**NOT SAFE FOR WERK:**

A Play by Hailey Young

**Characters:**

SB- 25, an R&B singer, darkskin Black woman

YOUNG SB- 7-8, a kid with dreams, haunting SB at times

MOM- 45-60, S.B.’s mother, a respectable woman

DAD- 45-60, SB’s dad, aloof, protective

KARA- Non-Black POC, SB’s agent and publicist

BODYGUARD

REPORTER/PAPARAZZI

MA RAINEY- A spirit/hallucination

NINA SIMONE- A spirit/hallucination

TINA TURNER- A spirit/hallucination

**Setting:**

In the crux of a mother’s arms…in the spotlight…in the cybersphere…in the shutter of a camera…in New York City

**Time:**

In the present, but always haunted by the past (and internet trolls)

**Scene 1:**

*A spotlight comes up and MAMA and YOUNG SB sit together on the floor. MAMA holds SB’s head in her lap and braids SB’s hair in two long braids down her back. “Feeling Good” by Nina Simone plays. They sing.*

MAMA: (*singing*) Birds flying high, you know how I feel

Sun in the sky, you know how I feel

Breeze drifting on by, you know how I feel

It’s a new dawn, it’s a new day, it’s a new life for me

It’s a new dawn, it’s a new day, it’s a new life for me

ooooh

YOUNG SB and MAMA: And I’m feeling good

*They keep singing together. After a verse or so, MAMA pulls at SB’s hair a bit.*

YOUNG SB: Ow, mama.

*MOM shushes her and continues braiding. YOUNG SB keeps singing.*

MOM: You know, someday, I bet you’re gonna be famous just like your mama.

YOUNG SB: You’re not famous.

MOM: No, not right now, but I was. I used to be the lead singer of a group. We called ourselves “The Esteemed”

YOUNG SB: The Supremes?

MOM: No, no. The Esteemed. We performed mainly in churches, singing the music of the lord.

YOUNG SB: Oh. Ok.

*MOM completes the braid and stands, dancing slightly on her toes. SB’s DAD enters and whisks MOM away, both of them dancing together while SB watches intently. MOM and DAD exit. SB stands and dances like her parents with an imaginary partner. She pauses, looks around, then starts to do a movement close to twerking or crumping.*

**Scene 2:**

*Cameras flash. SB enters, now an adult, in MET Gala attire. The theme is “Planetary Alignment,” and SB wears a dress that signifies the planet Saturn, with rings surrounding her hips.*

*SB walks up to a line of reporters. REPORTER 1 places a microphone in front of SB’s face.*

REPORTER: SB! SB! Tell us who you’re wearing!

SB: This is an original piece created by my friend and famous designer, Orlando Green.

REPORTER: Oh wow well you look gorgeous tonight. Where’s your boyfriend tonight?

SB: Oh, he’s not with me today… he’s on tour right now.

REPORTER: Oh. Well, thanks for speaking with us today. Have a great night!

*KARA enters and walks up to SB.*

SB: You’d think they would ask about my album or something…

KARA: That’s not what makes headlines, you know that.

SB: Oh yeah, they’re all dying to know about my relationship with Lil Kris.

KARA: Don’t worry about it. The NDA he signed means he won’t be able to talk about the breakup.

SB: They’re going to notice eventually…

KARA: Yes, but there’s a way that we can spin this, you know? Different schedules, long distance is hard, that sort of thing.

SB: Yeah, definitely that and not that he called me a frigid bitch whenever I didn’t want to have sex with him.

*SB and KARA walk, and more paparazzi follow them.*

KARA: Ok, camera on your left. Make sure to smile and don’t be so stiff.

