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WE HOPE TO SEE YOUR WORK IN THE NEXT ISSUE!  
SUBMIT!
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HELLO BEAUTIFUL BLACK WOMEN. I'D LIKE TO SHARE THIS WITH YOU.

My father once told me something that I will never value, but also never forget: "Just face it, Naya, your hair's not going to grow. Just get weave. You look beautiful with weave."

I did not give up trying to grow my natural hair. Weave does not define my beauty. I look beautiful in the way that I choose to present myself because I do not use copious amounts of gel, leave-in conditioner, and edge control for my high puffs to gain anyone's validation.

No matter who it is.

Think about it, if I base my appearance off of what you say, who am I really?

Me or you? Your happiness is not my happiness.

I am more than you want me to be.

Janaya Laudé
Self-Love
On February 14th, 2017, I awoke from my rather pleasant nap to hear my parents bickering. I looked at my phone, which nearly blinded me, to see it was 10 PM. As someone who appreciates all the sleep she can get, I was a tad upset. Just when I was about to throw off the covers to tell them to be quiet, the words I heard the words ‘Muslim’ and ‘Trump’. My parents talked about politics only once in a blue moon, so I stayed inside my warm bed silently listening to the conversation.

From what I gathered, my Mom was “pro-Muslim ban” while my Dad was against it. Though my memory escapes me on what exactly was said, I can remember one vivid detail from that night; it was my Mom’s voice getting louder and louder. Her tone would make you believe she was trying to fight someone in the Thunderdome. My Dad struggled to speak, only being able to utter a few words before my Mom interrupted him.

After a few exhausting minutes, it was useless trying to listen to this so called ‘debate.’ I already knew my Mom lost the argument. The way she acted was what deemed her the loser in my eyes. She embodied what I hated about this country and is a key example on why this country is divided; she refused to have a conversation.

I firmly believe with every fiber of my being that in order to eliminate the divide, we need to talk each other.

During the race to the Oval Office, so many people were appalled by Trump’s statements. So much so that a majority of the left were hurling labels at his supporters such as "racist" and "sexist". The latter was brought up because they weren’t willing to support the Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. Even Clinton, the one who wanted to take the high road and not stoop down to Trump’s level, called his supporters "a basket of deplorables."

It’s no wonder why she lost the election aside from her questionable positions for a liberal, relationships, and past; she insulted a whole group of people she didn’t even know.

The onslaught doesn’t end there!
Bernie Sanders, who had an overwhelming amount of supporters, also received the same treatment. She privately called his supporters ‘basement dwellers.’ Honestly, with that kind of attitude what do you think is going to happen? Did she think bullying people, especially just because they’re affiliated with your party, would guarantee her the win?

I must admit, it’s a bit funny. Democrats accuse Trump of creating this toxic environment yet they definitely helped contribute to it. I can’t recall a single debate between Clinton and Trump where there was an instance where the two allowed the other to finish or didn’t trash talk each other. Keep in mind, these two were running for the position of the President of the United States yet they resorted to playground tactics to try make themselves look better.

Aside from political figures, there’s a group of vocal individuals who believe that acting in this manner is a civilized way to get your point across and persuade someone to join your side.

I cannot begin to tell you how much it boils my blood to see people proudly showing off the aftermath of Berkeley riots or videos of Trump supporters getting attacked. Everyone around me knows I am far from fond of Trump, however when he condemns the actions of these people, I can’t help but agree with him just like I do when Democrats don’t approve of what he says or does. By setting fire to things or destroying local businesses, you’re giving Trump and his administration the moral high ground. In certain people’s eyes, you’re their Trump.

So what is there to do about this divide in our country? Many are just not willing to listen to the opposing view. When I hear my classmates or teachers ask how we got here, I have the urge to say that this lack of communication played a major role in it. We need to stop shutting down people’s opinions we don’t like. No longer can we throw crude names, punch them in the face, or cause property damage. Instead, we need to sit down and have a discussion.

If not, don’t be surprised if we have another Trump in the White House.

