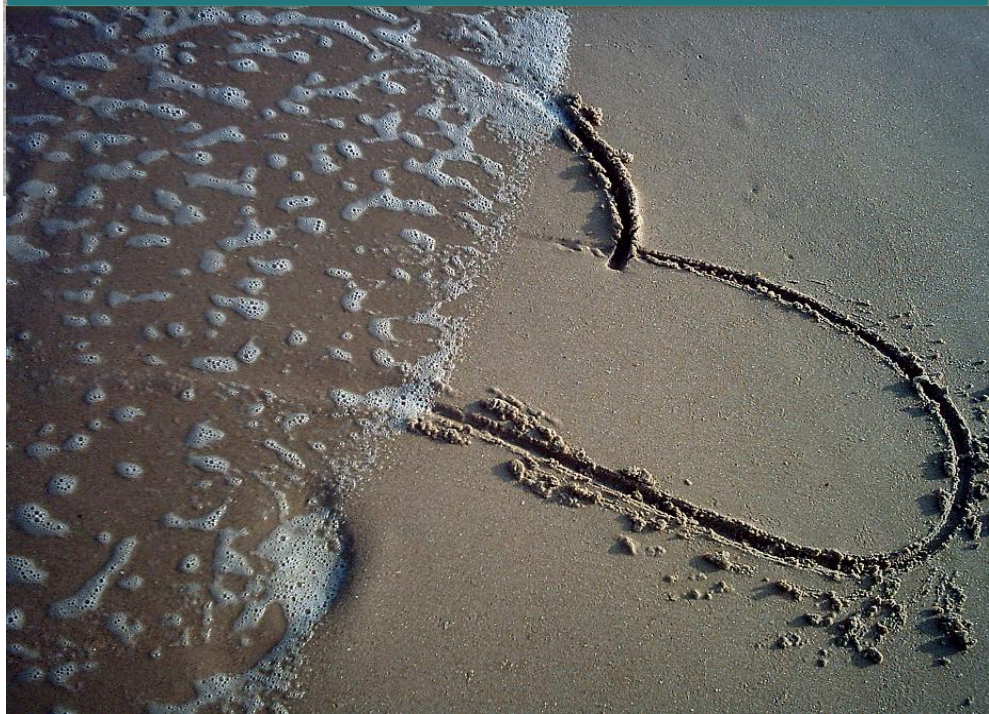




REMEMBER ME NOT

A Collection of Poetry



RENITA BRYANT

Remember Me Not (A Collection of Poetry)

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Myndmatters1@gmail.com

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Love, By Definition

Some relationships teach only of the nothingness of love
When what we were no longer exists, replaced by something we never
wanted to be
Empty doesn't come close to describing the gaping hole left by
another person's broken promises
And crippled substance
As they offer both everything and nothing simultaneously

Some people know only of the incompleteness of love
Starting and re-starting and stopping because their minds race
Their focus unclear, their hearts unsettled
Still they search and destroy
Seeking to defend, leaving long before the end
His nonconforming plot trapping her in an unassuming ploy

Some entanglements reveal only the passion of love
One-sided connections leaving us resigned to unworthiness
While filling the trespasser with our goodness and relief
Servicing undeserving associations
Incongruent actions misaligned with false promises and broken
beliefs

Some stories only give voice to the misrepresentations of love
Fairy-tale endings never meant to see day's light in the wake of reality
As lines are written with fallacious accuracy
Product positioning to promote the promise of something better
Trusting both at once, a life wrought with duality

Love, by definition, teaches and grows and endures and completes
Arrested by breaths of affirmation, suspended in time and tomorrows
Opposed to leaving you without, as it only knows how to fill
Its very nature wholeness realized
Consistent actions confined within commitments seal

When you love rightly, you inherently reap
Lifetimes are crystallized and joy emits from favored emotion
As it is evidenced by your words and deeds and thoughts

Suspended in potential and purpose
Conceived with greatness and fullness
It becomes the very nature of devotion

But only when you love, by definition.