*REPORTERS call out SB’s name while taking photos. SB poses, and out of the crowd, a hooded figure stands looking at SB. SB sees the figure and waves, but there is no returned wave or any movement from the figure. SB is confused, and she walks away to catch up with KARA. They exit.*

**Scene 3:**

*In the cybersphere. The sound of tweets and notifications pinging and a collection of words and article titles show up around the space.*

*They read:*

*“Famous Singer SB Seen at the Met Gala Wearing a Friend’s Design” – Buzzfeed*

*“Wow. From viral tik tok video to Met Gala. Love to see Black girls winning ☺ ” - @corinne5867*

*“Her makeup looks horrible” - @hanabanana*

*“How did this one hit wonder make it onto the carpet??” - @jedimaster297*

*“The lighting is not doing her any favors. @metmuseum do better” - @blackgirlmagic2983*

*“Where is Lil Kris? SB on Met Gala red carpet without a date sparks breakup rumours” - @deuxmoi*

*“She seems like she doesn’t want to be there. Why is she frowning?” - @user384603*

*The pings transition into a synthesized drum beat. Lights up on a concert stage. It is mostly bare bones with a platform in the center of the stage. Backstage can also be seen stage left.*

*SB enters. She is backstage on stage left, getting ready to perform. Her outfit is a muted black and grey, with clothing covering most of her body. KARA enters and looks SB up and down.*

*KARA: Come ‘ere.*

*KARA starts blending SB’s makeup with her fingers.*

KARA: I swear to God if that makeup artist doesn’t get her shit together, I am gonna fire her. How much contour does a face really need?

SB: Stop, Kara. It’s ok. Stop fussing, damn.

*SB pushes KARA’s hands away. KARA retreats to the left corner of the stage to talk to the SOUND DESIGNER.*

SOUND DESIGNER: SB, you’re on in 30 seconds…

*SB readies herself and shakes out her body. She gestures towards the sky, something close to praying or a pre-performance ritual.*

SOUND DESIGNER: And you’re on in 3…2…1… GO!

*SB takes a breath and steps onto the stage to thunderous applause. A sultry guitar plays in the background. She stands in front of the mic.*

SB *(singing):* It’s hard sometimes ‘cause I know

he’ll never love me like he loves her.

Does he notice me? Or am I the monster in the closet,

the ghost who haunts him.

I’m not gonna break over some guy who’ll never have my heart.

I’m not gonna fight for anyone who doesn’t want my love.

I want to be yours, but this love song’s getting old.

I sometimes think about what it would take to make you notice me.

But it’s not enough. I’m just a girl

who would do anything to be anything to you,

the doll you play with, the trash you throw away.

Am I the one he sees when he dreams every night?

Am I the one he sees in his future life?

Am I the girl he’s going to fall for?

No, so I’ll find a way to live my life without you

I’m not gonna break over someone who’ll never have my heart.

I’m not gonna fight for anyone who doesn’t want my love.

I want to be yours, but this love song’s getting old.

*Thunderous applause. Some audience members can be heard screaming “I love you SB” or “Woohoo.” SB blows a kiss to the audience. Blackout.*

**Scene 4:**

*In this scene, there is a static sound that gets louder and louder throughout the scene, building tension.*

*SB is in her NYC brownstone reading. Outside on SB’s street, which is seen stage right, there are paparazzi hiding trying to sneak photos of SB. SB looks out her window, and sees them. She quickly closes the curtains.*

SB: God, will they ever stop? What do they want now?

*Suddenly, KARA enters stage right and runs to SB’s door. She starts banging frantically.*

*SB runs to the door and opens it. KARA rushes inside.*

KARA: Code red!

SB: What?

KARA: CODE FUCKING RED!

SB: What do you mean, Kara?

KARA: Where’s your phone?

SB: I think I left it on the counter.

KARA runs to get the phone.

SB: Kara, calm down. What’s going on?

KARA: Here.

*KARA puts SB’s phone in her face, showing her an article that appears on a tabloid website, titled “LEAKED: A NSFW Video of Singer SB.” The article title appears so that it is visible to the audience.*

*SB’s face falls as she reads other comments and messages, which appear all around the stage.*

*“How do I save a video on twitter? For…science” - @hogetter*

*“No wonder Lil Chris liked her.” - @greatp69*

*“Her moans sound better than her singing” - @freaknick298*

*“So upsetting to see my girl like this. I thought she was better than this” - @blackgirlmagic2983*

*“Y’all should be ashamed of yourselves. She’s a real person” - @greatcomet204*

*“@SB I’m available for a good fuck anytime.” - @inyourdreams22*

*The buzzing sound is now super intense. SB sits on her couch. KARA is pacing and speaking, and the sounds echo, adding to the buzzing.*

KARA: I tried to talk to them about taking it down, but you know how the internet is… We can try to spin this, make a statement about privacy and how damaging leaks can be… SB?