"Stop thinking that everyone who disagrees with you is evil, or racist, or sexist, or stupid, and talk to them. Persuade them otherwise..."
Jonathan Pie, November 10, 2016
I believe in superheroes because they are people who risk their lives to protect civilians and other people who may or may not deserve their protection.

Heroes do their best to keep everyone safe and free.

Without superheros, people (humans) would probably destroy themselves and everything around them.
POEM:

MY LORD

My Lord told me his love would not fail, as he showed me a hand that was pierced by a nail.

He told I’m safe, started lifting the negative to positive as my eyes became clear I saw what life entails.

I saw beauty without measure and felt love’s complete peace.

I willfully surrendered but felt no trace of defeat. I listened to my heart and caught the rhythm of its beat as he says our hearts are one and that this is where love meets.

He told me that I’m his and he’d never let me go. He just thought I should know if there ever comes a time in life that’s really low, look back to where our hearts met so that love can begin to show.

He said “I fought the battle and won it for you, for all your sins have been forgiven my love and for them you will never pay”.

Although you may stumble along the path he will always help keep your way.

—Tanija Stroud
Time.

Memory.

They move laboriously like grains of wet sand in an hourglass. My lungs fight to expand and contract when I think about the Bar and its demise.

A picture of an old Hollywood party with iconic legends hung above the third table on the left side of the Over the Hill Tavern. As a child, I would sit under it and play a game: find the actor who most resembles the familiar faces around me. Zig, I found at the center of it all.

Her red curly hair was radiant. She wore an emerald gown and pearls; defining grace and elegance. Next to her was a man in a black tuxedo. His warm smile reminded me of Todd. Although he stayed busy ensuring that the drinks never stopped flowing, Todd would always pause to send me a wink and a smile. Revered by everyone, my parents were stars. I adored being raised in their limelight.

One turgid grain slips through the hourglass, and I am drawn into another memory.

When I entered her hospital room, I was horrified. Her glamorous emerald gown had become a thin hospital covering. The strands of pearls were replaced with ventilator tubes; her red curls pulled back into a messy bun. I cradled her frail hand. Like the rest of her body, it was faintly yellow and covered in deep purple bruises. We held hands until I had to go.

*I’ll be back tomorrow. Olive you, Mama.*

**Tomorrow does not arrive.**
On Friday, July 27th, 2007, Buddy picked me up from the Rec.

Every traffic light felt unbearably long. I just wanted to get to the hospital so I could see Mama. When we pulled up in front of the house, I knew it finally had happened. Uncle Mike parked behind us. The car doors slammed shut. I took my last breath.

Zig, my mother, had died from liver failure.

Time and memory move laboriously like grains of wet sand in an hourglass.

I chose to listen to my heart. It does not hold onto the details of times captured; it only remembers the love.

As I put the scissors down, the truth tumbled out. There was a voice that insisted I should be ashamed of my mother, and therefore, my upbringing. I had learned my numbers and colors from a deck of cards and how to count money from cash tips. But Mama had also taught me one thing above all else: follow your heart, and you won’t go wrong.

My heart tells me that I am Mama’s bountiful love. Never just fragments of her story. I do not need to become her antithesis; I am free to be my own star.

I breathe deeply, remembering the words of her closest friend: “Chin up my dear, posture, of course, and look life in the eye and smile. Mama is always with you, and don’t you damn forget that.”

-Kathryn Kozey
I am sending this because women/girls matter in this country and our voices must be heard.

2413 Rayburn House Office Building Washington DC 20515.
I know one day she will not crawl into my bed. My niece will no longer be afraid of the dark, and she will fall asleep without asking me to protect her from the monsters outside the window. I will not have to lift her up to reach the sink or tie her shoes when the laces come undone.

I may not like it, but eventually, my princess will not need her tía anymore.

As a Latina in a political and social environment that constantly doubts her, she is facing a cruel world. Before the moment of her independence arrives, I must help her build a strong foundation.

I know that my princess has the potential to defy social standards and create ripples of hope that reverberates throughout our entire nation. Yet, how can I properly guide a toddler when there is so much that I still need to learn?