Temptation

I looked temptation in the eyes and called it by name—your name
I smiled and laughed and loved this newfound gift given to my heart
and flesh and mind
Somehow forgot I my spirit and soul satisfaction
Because for now I was happy and tickled pink by his smiles and touch
and words that caressed my entire being and body and conversation
I was smiling with molars that never ceased to shine and show my
excitement and elation
We traveled roads never journeyed and paths never crossed by the
me that was present before he was
My hands became workers and soldiers committed to work for him by
him to him in all manners and acts

I looked temptation in the eyes and called it by name—your name
In the database of my mind a red flag warned me that my pseudo-
fairyland could not exist in our real world
But I justified that notion with rational discussions of ‘past distrust’
It was acceptable to love him and need him and feel satisfied through
him
We both wanted equal justice and social consciousness, awareness
spreading through out and through in this nation and our sister
worlds to incite mankind to stand and fight and change their
condition and not become complacent in this modern-day Babylon

But now I demand alone
Now I demand for him to be the Man he claimed and professed to be
before the revolutions and journeys and making of love around lakes
and parks and paths...

We both wanted to take long walks and recite verses and educate our
minds and feed our soul with words of exhaustion and strength and
longevity to continue onwards to futures where we wrapped
ourselves in the other while Vandross crooned in the background...

But now I dream alone
Now I have thoughts of his whispers fading into the soundtrack of my
life mixing with the other apologies and confusions caused by people

with a purpose of another mission that just so happened to collide
with mine

Our coincidence

I looked my temptation in the eyes and chose not to walk away—then

But now I have been forced to rid myself of the foul existence that we
were and were destined to be in my life

No touch or feel or word or deed could erase the void I felt when I felt
I loved you

On purpose

In spite of

In recognition of this commencement I should leap over your
degradation and inner hatred of the girl you attempted to conquer
and defeat

I should smile laughs of joys your heart could never provide for my
spirit and soul satisfaction because now I am the dream I used to
dream with you

Now I am the blessing you didn't know you had until God blessed me
by removing it from you

Now I can look you in the eyes and simply—walk away.

Remnants from Relationships I

We were friends once
Existing in a time when we meant the world to one another
Fighting for versus fighting with
Hoping to build a future rather than rewrite a past

Broken mirrors reflect our long forgotten honesty
Cracked lines venturing into spaces our hearts never could
Finger-stroked cheeks erase shadows left by dark clouds
A life marred by our being

Even when I forgot to remember how much I needed you, there you
were
Ever present acceptance cradled and lulled me back to infancy
Strength swaddled by juvenile insecurity
Never once demanding to receive anything other than what you
already had
Giving so much, demanding so little

A lifetime cannot undo our actions in a moment's time
Careless yet determined aims
Breaths hollowed by years of silenced truth
Feelings deteriorated by memories of neglected bonds

Miscommunication, confusion, dysfunction became our daily language
Speaking recklessly, talking senselessly as days evolved into nights
Until the only thing remaining was a chasm spanning our disparate
realities
But somewhere in the depths of my longing, your voice soothes my
aching hurt

Because as much as I remember the remnants left behind by our
collective goodbyes
Memory holds tight to the promise hoped for in our initial hello
Lest we not forget, we were friends once.

My Song of Lust

A friend once said that love isn't blind but lust is
Cause love sees and accepts while lust feeds and neglects
And I agreed with that confession
Cause I've been introduced to that lust thing
Tending to be pretending and deceiving while scheming

Not so much me but him I say
And maybe I didn't pay attention to his arrogance
Cause I thought it was confidence elevated to higher levels
And when vanity introduced itself I stood and applauded for the man
that was aware of self
But confused was I cause this bottle was a bottom shelf brand
misplaced by a past love to the top shelf
But stupidity renamed itself ignorance and I kept wearing a
transparent fold over blinded eyes
And telling myself these lies that get a smile
Out of even me—now, not then

It's almost a new philosophy except it introduces no new concepts
Cause I believe you know truth
You know internally if he isn't committed to being the thing that you
need
So while love sees an arrogant gem, lust envisions a rare stone
While love sees him for what he truly is, lust can't leave for interest
and intrigue
It just cannot leave this man alone
And so my song became unpredictably staccato
Lines on repeat
Jumping to the hook
Dysfunctional rhythms and beats of defeat
And mistreatin' verses but I let his angry surges slide
Cause I didn't see pride
Only a man confident of self and aware
Nothing more or less well maybe less but...