SB: I…um…

KARA: I’ve already made sure that you will have a bodyguard with you at all times and I’ll cancel your tour dates for this week.

SB: I…

*SB nods, unable to form words.*

*Her phone dings. It’s a text from MOM. It reads: What is this video I’ve heard about? This is not how I raised you. Hope you come to church this Sunday.*

*SB: FUCK!!*

KARA: It’ll be fine. We can lean into this new sexually liberated image of you. You know? People love the girls who dance suggestively in barely any clothes. It’s very *in* right now. We can use this to our advantage.

SB: Just do whatever you can to get me out of this situation. And don’t cancel those tour dates. It’ll just look like I’m hiding.

KARA: Oh sure… um are you okay?

*KARA, clearly uncomfortable with emotion, gives SB a quick, light tap on the shoulder to comfort her. SB glares at her.*

SB: I’ll be better when you fix this… so can you go do that, please?

*KARA nods and shuffles nervously out of the apartment. She pushes through the hordes of paparazzi and exits. Once KARA is gone, SB puts her head in her hand and cries for a couple seconds. Then, she controls herself and stops. She steps to a mirror hanging stage left and fixes her makeup. She pauses. Then she screams. Blackout.*

**Scene 5:**

*Again, SB is backstage at her concert. This time, though, she wears clothes that barely cover herself, a bejeweled bra and shorts. She fusses with them, clearly uncomfortable. KARA runs toward her.*

KARA: Ok, so everything is ready with the new song. There’s a lot of choreo, so make sure to focus on the steps. If you can’t sing, it’s ok because there’s a backing track.

SB: I got it, Kara.

KARA: And stop messing with your outfit. The last thing we need is you showing more of your private parts to your fans.

*SB glares at KARA. KARA backs away and exits.*

SOUND: SB, you’re on in one minute.

*SB breathes in and out. Behind her, the hooded figure enters. They reach out towards SB, but she begins to walk onstage. The hooded figure exits.*

*SB walks onto the stage, and her background dancers dance sensually to the beat of her new song, “Lustin’.” SB dances sensually as well. She body rolls and shows off her body, but her movements have less confidence. At certain moments while singing she visually cringes.*

SB: *(singing)* Oh I’m lustin after you

why don’t you come down here?

where I can see you baby

let me make you whole,

make your whole world turn

upside down, inside out

Don’t you love

what I do to you?

Take me inside

show me what you can do

Make me up, dress me down

Oh, I’m lustin’ after you

*The song finishes and SB poses. The crowd screams even louder than her last performance, clearly only interested in seeing this crafted image of her. SB exits the stage. Lights fade to black.*

**Scene 6:**

*A talk show. It is “The Sid Norton Show.” SID NORTON sits at his desk.*

SID: It gives me great pleasure to welcome our next guest who is currently on her North American tour. Everyone, please give a warm welcome to SB.

*SB enters, wearing a low-cut blue jumpsuit. She waves at the audience and sits in a chair opposite SID stage left. SB squirms in her seat.*

SID: Well, you have certainly had a big week, haven’t you?

SB: Um… yeah, you could say that.

SID: I don’t want to push you, but would you like to say anything to those who have seen it? An apology or…

SB: I don’t think I need to apologize.

SID: Oh, yes. Of course.

SB: Whoever leaked that video should be apologizing.

SID: Sure. Sure. Um. Let’s talk about your newest song, Lustin’. This is certainly a different message than you’ve told in your other songs. What is the story behind it?

SB: Well, I didn’t want to be scared of my sexuality, ya know? It was horrible that that video was leaked, but it allowed me to show my fans a part of myself that they hadn’t seen before.

SID: Oh, we definitely saw a part we hadn’t seen before.

*SB has misheard SID, but she doesn’t know that.*

SB *(accusatory):* What did you just say?

SID: Oh, I um… I just said that we definitely saw you feeling powerful.

