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## A Word for Mama

by  
Ebony Christie

*If you happen to stumble upon these words, I'm not seeking any remorse because this is my story. A memoir. We all have one. Choosing to live out your truth unapologetically offers a form of freedom that's refreshing as the wind. Though these words illustrate the pain of a motherless child, it is also something I believe is worth sharing with you.*

### THIS IS ME.

My name is Sloanee. I know it's abnormal to be formally introducing myself to a piece of paper that's of sacred value, but my grandma didn't raise me otherwise. Grandma raised me to be strong. She raised me to be respectful. She raised me to not follow the flock but be the leader of the pack. Grandma and I knocked heads a whole lot, but I'm grateful for her hands even when being scolded for bad behavior. Anyways, getting back to the subject of why I'm even writing this, I was given the name Sloanee after my great-great grandfather on my daddy's side of the family. I have two "e's" at the end of my name because my mama knew she was having a girl or that's what my daddy tells me. Sloanee means warrior, and I carry that with pride because it reminds me that I can make it in a world where things aren't black and white. As I write on these pages, you— as my diary— will come to understand that there is a blanket of grey in my life that will never go away. It's with me wherever I go. It is a form a grey that reminds me that my own American Dream isn't a two-parent household. It is a dream that is illustrated in the form an older generation deciding to serve as my village. What first started off as shame has turned into acceptance. An acceptance that shines through my skin, and one that's ok with being different

from the rest. As these words bleed freely on this paper, I feel freedom withering in my bones. Mama. . . . I'm free, free at last.

#### A BROKEN RITUAL.

“Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete? Proving nature’s law is wrong, it learned to walk without having feet. Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams, it learned to breathe fresh air. Long live the rose that grew from the concrete when no one else ever cared,” I read aloud a poem by Tupac Shakur. Though the course of our lives was different, Tupac and I share something in common. I too am a rose that grew from cement. Growing up not knowing my biological mother and my dad living in another city, no antidote could properly heal. In America, it felt like a slap in the face to those, like me, who had no control over our parental relations. As a child looking through the lens of harsh judgments, I internalized the false narrative that a concrete-grown rose isn’t nearly as valuable as one that follows the traditional steps of prosperity—place seed in mineral-rich soil with direct sunlight, water daily with the love of a mother and father, wait for a perfect rose to bloom. No other options. No alternative route. As a child who didn’t know her mother and whose father lived in a different city, it seemed I was destined never to become a beautiful rose. I wouldn’t fully realize this until I entered grade school. It had become overwhelmingly apparent that a mother-daughter relationship was something that had completely skipped over me. I remember sitting at the circular table with my kindergarten class, and my convivial demeanor shifting, when one of my classmates asked me about my parents. Frantic, I somehow managed to convince my peers that my guardians were my biological mother and father, and that I too had obtained the American Dream.

When I turned five, I was afraid to tell the truth, because of the fear of rejection and judgment. If they ever were to find out that the reality of it all was that I didn't have a mommy and a daddy but instead that my grandparents were my legal guardians.

I had been defeated by society's unforgiving belief that a perfect rose had to be nurtured in a two-parent home. This need to lie soon morphed into anger and jealousy. Seeing the girls in my class nonchalant and unable to compartmentalize how blessed they were to have an active mother—something that I so desired—was completely unfair and selfish. Why did I have to be the imperfect rose? Though my grandparents' unconditional love was sufficient, it didn't live up to those three simple steps of prosperity. It was as if the universe had purposefully placed my rose on a route to complete damnation. I knew nothing about the picture of my reflection I so often caressed with my fingertips.

For years I struggled with understanding that simple question—"Why did I have to be the imperfect rose?" But as I grew older, I became content. Content with the life and imperfections within my rose God had given me. The contentment with my imperfect rose would only increase when I exposed myself to a world outside of my own. *I wasn't alone*. There were millions of people like Tupac and I, who were imperfect but determined. Since a young age, America had brainwashed me to believe that because I knew nothing about my mother, success was farfetched. But in this life, there was no equation or exact way to reach prosperity. With my grandparents standing in the gap to serve as my guardians, and my grandmother filling the motherless void, I was secure. But unlike most women who nurtured their roses through a means of compassion, my grandmother's technique of nurturing was displayed through tough love. Though not every moment of her affection was pleasing, my imperfect rose was growing to withstand the harsh realities of this world. The lack of affection taught me to trust my instincts

and let my actions of hard work and ability to sacrifice speak for my character. Not knowing my biological mother had caused a fracture in my rose, but it gave me the hunger to resist complacency. This testimony of my mother's absence has allowed me to see that a "perfect" rose doesn't exist. My imperfections separate me from my counterparts, and like Tupac, I decided to use scars caused by the weight of the concrete as my greatest asset for the future and will dare to be different.

### #BLM – MY ANCESTORS WIDLEST DREAM.

A four by four, mahogany-brown box sat perfectly on the old hickory chest in the guest room of my one-story home. In the biblical text, an alabaster is depicted as a box used to protect something of value. My family heirloom, while not made of alabaster, represents something that's precious and that needs to be protected—the African American community. Though it didn't possess a voice to speak for itself on the outer surface, inside my box contained what I most cherished. This box holds value that no money could buy. It carries a dark past. It contains hope for a brighter future. Bruises and scrapes wrapped around its perimeter but remained intact. Its small stature gave way to an uncompromisable strength that I most admired. How could this alabaster box —stripped of its identity and forced to conform to the standards of a land unknown to it— stand unwaveringly strong? Inside the box was a community of people that shared a common denominator which gave me comfort. Each time I opened the box I was reminded of the rich shades of black that had somehow crafted their own culture; inspired by the land from which it was stolen. In simpler terms, here in this alabaster box was a community I had come to identify with. Raised by those who had undergone racial disparities, I had come to understand the value of our struggles. Nurtured by the folktales and legends, I admired the superstitions that

determined whether the trust could be extended. Four hundred years of captivity and the black brothers and sisters within my box had managed — with gruesome consequences— to loosen the shackles that alienated them to inhumane conditions. My alabaster box peacefully resting on the chest, held the testimonies of countless warriors who fought to secure my freedom. The selfless ambition to execute the acts of civil disobedience by my ancestors fueled the drive to settle for nothing less than what we deserved. If it weren't for the contents that resided in this box, would I have had to endure direct hardships? Besides the lessons of resilience and bravery that ran deep throughout this box, there was one thing that struggled to manifest: an internal deficiency that needed improvement. Our predecessors had brainwashed us to believe that one shade of melanin took precedence over others. The lighter shades of black somehow had more leverage in a society not made for darker complexions. This false narrative sold by the oppressor placed both colorism and a superiority complex in this precious box. Our efforts to fight against the racial divide had become clouded with insecurity and a lack of unity. The bullet of hate had found its way into the brown box with one of our kind pulling the trigger and paralyzing our ability to support and uplift ourselves. The Black community, my alabaster box —far from perfect, but forever progressing— I had unconditionally come to love.