Back to my tests and trials
So I continued acting insane in my membrane long enough for even
me to get nauseated

And I finally started seeing clearly
No, not nearly because I was in love but because I was in hell
I was sick of his scent and his voice and his touch and his selfish ways
I wanted to take my fists and knock this man-child upside his air-filled
head
Leaving him as a comatose victim for days
While I mess up his credit, destroy his car, rip his clothes, and leave
him with that pit in the bottom of this life
Parallel to mine
Emotions even Webster can't define
Devotions that make pastors testify
Commotion that blows rinds off of Florida citrus
I want him to cause an evolution
start a revolution
be profound rather than a bloodhound
Find two words and make them rhyme
Or rub them together and make the earth spin
Clear off its axis like he did my head
Cause he was my lust and I was his
Until the fold stopped being blind

Now you see why I agreed with that confession
Love isn't blind but lust clearly is
Love would've tried to strengthen and mend while lust knew to
retreat and pretend
Love would stay to defend itself but lust doesn't have the same
chemical composition
It more closely aligns as an inert emotion
a good enough potion
Void of active ingredients
So it runs like Tom Hanks in Forrest Gump
Over mountains through woods and down that football field
It tries to disguise itself in nice clothes or fancy cars or well decorated
homes that his wages can support
But my common sense must stop it and find a means to resort with a
quick-witted retort of sorts
Because I'm tired of child's play

Hopefully the station will someday change and I will enjoy the smooth
melody of off-key singers and bad tones of tone def men

But until then, I'll just have to be content singing alone
'Cause I've heard enough of these lust songs

I can write an entire album on my own.

LIVING

Learning your past is the key to life
Discovering your end as your new beginning
Leaning upon that which filled you with strife
Realizing your price paid for living

Relying on truth you never knew
Sending your heart to uncharted places
Denying those things which once defined you
Leading your mind through unfamiliar spaces

To walk through the storm and also the fire
Remaining grounded in every aspect
To understand yesterday is tomorrow's desire
Remembering in life there are no regrets

Forgive the mistakes; forget all the wrong
Stay focused; allow life to simply go on.

On Purpose

I loved you on purpose, on point, on cue
without restrictions, thoughts, constraints, or questions
I freely offered my purest rendition for your soul and spirit
satisfaction
your careless actions excused by my mellowed thoughts and
unyielding bind
constantly wanting to have your wholeness blend with my
iterations
attaching to the you I *assumed* existed
but time revealed a mental lapse running around the tracks of
my mind
twisting-turning-jerking-snatching me back to experiences
both cherished and detested
and while I would assume mass confusion for this sanity-
challenged state
I have found a haven safe from you and yours for me and mine

I loved you on purpose, on point, on cue
without lies, suggestions, coercion, or inconsistency
I wholly embraced the shell that enclosed the spirit and soul of
you
those facets of you the world rebuked and you yourself fought
to deny
new life was what you promised with your smiles that could
anchor boats floating over tears left by past loves
both prisoners to pasts never meant to see our future
vows made by juvenile hearts with hollowed words

I was on point and on cue with my love for you
You rejected me
you made me the remainder of our division because you plus
me divided by you equated to me
loving alone
you kept the compass and maps to keep me dependent on
you needing you forgiving your behavior with my apologies
and spiritual nature
we laid together
no bed of lust and sin-sick guise

we were wrapped in our den of passion
pure and simple
chaste and plain
and while I dared to fully comprehend the blending of wrong
for reasons of right, I tried

You were so sweet to me
nectar-filled goodness wrapped in a butterscotch package
chocolate eyes and silky skin
I was drowning in your taste and your scent and your
everything that now means nothing to me
you discarded us by simply walking away
you left me buckled and bruised from the mental fists and
emotional punches that escaped your control in fits of
selfishness and silence
I lost the dream I used to dream with you
sacrificing the hope I once had in you
my fictional truth
somehow with opened eyes I found you *only* good and sweet
and right in those dreams
reality wasn't kind to you or me for you and me
I discovered how true my emotions were and how tangible you
weren't
I made you what I wanted and needed you to be
my unrelenting error

My love was on point and on cue for you
I provided no disguises, no secrets, no nothing for you to be to
me what you were
I was heels over head in love with you
I sipped from every word that slipped from your lips, swam
across the spans of air and time and finally rested in my ears
why couldn't you be the man you needed to be
why couldn't you voice the words of commitment, freely
whispering to my heart
silencing all else, even our mutual fears
pressured by nothing but your own empty promises
why couldn't you love me on point and on cue
or simply on purpose.