SB: Oh yes, sorry. I must have…I just don’t understand why everyone is so obsessed with my body parts. Like, if you’ve never seen a woman’s body before, just say that.

*The audience laughs.*

SID: You seem to be surprisingly well-adjusted considering everything. How has your boyfriend helped you through this time?

SB: My boyfriend? Oh, Lil Chris. Um, well he’s abroad right now.

SID: Yes, there are rumors that he’s been hanging with quite the crowd while he’s been over in Europe. Models, pageant queens…

SB: I had not heard that. We are quite open with our communication.

SID: Oh, well open communication makes for open legs.

*SB has misheard again, and she is slowly falling into madness.*

SB: What?

SID: I said, open communication makes for a great relationship. Isn’t that true?

SB: Oh uh yeah. My mom always said that.

SID: You’ve said that your mom was a gospel singer…and your first agent. What was it like having your mom by your side?

SB: It was definitely interesting. She’s my rock, so I loved having her by my side. She actually helped me write my first single, Butterscotch.

SID: Oh wow, well, I hope we get to see some of your church roots come out in your next album.

SB: You might just see them come out, haha.

SID: Well, thank you so much for coming. It’s been a pleasure.

SB: Thank you for having me.

SID: You can catch SB on her North American tour until July. And make sure to stream her new single, Lustin’. We’ll be right back after the break.

They cut the cameras, and SB storms stage right. KARA walks onstage, frantic.

KARA: What the fuck was that?

SB: I don’t know. I…

KARA: This was your chance. I gave you talking points. TALKING POINTS, SB!!! You were supposed to talk about the music, about how the video has revolutionized your music style and allowed you to be who you are.

SB: This is NOT who I am, Kara.

KARA: Then who are you SB, huh?

SB: I don’t know, Kara! I just know this isn’t me, the clothes, that song. I need to get outta here.

*SB exits. Lights fade to black.*

**Scene 6:**

*A video on a screen shows Lil Chris, SB’s ex, on Instagram Live.*

LIL CHRIS: Oh yeah, but SB was always desperate for attention, you know? She was really begging for it. And I tried to stop her from sending that video, I really did. But you know, sometimes bitches be cray.

*LIL CHRIS looks at the bottom of the screen as if he’s reading comments.*

LIL CHRIS: @mofo234 asks, “What about dat ass tho?” Haha, you know I gotta give it to her on that one. Body graced by God.

*Lights come up on SB in her apartment taking off her makeup in the mirror. She is looking in her mirror when suddenly, the hooded figure enters from a room offstage. The audience can see the figure, but SB is unaware.*

FIGURE: Hello.

SB: AAH. What are you doing? Who are you?

FIGURE: Are you feeling good, SB?

SB: What?

FIGURE: Cause I am…

*The FIGURE is revealed to be NINA SIMONE. She dances and sings her song, “I Put A Spell On You.”*

SB: What the fu—

*MA RAINEY enters from another room offstage. Their voices blend together as MA RAINEY begins to sings her own song, “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom.”*

*NINA SIMONE and MA RAINEY dance toward SB. TINA TURNER enters, and she joins in their dance. She sings her song, “Steamy Windows.” They stop singing as NINA SIMONE cuts them off with her hands.*

NINA SIMONE: Welcome to this emergency meeting of Black Women Entertainers Across Time Against Sexualization

SB: Black women against what? huh?

NINA SIMONE: BWEATAS, honey. Black Women Entertainers Across Time Against Sexualization. Now ain’t that something?

SB: How is this…happening? I must be—

MA RAINEY: Dreaming? No, if you were dreaming, I couldn’t do this.

*MA RAINEY kisses her lightly on the cheek. SB is taken aback.*

TINA TURNER: Now, my dear… we know about your situation.

NINA SIMONE: Yes, we just had to come and check on you. You seem… distressed.

SB: Well, I am now.

MA RAINEY: We all dealt with this in our own ways, you know. When you’re a Black woman, it’s in the contract.

NINA SIMONE: Yes, there’s no way to escape it, I’m afraid. They love to tell Black women what they can do with their bodies.