Perhaps, I will start by telling her that there are neighborhoods that seem safe from afar, however she must look beyond the surface. The paint on the outer walls of the homes are chipping, and inside, there is a single mattress for three people. As repeated failure and disappointment chips away at their hopes, the residents stop believing that they deserve better.

We are a part of these forgotten communities, and therefore we have to constantly fight against the mindset that people like us will never reach success.

She will face internal conflicts from within our diverse neighborhood as well. In middle school, I was the only Puerto Rican surrounded by prideful Mexicans who did not allow themselves to expand beyond their own cultural borders.

I do not blame them. It is a vicious cycle of isolating the “outsider”. The broader community of Richmond, California has oppressed their people, so they did the same to me. On the playground and in the classroom, I adopted some of the Mexican dialect to fit in. I lost my Spanish, not realizing the irony of the fact that our heritages have more in common than they do differences.
Then, there is the pressure I know she will endure at home. Her abuela has to work long hours as the main provider for all seven of us in the family, leaving us with the responsibility of cleaning, cooking, and watching over ourselves. My siblings and I taught each other to fight to achieve our goals.

She, too, will have to mature quickly and learn to be self-reliant. At times, it will feel like life is filled with chores, lab reports, and suffocating loneliness. Like a scientist observing rats in a cage, her abuela will watch and criticize as my niece tries to reach her high expectations.

I used to live in constant fear of making mistakes. Every time I disappointed my mother – her abuela – it felt like a sack of lead landed in my stomach. The weight spread and hardened around my very soul, encompassing my body and guiding my actions. Trying to follow my mother’s high expectations, I blindly sacrificed finding my own path so that I could follow hers.

I hope that my niece will learn from my missteps. Although I do not want her to experience more hardships, I will not hold her back. She is only a toddler—abandoned by a father who somehow walked away even after he saw those big brown eyes and a mother who does not understand the importance of loving support. She will have to learn that we have no control over our parents’ lives, even though they try to project their dreams, that have long ago faded away, onto us.

My princess is allowed to cry and even occasionally quit, as long as she recovers, ready to fight again. I will not expect perfection. Naveah must define happiness for herself.

I WILL LET HER FLY
A scale halfway up and halfway down on one side
Thick sweaters with a logo beside
Set for the winter time
Holey hand-me-downs from the past lives
Who were set to fail to shine
Free sand running between the clean, priceless hands
Replaceable melanin hands carry dried sand
Stuck on the glue from the past

Forget the sky is the limit- well maybe for some
For others, its rule barely centimeters above the ground
They set us up like legos
Feed our brothers candy and spoons full of sugar for breakfast
And feed the royal egg whites and orange juice
They give us old bikes with rusty chains to ride
But give the royal new bikes with a bell and a cute little basket set aside

As generations come and go our past is slowly nothing but a lie
They yell equal this, equal that
Freedom that, freedom this
With a feather and rocks on either side

The scale will always be down on one side
on the night the Chicago Cubs win the World Series, i am thinking about water
for Standing Rock

and oil
and arms
and tarps
and the way
they can be
tsunami’d
over fields
to protect
the bodies
with mouths
like wells
with oil
and names
like prayers
and dirt
that carries
and dirt
that holds
the names
like prayers
and prayers
with names
i remember
and bodies
i remember
the bodies
with mouths
open
and spilling
oil
and blood
and oil
and blood
Our beliefs for dates have changed in the last decade

It seems the idea of respect has become a huge barricade

Where have we gone wrong to show affection for our partners?

We do so little, but cry so much when they announce their departure

The norm back then was getting to know your significant other

Now it’s “We just talk” with no interest or bother

The first impression is your best impression

So why settle for the free sex and an uber is my question

Nothing wrong with expressing yourself, but c'mon you have standards

Boys and Girls we are the laughing generation that shows no manners

Let’s show the old timers that we can carry on their legacy

That we do love each other and not let our defined word be rarity

We can go on long walks in the parks or even catch a live show

Enjoying one’s company is all that is wanted—nothing below

Do I think we can take on this heavy challenge?

Yes, we can it, only takes patience and knowledge
MIND & SOUL

BODY IMAGE
EVERY SHAPE & SIZE
IS BEAUTIFUL

Black
is
Beautiful!