Love Me Simply

You refused to love me simply
Because it wasn't the easiest fit
My inconvenient presence
Blending with your inconsistent benefit

You were slow to love me simply
As I occupied too much space and time
Not enough hours to fill us both
So you acquired another woman's bottom line

You tried never to love me simply
Refusing the uncomplicatedness I became
Boring but loyal, sincere and true
A barrier to your desire for more dramatic aims

You didn't consider loving me simply
Ignoring the notion for a second's fraction
Instead you chose silence as your representative
Perverted purpose revealed through hypothetical actions

You have no right to love me simply
Lost forever by your own confused state
Or maybe that was your angle all along
And I am the one that fell for the proverbial bait

I no longer love you deeply
Forgotten promises of potential tomorrows
I choose to leave your life and heart
Reclaimed dreams traded for tear-soaked sorrows

Now I celebrate loving me completely
With the freedom you chased but could never afford
Strongly, safely, consistently, in all ways transparent
My forevers etched on love's doorway
My future and present self aligned and in accord

I no longer need what I once wanted from you

I no longer request what I once demanded from you

... Because now I simply can't.

I Assumed You...

From the very beginning
I assumed you

I assumed you wouldn't hurt me
With inconsistency and negativity
If your mind and body could ensure my peace
I assumed you wouldn't disrespect me
By consciously dismissing me and my needs
Simply to satisfy something with no substance only a quick release
I assumed you couldn't lie to me
And fill my head with fantasies and pleasantries that equate to
nothing
Cause I assumed that wasn't your style

I was consumed by my own assumptions though
I was consumed by the words that slipped from your soft lips
and landed in the puddle that resided between my ears
Cause I desired your attention
Not to mention my consumption with your touch and feel that led me
to
Uncharted places and unknown spaces in my heart's atmosphere
My illusions consumed me
How dare I contemplate a future when the past is all you live in
Giving in to your pushing and tugging at my heart's strings
How dare I dream scenes of love and friendship and happiness and
everything
How dare I simply dream of you
Maybe we so happened to collide one night
Misdirected vessels
Say we coincidentally decided that the strength it took to get us here
would be present and consistent afterwards
Our mass confusion
My disillusion
Meant hurt for me and pain for me and an apology for you

I find shame in my knowing I can't blame you
A truth discovered when I glanced at my own track record
Being an adult means more than being of age

It's a reality that sheds light on one's own inconsistency
My disconnects my mistakes my moments in history
Excuse me for considering something past our here and now
Forgive me for thinking of walks along the beach and late night dances
under the stars

I did not remind myself that you were unreliable
I did not remember to never forget that you were untrustworthy
I stopped contemplating your good and I made you good enough
I made you the man I saw in your future form
Which left me torn
And tattered and tried and alone
Still assuming you were not the voice that lied to me
Still believing you were not the eyes that looked elsewhere for
affection
Another woman's confection

So now I stand as the ass alongside you
Now I am ignorance walking in light
Now I have a story from which to speak
A strength that evolved from weeks of weakness
Now I no longer have to assume

Because now
I know you.

Maybe, Another Lifetime

Maybe tomorrow I will exist in a form that sets your heart ablaze
Wanting every fiber of my being to connect with yours
Not resigned to shallow wants for your body's desire
More pleasing to your eyes, better fit for your hands

Possibly next week my deference and vulnerability will be cherished
Celebrated as a complex existence partaken by you
Not bound to waters of insufferable temperatures
Discarded sincerity lost in your ignorance

Perhaps next year I'll spark some semblance of desire
Naturally accepted with no pseudo layers to cover my beauty
Not plagued by insecurities you created
Denied instability found noble in your eyes

Perchance next lifetime I'll be someone else
No wandering mind or unsettled spirit will fill nature's void
My everything will mean something
Hope restored as you gaze upon me with unbridled passion
Finally drawn to me, finally choosing me
Wanting desperately to hear those words dance from your lips

Yes, I lost myself somewhere along the way but at least I am finally
good enough for you.