TINA TURNER: How we can dance…

MA RAINEY: How we can talk…

NINA SIMONE: How we can dress…

MA RAINEY: Because they see us as inherently sexual beings.

SB: So what do you do?

NINA SIMONE: It takes away your agency when you’re seen as nothing beyond a body. We can have no feelings, no humanity.

TINA TURNER: So this is where we take that space, to be together and take back our power.

MA RAINEY: Would you like to speak about your troubles?

SB: Oh, well I feel like I don’t know myself anymore. I’ve been made into this image, this sexualized version of myself. I’m only seen as something that can be used for other people’s desires.

NINA SIMONE: When you are in the public eye, it’s very easy to feel like you don’t have control of yourself, of how people see you.

MA RAINEY: Even when you embrace your sexuality, you never know if you have true control or if someone’s still pulling your strings.

TINA TURNER: Especially when you come from the church and everyone is telling you how you should behave.

SB: I just want to feel like myself again. But it feels like I can either be a virgin or a whore. And obviously, no one believes I’m a virgin anymore.

NINA SIMONE: That’s what they want you to believe. But the truth is, we decide how we get to live in our bodies.

MA RAINEY: Music is meant to bring us into our bodies, bring us closer to the spiritual. You’ve lost sight of that power.

SB: I haven—

NINA SIMONE: When was the last time you danced by yourself, no choreo, no one else around.

SB: I…

TINA TURNER: When was the last time you put every emotion into your songs? Every pain, every joy?

SB: I guess it was when I first started singing. With my mom.

*NINA, TINA, and MA RAINEY join hands and offer their hand to SB. She takes it.*

MA RAINEY: You can get that back. Harmonize with us…

*MA RAINEY, TINA TURNER, and NINA SIMONE burst into harmonies. SB joins them as MA RAINEY conducts.*

MA RAINEY: Feel the soul, the blues in your toes, your head, your pinky finger. Let it wash over you.

*They continue to sing, letting their bodies lead them. As they sing, a warm light washes over them. They experience the joy and the pain in their song, but they do it together, holding each other and letting their bodies move the way they want. They dance, each in the styles of their time but driven by the beat of their hearts.*

*Finally, they come back to their original chord. Back to reality. They embrace. Lights fade to black.*

**Scene 7:**

*Lights come up on SB, on stage again. There is a mic center stage. SB is basked in warm light, wearing clothes in pinks and blues and yellows. Her clothing now matches the passion of her feelings and the colors of her soul. Her hair is intricately braided around her head. She takes up space.*

SB: Welcome to the final night of my tour, New York!!! I’m so happy to see all of you here. Thank you for supporting me through this journey.

It is my pleasure to sing a song that is close to my heart, one that I wrote with my mother when I was just 15 years old. I hope it allows you to understand a piece of my heart and my soul.

But before I start, I would love to welcome onto the stage my first fan, all the way from Harlem.

*The audience laughs.*

SB: My mother, Mrs. Bartman.

*MOM comes out with a microphone in her hand, clearly in awe of the crowd. She stands next to SB.*

SB: This is “Butterscotch.”

*The music starts and they sing.*

SB: I met you at the park, candy in your purse

they melted in the summer sun, leaving your hands sticky

every time you reached for a dollar, the one I asked for

to buy sherbet from the man at the corner store

SB and MOM: You’re sweeter than butterscotch, hotter than the August sun

I would ask who you are, but you’re everything to me

I’ll love you forever

MOM: I met you at the coffee shop, lemon in your tea

it cooled as you waited, leaving your heart heavy

with every minute that passed. But you waited for me

until I found my way to you.

SB and MOM: You’re sweeter than butterscotch, hotter than the August sun

I would ask who you are, but you’re everything to me

I’ll love you forever

*They end the song to thunderous applause. SB and her MOM hug and then bow.*

MOM: Thank you, baby. You made an old woman very happy.

*SB nods in acknowledgement. Then, she puts the microphone to her lips again.*

SB: I was hoping everyone could join me for this next one. This is a song by one of my favorite singers, a song that I sang at my first talent show. This is “Feeling Good” by Nina Simone.

