

The most important question is, why do I feel so deeply ashamed? I felt like you did, Maya, in that courtroom. I felt strong in my convictions, that in the moment I didn't want it. But now I'm not so sure. I wish I knew, Maya, I wish I knew. How were you able to find your voice again? I keep rereading your words, looking for answers. Looking for closure.

In my darkest hour, thank you for continuing to give me what no one can. You are my remedy. You are my cure.

Dani

Chapter Two

Raising the Bar

PRINCE

It's only a week after Labor Day weekend, but you can already feel the cold coming. Detroit winters wait for no one, and the city gets a lot of flack for somehow never being ready. Sure, there are potholes the size of craters destroying people's tires, and we're always getting hit with some sort of arctic or polar vortex. But for me, I see the end of summer as the calm before the storm, which is the best time. There's just something about the leaves in our backyard turning all types of oranges and golds and browns and the playful breeze whizzing through my basement windows. I hate the stickiness of summer, so the promise of fall gets me hype. It's when I feel I'm most in my zone.

"My dude, you the only one that uses that shit," Malik says. "Stay on everything Hov is up to."

I'm in the basement (aka my bedroom) with my boys after school and we're nodding along to the latest Big Sean album,

[LOVE RADIO TRANSCRIPT]

[CROSSFADE OF SONG HERE]

*For that young person who might be from Detroit
and might say, "I could do this, I could write this story,
and I might do it better." Do it. I dare you.*

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PRINCE JONES: Detroit, what up doe! I'm DJ LoveJones,
the prince of love and your new host for the three to four
p.m. hour, with DJ Mike coming in for rush hour from four
to seven. Welcome to the LOVE RADIO! I can't thank you
enough for the outpouring of love with my segment "Last
Night a DJ Saved My Life." You kept emailing and DMing
us with so many questions that 98.6 decided I needed my
own show time! And even crazier, at fifteen I'm the
youngest person to ever have a show here.

So, there you have it. Follow me online at @DJLoveJones or
call me between three and four every day, and I'll answer
any love questions you may have. But trust me, I ain't
forgot what time it is – I'll still be spinning all the hits. So hit
me up too for requests and with all your love problems.
I know you got them...and I have all the solutions.

I'm your guy. Your certified high-school love coach.

[PRINCE PLAYS A SONG]



Chapter One

Broken Record

Danielle

I've never met a person more drunk on love than my mom. She's got a list of old-school romance movies she's always been obsessed with and has the nerve to rate them in order of her favourites. Thing is, that order changes every month.

For September it's:

1. *Love Jones*
2. *Love & Basketball*
3. *Waiting to Exhale*
4. *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*
5. *Jason's Lyric*

6...the list goes on and on. But you get the point.

I'd be lying if I said I've never watched these movies with her...multiple times...maybe more like thousands of times. But the verdict is still out on how I feel about them.

"This is the best part, sweetie," Mom says, pointing at the screen. "Look!"

Every part is the best part, according to her.

I watch her as she's intensely focused on a movie she's seen over and over again, her feet tucked underneath her butt, her elbow perched on the couch's armrest, and her head resting in her hands. Everyone says my forehead scrunches just like hers when we're concentrating, the brown of it all creasing like the frosting on a caramel cake. "Camille spit you out," says every single relative.

I study her face as her bright, big eyes widen and take in the movie. I guess I have her laser-sharp cheekbones and thick, long hair. But besides that, I'm all Dad. Thank god he's not the constantly lovesick one.

She clasps her hands together as the hero and heroine kiss. "Isn't that everything, baby?"

I roll my eyes.

On the one hand, I appreciate Black artistry in all forms. But these movies always follow the same formula:

1. You got your main characters – the strong Black female lead who has had enough with life and needs to get rid of some sort of dead weight. Usually she does something drastic – like chopping off her long hair, taking a trip to a remote island, or just throwing herself into her work.
2. And then you got your supporting cast. Friends, colleagues, that one over-the-top person who brings comedic relief to the story.
- 2A. They fit into one of two categories as well. Either they are strongly encouraging the main character to

go after the love interest...

2B. ...or they're strongly discouraging them until the main character has some epiphany about their unhappiness or lack of love and manages to come around at the end.

The plotlines are predictable and *always* come to a lacklustre climax. Super stale. But everyone thinks that's just my cynical behind.

Take *Love Jones*. Within the first five minutes, the scene opens with a neon-red sign in the cut, illuminating the Sanctuary, a local, moody, smoke-filled poetry spot where the main characters, Darius and Nina, meet, all while listening to the sleek sounds of a woke brotha schooling Black people about how to talk to one another *basic*. Then smooth-ass Darius rolls up on the stage, reciting some poem that was inspired by Nina, speaking on blues and funk...and sex. Nina blows him off at first, but they eventually get together. Had that been me, I guess the movie would be over before it began, because there's no way he would have gotten a first date eroticizing me like that.

As the two characters profess their love for one another *again*, my mom glances over in my direction, expecting me to complain. But I don't – this time. She would just say that these romance tropes are everywhere, and with White Hollywood feeding us Black trauma porn, why not show more romances onscreen with Black leads?

And so, I'm conflicted. As a writer, I love watching for the cinematography, the banter, the showcase of a Black love

story blossoming. But at my core, I'm not a rom-com type of girl. The tropes alone make me uneasy when you really think about them.

Childhood friends? I gag at the thought of dating anyone in the cesspool of boys from my childhood.

Falling in love with a bad boy? Let's examine the abusiveness of this trope.

Enemies to lovers? Funniest one yet.

Forbidden love? Mokay.

Just not feeling any of these. If we really want to go there, they're all problematic and simple. Give me writing with more conflict, more depth, something that's more nuanced and grips you, makes you question the world around you. Let's talk about real-life issues that affect us daily, and the traumas our community is untangling. At least, that's the type of writing I want to do.

I feel like the platform should be used to bring more meaning into this world than just a story about two people falling in love. Just my humble opinion.

Still, for some reason, every time I'm tasked with dusting the shelves of our basement entertainment centre and my mom's DVD collection – yeah, don't even get me started – I can't help but pull out *Love Jones* and look at the package. It's the scene of Darius and Nina passionately kissing, in the rain. When no Black girl with a silk press is really gonna want to stand out there and lock lips while getting their hair drenched. And yet? Sometimes I catch myself daydreaming it's me.