Happy-Go-Lucky Poetry

You wanted me to write a poem that wouldn't make you responsible
for my pain or accountable for my hurt

But I couldn't

I couldn't find an instance where I wasn't reading your mind or
excusing your actions

Wasting my borrowed time to do the work that had your name
attached

I considered starting with our humbled beginning but there was
nothing happy about being your afterthought

Operating as a substitute for your hearts subliminal wants

You were tossed aside and so did the same to me

A hurting person aimed to repeat the cycles unlearned from the past

Avoiding our truth by walking out of my life so effortlessly

Misguided love struck ill by misplaced ill-fitting feelings

I was never happy go lucky with you so why pretend to be in my
poetry

You confused me.

I was lonely and frustrated with you.

You rejected me.

After you decided to go, I called and He came

That's when I found happiness

It's been the only time I ever felt lucky.

Mass Confusion

I cannot let go

Every thought in my mind and sound in my ears and sight in my eyes
is begging my heart to release the stronghold he has on me

Can I walk away and not be constantly tempted and tainted and
tormented by the thoughts of him and me and us relating on those
deeper levels during those midnight hours?

We were dangerous and doomed from the location at which we chose
to start

No longer is this fascination attached to an expectation of love
because I am simply trapped in the sensationalism of our bond

He loves me and doesn't want to walk away. I desire him and struggle
daily to demolish the chains

I am a sinner rowing up an unknown creek without a paddle or a
prayer

I made the call

Only trying to fulfill the growing blaze that overwhelmed the stronger
nature fighting within me

I wanted to give in

I needed him to come inside of my intricacy without asking for
anything else

I urged him to liberate his heart and soul within my complexity not
assuming something else

I decided to owe him nothing except for the goodness I sought to
share with him

I must let go of this thing that has yet to demonstrate purpose in my
life

It has become my duty to find strength to defeat the lurking adversary
inherent in my temptation

His kindness and sweet naiveté summon me incessantly like the flame
that seduces the moth
I am basking in his craving for me

His adoration confuses the me that is present after the windstorms
have left
The me still standing after the downpour of rain and realism.

I needed something from him

There was a deliverable I could not find tangible until I called and he
came
It was simple and necessary and true

Too bad the full essence of it cannot reside in my mass confusion
Because if it could I would define it and name it and write poems
about it
I would designate honorary degrees for it and admire it up close and
from afar

I am called to live in confusion because it nourishes me
This state comforts and cradles and incites me with words and
thoughts and verses that other states cannot manage

I had to have him on my terms

Although accomplished, something won't allow me to simply walk
away
This thing I cannot comprehend through denotation has me bound
and submissive and tolerating and enduring for an intention I cannot
fathom

My delusion.

I had to find the place that was the spot that was the location that was
the site at which my transformation could occur.
Because I can no longer deal with me in regards to him and
concerning us.

I long to be free from this confusion that jails me within walls of still
loving you-can I love you-do you love me

He and I were not compatible in the common sense
We related on planes and in skies overlooking galaxies that fit into the
small of our collective hands
We were a combination of wrongs and rights in all facets of the words

Our collusion.

We thought it was right because nothing else had ever compared to
what we shared
We assumed that love felt like this and was supposed to hurt and
confuse and keep awake at night the people accepting it and wanting
it and needing it

But I, no matter how visible the answer is cannot say goodbye
I cannot turn away from the desire scathing me on the inside
I cannot release the emotions causing my heart to implode and all my
organs to erupt in a sea of sobs and groans of heartache

Mass confusion lives because I give it permission to do so
It functions because I allow it a comfortable setting in which to
operate
I provide the oxygen from which it pulls breath

Maybe one of these days love's confusion will grow old and dissipate
into a lake of laughter from the joy and excitement of contentment
and genuine forever afters
But for now I bare it and it bares me

After all, it is *my* mass confusion.