YOURSELF

PRIDE
I believe
I’m just a Puerto Rican boy from a poor community
Because of that I have a lot to say
Drove past my old block the other day
Barricaded by cops with a yellow tape stretched out
What else do I have to say
What I believe

Doesn’t come from a false priest and his principles
It doesn’t come from my Spanish culture and its rituals

It comes from what I see
Just because I’m young doesn’t mean that the naked
eye can’t see the government’s lies
I believe that no matter the situation a baby shouldn’t
be left outside with a donation sign
I don’t care how high you are
If you are so high in the clouds
that they blind you

acting like Superman
red cape so we can find you
better wake up cause no man is left behind

13 Hours
Great movie
And for those kids who were left with siblings to raise
I applaud you

You were a stronger person than the one who birthed
you

I believe that every person is given a choice
You can either keep the catfished theme
You know the
Captions and pictures on Instagram
False images

Cause the same fella that’s on the gram acting godly
Is the same one flipping burgers at Burger King
That’s living in the basement of his momma house
asking her to cook cause he’s hungry
But always say he got money
The same kid running the block

A POEM BY DANIEL HEREDIA

Cause I Believe

Smoking a lot
Hiding from cops
Humping the thots
With the fake MK watch
And the tatted eye
Drop

False prophet
Teaching things that he shouldn’t be teaching
Painted this picture
All hands are reaching

Black Lives Matter
And yes we like to believe it
And we can march for a reason
But if we can’t get wealthy white people
To preach it
It’s meaningless
You sh*t outta luck
Forever washing dishes
Sorry Martin Luther King, Jr.
Seems that all your work to stop racism ended to degree
Unless
To live
Or fight for
A life of determination and concentration
Focus on a dream
Don’t have no hood wife
Pops said you can’t take the hood out of the life
But maybe
Just maybe
You realize
You can do anything you set your mind to
Your focus needs more focus
Mr. Miagi quotes as a way to remind you
I believe that police brutality is based of ignorant
mentalities
They believe scars should remain on black people backs
Cause they don’t want to see you take action
Snap crackle and pop
Makes me think that rice crispy is prejudice
They use the same names they used to explain slave trade
And hardship
Watching the poor bleed
No money for the homeless
Then wanna watch them catch a disease
Drop like fleas
Somebody please

That smell of burned money filled your room like Hawaiian
breeze
It’s febreze
Watching the poor bleed
No money for the homeless
Then wanna watch them catch a disease
Drop like fleas
Somebody please

Just know if the world not right
They’ll make a mess in your kitchen
It’s crucial you’re smart with decisions
I believe that the land of the free
Is the land of the weak
They talk about issues and how we improved
Years later the same issue occurs
So what

You merely gave it a pillow and put it to sleep
Hope doesn’t empty the belly of the beast
Beast being it
Belly being
Me and you
Gave me Advil to surpass the pain
But when it goes away
My life remains the same

I believe that soon enough
Based on presidential elections
Boo Trump
Based on new ideas
Dividing Mexico
Based on selfish minds and beliefs
Sorry LGBT you might have to put up another fight
I believe that there will be a war
A war within states
President Day arrived

Poor go to jail so they can eat
And I understand you worked hard for your green money
tree
Banked loaded with cash
Bought an airplane
Kinda hoped that you crashed it
Paper spent on selfish needs
What if the money caught on fire
That Bentley got a flat tire
Series of unfortunate events
What I predicted was right
A March came up saying ‘f’ Trump, take his life
Aren’t we birthed from immigration though
Inspiration created a nation though
Foundation grew generations though

But I got this idea
This idea that’s lurking
That I wanna be like fierce like Ali
I wanna break rules like Parks
Spread the word like Tupac
Act like Washington
Denzel
Best actor of all time
Got me engaged and intrigued
That if it was me
I’d be the baddest cat out there b
You’re either a somebody or a nobody
American Gangster

But I realized the greatest I can be is Me
I believe that the greatest anyone can be is the person they see in the mirror
The mirror can be cracked but there is always a clear figure
It doesn’t change the vision
Only the appearance that given
I believe that you are America’s greatest attribute
Teens are the next big thing
Don’t let the stuff we live in guide you
And just because we are at the bottom
Doesn’t mean there’s a dream we shouldn’t climb to
Cause I believe
I am accustomed to locked doors.

