

*Keshia James*

## STILL HERE



I am still here. And so are you if you're reading this bit of writing, still here, to breathe, and smile and laugh and cry and engage in interesting or dull conversations if you so choose (ain't life beautiful). But the truth is thousands, dare I say millions of women are not here today. Their lives have been snuffed out by someone who didn't love them, who thought that they would play God and declare that they should no longer live and and who carried out the act to ensure that their words became a reality.

Yesterday, a woman walked off of a bus that she rode with her daughters. She was shot to death in her chest. Her life slipped away from her. It could no longer remain. I imagine that moment in my mind. Slow motion. I imagine that she walks normally to the exit door of the jitney, her daughters, 15 and 9 in tow. And as she takes her first step outside, boom, like a firecracker on New Year's Day. And then another boom, the bullet penetrates the thigh of the 15 year-old daughter. No beautiful lights fill the sky. The woman falls to the dusty ground, feeling afraid as a rush of sudden pain explodes in her chest. She falls face up. She looks at her daughters as they scream for her, for themselves. She knows that she is leaving. She tries to hold on I'm sure. She wants to be there to see her daughters grow up to be honorable ladies, with lives filled with happiness and peace, something that may have eluded her life. I imagine that she had a brief flash to when she was little, and maybe she thought briefly of a happier time. Maybe. And then nothing.

I'm tired of this. I'm tired of women dying because a coward dwells in the shadows of life. I am tired of children being left motherless. I am tired of hearing the stories. And not because I have become hardened and no longer wish to listen, no, I just don't want any more women to suffer and die at the hands of abusive partners, ex or current ones. I am tired of women feeling afraid and powerless.

When I was little I grew up in an abusive family. My father issued threats against my mother many times. Fear gripped my life like a glove. I wore it well, as I tried to live a life that appeared drenched in normalcy. My life wasn't normal. Some days I didn't know if I would see my mother again after I came home from school. Some days I didn't eat. I couldn't. Fear. Sometimes I would sleep with a knife under my pillow. I was prepared to fight if the need to do so arose. I was prepared. I always wondered if my family was the only one who experienced the oppression that my family did, at the hands of my father. I always thought that I was the only one. But I wasn't. I never was.

Today, I walk in forgiveness everyday when I relate to my father. Because hate is a bitch, and who needs that? Heck just last week I went to the A&E with him, and wouldn't you know, two women came in there after being attacked by their partners. The looks in their eyes seemed too familiar.

As an adult, some who know me might be shocked if they found out that I lived such a life once. But abuse doesn't have any pre-requisite looks. Abuse takes place in the home of the pauper and the rich. Many women go to bed with swollen eyes and broken ribs. Or maybe they are told the most horrific words that compound into an emotional punch that leaves their spirit broken.

Today I cried for that woman and last night I had a dream. I dreamed that a woman screamed, "No one cares about women who get abused!" In my dream I cried too. Today when I cried, I cried for the lady who died yesterday. I cried for every woman who is currently in an abusive relationship, and who doesn't see a way out. I cried for every woman who just doesn't see...her worth.