A Poem for My Mother Vanessa
(October 4, 1963 - May 11, 2006)

I wanted to write a poem to convey how my heart feels
but mere words could not express enough
and rhyming patterns felt too unreal
How could simple lines and stanzas testify
to the gratitude I have
the attitude I have
Fear I, dissecting the emotions in half
Due to insecure accent schemes and immature usage means
all in an attempt to tell you - I Love You

I wanted to write a song to inform the masses of my adoration of you
my infatuation with the strength of you
the skill of you
but I doubt they could comprehend your beauty
and magnificence in this lifetime
Reciprocate your radiance, respect, and righteousness in HIS life's
time
But the song would appear wildly staccato and incomplete
and I'd risk missing the beat to tell you- I Praise You

I wanted to write a script with characters that could sum to the one of
you
But I doubt simply two could pay tribute to the work you do
The right you do, the hands you lend
A virtuous woman comfortable in her own skin
Journeying along God's plan
But with the media's current direction
I'd fear losing who you truly are to who they'd market you to be
Causing me to lose at my attempt at saying - I Honor You

So instead I'm dedicating a lifetime, my life's line
To giving back what you have given me
- Helping strangers because change starts with one person
- Working in the background because not everyone needs to be center-
stage
- Taking responsibility because accountability builds character
- Loving those around me because harboring hatred will hurt only me

- Not being ashamed of who I am/what I am but embracing what God's making me, the quest on which He's taking me
But only if in my life's span I am able to depict that through it ALL
I've been trying to show how much I THANK YOU.

-Originally written/presented Mother's Day 2005

The One

It takes a **Confident** woman to unite with you
To become alright with you
Bask in the light of you
Rejoice at the might of God's presence in you
Witness the essence of love's capture of you
Watch as your goodness...
Your gentleness...
Your greatness comes into full view
Percolate as your purpose pulls you ... To HER

I know it must take a **Patient** woman to align with you
Disregard the valley's low to spend time with you
Incite a rhyme or two dedicated to the core of you
The folklore of the mystery of you
The history of you
Conscious of life's trials on you
Overcoming obstacles as your destiny is realized ... Through HER

I assume it takes a **Loving** woman to match the passion of you
Evolve darkness into light through the sincerity of you
Temperature climbing at first sight of you
Surrendering helplessly as the smile of you
Envelops her, revising the style of you
Only to witness your uniqueness
Peculiar made righteous as your future is revealed ... With HER

I see that it takes a **Spiritual** woman to balance the force of you
Give structure to the depth of you
Following the ordered steps of you
Helping direct the focus of you
So that God's blessings befall the both of you
Fasting, praying, and consecrating to purify the soul of who
she recognizes you to be in God's eyes
Pressing towards the mark of a higher calling ... in HIM

I am certain that it requires a **Special** woman to see her future with you
Able to support the goals of you
Memorize the mold of you
Forgiving the mistakes of you
Starting over to celebrate love's fate with you
Defending against the foes of you
Protecting the brilliant smile of who

She sees as her past, her present, and her future

The journey was always simply about finding ***The One.***

Think About It...

I'm starting to think you really don't think
about what I say, do or feel
Because without conscience you dismiss my needs
Justifying your actions with baseless sentiments of what's real

I wanted to be more than your friend or pal
Considered a desired addition to your life
Significant position over random access
Full potential of someday being called your wife

I'm worth more than just a physical spar
My body valued beyond your after-thoughts
And not subjected to maybe later or rather-nots
Distanced away and considered a lower bar

Offering only time remaining as your compromise
I get rejected with the dismissive quickness
Only brought back into your fold for sweet releases
But *she* gets considered and granted wishes

My all is not enough, I now see
Were you too weak and afraid to admit it before?
It was only something temporary you did seek
Hidden behind a good guy ill-framed door

You thought you were shielding me from pain
Left to wonder the path you chose alone
But I decided in your first hello
With me, I wouldn't allow your heart to find its home

To say I didn't love would be an understatement
To say I lied would be a purer truth
To admit I fell for something I never wanted
Would it be the worse thing I could do?

