Kamala Harris! Don't stop at "nurse," if what you want is surgeon. Astronaut. Head engineer. We're not here to make space — we are the space.

And my film/media girlies? Fight the Film Bros, please. I'm begging. We need more Celine Songs, Greta Gerwigs, Ava DuVernays, Dee Rees, more *Lady Bird* and *Priscilla* moments, more *Pariah* and *Daughters of the Dust* moments. Not one-offs, but a pipeline. A revolution with contour and creative control.

We need you — brilliant, chaotic, emotional, weird — just as you are. Fully.

With love,

From a Black, queer, femme girl who is still figuring it out — and doing it loudly.

Realistically not choosing between soft and strong and more about living in the tension of both.

To every woman and femme-identifying person reading this — whether you're soft or sharp, messy or meticulous, shy or unhinged: you're allowed to take up space. You don't need to shrink, code-switch, or edit yourself into something easier to digest.

You don't need to be pretty *and* smart *and* quiet about it.

Whether you're disabled, trans, neurodivergent, chronically ill, plus-sized, or just *really fucking tired*, I see you. I'm with you. I'm writing for you.

Being a woman — or identifying with femininity in any way — isn't about being perfect. It's about being **real**. It's about being too much sometimes. It's about having nothing left and still showing up. It's about refusing to disappear.

We are not monoliths. We are not muses. We are not marketing.

We are here. We are layered. And we are more than enough. Always.