*Tu lugar es en la casa, muchachita,* my mami says. Your place is in the house, little girl.

I hear, nothing gold can stay, my dear, but you, I will keep pure. Her tight grasp shields my vision and her convictions drown out the whispers across the threshold.

She tells me her dreams—those she has managed to hold dear. She envisions prosperity for her children. Anything less would mean that her tremendous quest to split the ocean in half was fruitless. This country has provided us with a foundation of security. It now guards the exit like a doormat, reminding me that I should be grateful for my confinement.

Only I am not.

My mother’s instinct to protect me is derived from the wisdom of experience. Yet, this history is also the reason that she will never understand why I long to be unsure. As the daughter of a woman intimately familiar with the terrors of darkness, I am defying both tradition and reason by craving the nights I might not remember.

Time and time again, my mother sacrifices portions of her true self without realizing that the missing pieces do not simply disappear.

She has passed them on to me; I am the woman starring in both of our dreams. Does she remember? Can she see the similarities between who she used to be and the young woman that I am becoming? As I step farther away from home, the purple moons under my eyes darken.
They are no longer from deprived sleep, but from too much sleep. I drift and reawaken in another world, that at times, appears to be another universe.

Five hundred miles off the coast of the Dominican Republic, on a manmade yola heading towards the United States, I see my mami. She is alone. Huddled over like an infant, she tries, and fails, to remain unseen. The tremble in her hands, the quick intake of her warm breath, her pink tongue sneaking out every few seconds or so to wet her lips—these signs reveal her fear. She hums to herself in an attempt to drown out the cries of the menstruating woman thrown overboard by fellow passengers who fear the wrath of sharks. The smell of barf lingers in the air, as do the cries of children whose parents boarded the yola heading towards the land of the free. Her sobs during those dark nights are the perennial echo that haunts me even when the stars are replaced by the blinding light of the sun.

In solidarity with the countless women of color who were excluded from our forefathers’ discussion of the Declaration of Independence, with the courageous advocates of the suffragist movement, and with those who fight daily to protect Planned Parenthood’s right to exist, I can see that my mother’s journey is just one of many. Even if her story is not recorded in any textbook, she is much more than a footnote in history.

Despite my mami’s need to keep me as she could not be— a blossoming flower in a serene, gated garden— it is time I confess my dreams. I choose to reach up and out towards the sun. And though she may be devastated, I have to explain that purity is no more than repressed frustration. To remain golden as nature's first green is not to exist.

I will honor my mother by breaking down the doors that her possessive love has placed in front of me. Her fight will not die. It will be traced along the scars from the momentous adventures she has warned me to avoid.

I will feel like I have died a thousand deaths only to wake up refreshed in the morning.

I will know what it means to live.
I BELIEVE THAT EVERY MAN WAS CREATED EQUAL NO MATTER WHERE THEY CAME FROM AND NO MATTER HOW THEY GREW UP.

MR

I BELIEVE IN SAYING HELLO.

-SF

I believe that if we all tried to be a little more understanding of each other, the world would be a better place. Just a little.

MC

We can not only be more than we think, but we can be more powerful than we are today.

-JH

Sporks are superior to forks.

-FA
I believe in the Golden Rule.
If everybody followed that, we'd be a better community.

-GV

I believe people in their heart of hearts want to be their best selves.

-IH

I believe they need permission and an invitation to do so.

-JS

I believe in the humanitarian spirit of all people, and that it can defeat our utilitarian impulses.

-KV
Aliens are real. -JV

- I BELIEVE IN 3RD CHANCES. -ZS

I BELIEVE IN MYSELF. NO ONE ELSE KNOWS ME LIKE I KNOW ME. -BH

no one's SHINE SHOULD BE DIMMED BY SOCIETY'S EXPECTATIONS. I BELIEVE IN love. -JR

IF PEOPLE HAD MORE compassion THIS WOULD REALLY BE A BETTER WORLD. -CO