Remember Me Not

Remember me not for the love I offered but the time I lost
Pursuing prospects with no focused aims of securing me
Left as an abandoned notion in their converged minds and hearts
Escaped ideals freed by time's powerful reality

Know not my life by her constant chimes of discord
Melodies clouded with unscripted lines saturated in sympathy
Requesting nothing in return as innocence was shrouded in ignorance
Unrequited emotions locked in a sea of intrigue and mystery

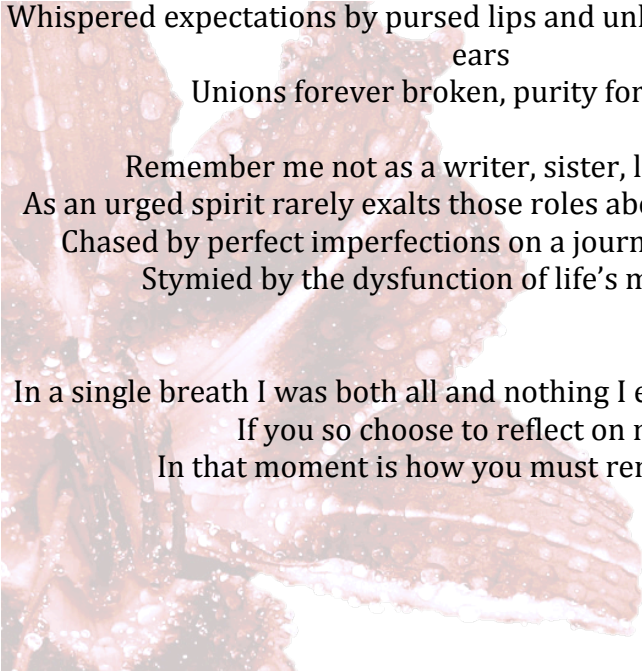
Speak not of my wasted moments and manipulative assaults
Birthing remnants of a life meant only for yesterday
Too ashamed to reveal itself in the wake of day's light
Shrunken dreams feigned surprise to my narrowly forgotten way

Gaze not upon my downcast eyes rather mourn my grief-filled
musings
Stolen years and borrowed lifetimes sully the sanctity of familial bond
Whispered expectations by pursed lips and unheard through strained
ears

Unions forever broken, purity forever gone

Remember me not as a writer, sister, lover, or friend
As an urged spirit rarely exalts those roles above selfish motivation
Chased by perfect imperfections on a journey to be everything
Stymied by the dysfunction of life's mis-education

In a single breath I was both all and nothing I ever thought I could be
If you so choose to reflect on my life
In that moment is how you must remember me.



Also from Renita Bryant

Proposing Forever

(A Short Story)

“I’m sorry, but I can’t marry you.”

The words were whispered with a certain sadness and guilt. Sadness because she knew once they were released, there was no turning back. Guilt because she wasn’t convinced sadness lived in this ending. Her mind raced between emotions, struggling to choose just one. So she closed her eyes and decided to accept them all.

“Wh-what do you mean? Don’t you love me?” He looked at her with hope that was quickly giving way to fear. His heart and mind were caught in an internal jousting match and he couldn’t quite decide on the winner. Everything had happened as planned. The flowers, stargazer lilies, were arranged throughout the house. Candles were lit in every room and he’d written the little love notes and poems weeks ago to ensure perfection. He thought of the chilled champagne and chocolate covered strawberries, both waiting to be their celebratory meal. This was not how he pictured this moment. Those were not the words he envisioned falling from her lips once he descended to one knee. This was not the promised start to his happily ever after.

The cell phone in his jacket pocket buzzed as he realized, with horror, what was happening. His parents or her sister were on the other end of the line poised to congratulate him on finding his

soul's mate. Everyone knew how much this meant to him—how much she meant to him. He could barely understand this himself and therefore, felt no rush to explain it to someone else. He angrily silenced the phone and shoved it back into his pocket.

She didn't know what else to say. No words could erase the ones she'd spoken and no apology would suffice. She slowly separated the ring from her finger and placed it squarely in his hand. In that instant, her mind stopped racing and her heart settled. She blinked, insistent on not crying because her tears would confuse them both. Now was not the time to unload the truth filling space within her mind. This moment was not about replaying every minute where she'd allowed his will to win or put her desires on a backburner. She thought about how much of *her* had been lost in this world—opinions, objections, feelings, and preferences—all so he could own prime real estate in her heart. She was afraid the woman she had become would be the woman she'd have to remain being. That was no longer an option.

He pulled all 6'2, 190 pounds off the floor and looked at her. She seemed... happy. Could she really be happy about hurting him? He walked to the opposite end of the living room to create a physical distance that matched their emotional one. He thought of bottling his confusion and simply leaving. There was no need to listen to anything she said, as it would never make sense to his ears or heart. Besides, she couldn't possibly have a logical reason for saying no. Didn't she want to make a home and raise a family with him? They'd discussed this many times over the course of their

two-year relationship. Not once did she give him reason to believe her answer would be anything short of a joyous and confident Yes. He lowered himself to the edge of the sofa and put his head in both hands.

She wanted to feel something other than elated but she couldn't. She was experiencing a freedom that had been mismanaged for two years and there was no way she'd lose it again. Out of respect for his feelings, she tried to shield her excitement. She'd never want him to mistake her actions as heartless. It wasn't that she was simply saying no to him. It was much deeper. She'd tried for months to have both his wants and her needs coexist but the ideal balance was never found. She'd finally reached a crossroads in her life where she needed to say yes to herself. This was about loving herself enough to fight for something that meant everything—her spirit.

In the beginning, she simply wanted to please him. She always wore her hair in an up-do because that's how it was styled the first time he professed his love. She dressed in skirts because he preferred the look of her legs. She rarely allowed anything other than the Mikimoto pearls he'd given her as a 28th birthday present to adorn her neck. She wanted to be his graceful, feminine ideal. She wanted to be his mind's view of perfection but trying to be so much for him had left little room for her. She was starring in a dream she'd authored, produced, and directed and somehow it was transforming into a nightmare.

When she turned and walked out, everything would fall into

place. She'd focus on her needs and dreams, which would lead her to launch a new Consulting firm with an old friend from graduate school. She'd know herself and not allow her dreams to be silenced so that a man's desires could soar. She'd spent years diluting her successes so as not to spotlight his struggles and imperfections. She would reconnect with old friends and start exploring the organic things that summed to the whole of her. She'd volunteer more and give back to her community. She would go to museums and jazz lounges on Fridays, take midday strolls on Saturdays, and have brunch with friends on Sundays. She would finally start to enjoy just *Being*.

When the door is opened, he will not stand. He will not call after her. He won't look at the face he'd planned to wake up to every future morning. Instead, he'll cry. Albeit in his own way and without a stream of tears adorning of his face. He will grieve for the happiness that will never return. His heart will harden as she leaves because she represents everything that was good and pure in his life. Her goodbye means the exit of his fairytale.

But, life isn't that simple. There are norms and pressures that force us to make decisions we aren't suited to make because no one has taught us how to make them. Women grow up yearning to dance in the white dress and toss an overpriced bouquet to those still chasing their Prince Charming. We want to open joint accounts and receive mail with Mr. & Mrs. on the cover. We chase the external appeal of a marriage because it has been bottled and sold as a natural next step. Life isn't simple because it introduces

us to people that constantly offer personal opinions based on their frame of reference, neither of which is perfectly aligned with who we are and what we need.

That was her reality and therefore she couldn't utter those initial words. She couldn't put the ring in his hand or disappoint the growing excitement in his eyes. She couldn't leave to greet her fairytale ending. So instead of saying no and experiencing the fullness of her power, she bowed her head and whispered a simple yes. She said yes for all single women that will never be asked the question. She accepted for every woman that envisions a man loving her unconditionally. She represented all little girls that dream of weddings but never grasp the concept of marriage. She accepted his proposal because she appreciated the hints of thoughtfulness in his preparation. The symbolism of him arranging her favorite flowers and lighting candles sent emotional waves over her that parted her lips and melted her heart. This moment was the best of him and she always wanted the best of him. So she smiled as he hugged and kissed her and called their family and friends. She laughed while retelling every detail of the proposal to her eager listeners.

But when she closed her eyes that night, in a bed he'd chosen although it bothered her lower back, under inexpensive sheets because he thinks no one can really tell the difference, with the television on because he likes to fall asleep that way, she cried. She shed tears for the woman that liked 1000 thread count Egyptian cotton sheets but would never sleep under them again

because she didn't want to debate the topic. She sobbed for the young girl that had allowed her place in this world to be overshadowed by a man's needs and opinions. She apologized to herself for not being strong enough to fight more. And lastly, she forgave herself because deep down she knew no one had ever taught her how to balance connecting with someone while still maintaining some semblance of self. She had become a product of her environment and no matter how much she wanted to grasp that freedom and blaze her own trail, the thought of being alone made her grasp his hand instead and accept the good and the bad of the life he proposed.

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