*SB encourages the audience to join in and the lyrics are shown behind them. The cast also joins in backstage, harmonizing. It is a chorus of voices. As they end the song, SB dances how she wants, letting all her feelings out. She cries happy tears.*

**Scene 8:**

*SB is on a livestream, either Instagram or Tik Tok or another platform. She can be seen on the screen simultaneously while she is on stage.*

SB: Hey y’all!! I just wanted to come on here and thank all my fans for supporting me during this time. It is so hard when our body is exposed to the world, when you are made into an animal and put on display.

My body is not yours.

It is mine.

When I sent that video to Lil Chris, I wanted to feel powerful and loved. Instead, it has done the opposite.

I am a sexual person.

That is a fact.

But I am not defined by my sexuality, by how big my body parts are or how much clothing I’m wearing.

As a Black woman, I am often made to think that I must fit into the world’s image of me. Or even actively resist it. That is a lot of pressure to put on a person.

But from the help of some friends, I have learned that my feelings matter, and I must feel them fully. Anger, sadness, joy — they are the key to becoming my greatest self. And I will continue to find my greatest self… through my music. I encourage all of you to find that thing that allows you to express every chaotic feeling. Be your weirdest self. ‘Cause I know I will…

*A string of comments come through on the live.*

*“Yesss weird black girls” @blackgirlmagic297*

*“I need you to release Butterscotch on Spotify rn!!” @chloebae44*

*“She’s definitely reading from her notes. So fake.” @user29248444*

*“I didn’t think she could come back from this…I guess I was wrong.” @dreamerschords71*

*“Black QUEENNN” @megthehorsegirl20*

*“How do I save this… for science” @hogetter*

*“Love you, SB. Please come to Detroit on your next tour.” @beyondsea23*

*SB smiles into the camera, genuinely satisfied for the first time in weeks.*

*Blackout.*

*End of Play.*

Playwright’s Statement:

This idea for a play has been on my mind for quite some time. Throughout my time as an undergraduate, I have been captivated by questions about Black women’s sexuality, and more particularly, the way that Black women have been hypersexualized throughout history. Women like Ma Rainey, Nina Simone, and Tina Turner all felt the effects of sexualization and worked to combat it or claim their personhood. Whether through vaudeville or through classic rock, the lyrics of these women’s songs show the world their eroticism. Because of this, they were seen as trailblazers by some and as lewd or backwards women by others.

Even in the reference that I make with SB’s name, her initials referring to Saartjie Baartman, I attempted to make clear how pervasive this issue is. I learned about Saartjie Baartman through works like Sander L. Gilman’s essay titled “Black Bodies, White Bodies.” Her story is heartbreaking, but it shows how Black women have been treated across time. By calling her into the space of the play, even in this small way, it is a reference to the ways that Black women have performed in front of an audience. She is a dangerous reminder of how Black women can become a spectacle or a show. Dissected by their body parts, they lose pieces of themselves, both physical and metaphorical. I wanted to explore this phenomenon within the play.

More generally, Black performance is also an idea that the play delves into. When Black performers perform for wider audiences, they risk their message becoming misconstrued or disregarded. Yet, performance is imperative within Black culture. In E. Patrick Johnson’s essay “’Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” he writes about Black performance and says, “People have a need to exercise control over the production of their images so that they feel empowered” (138). For SB, she must regain control of her image, which is not an easy thing to do, especially in the modern era.

Today, because of the internet, Black women entertainers like Beyonce, Megan thee Stallion, Lizzo, and Chloe Bailey have had to go through even more scrutiny and dehumanization. They have been sexualized or even masculinized in ways that are dangerous to their mental health. So in a world where everyone’s opinion can be heard about one’s clothing, body shape, etc., how can Black women make sure that they do not become a caricature or a stereotype? How can Black women make sure that they do not lose their humanity?

I believe Audre Lorde’s *Sister Outsider* contains a plethora of ideas that answer these questions. In Lorde’s “Uses of the Erotic,” she writes, “The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings” (Lorde 53) Lorde writes about how women have had to suppress the erotic in order to fit into the world, losing their power and their agency. In the play, I wanted to explore a kind of praxis for Lorde’s ideas of the erotic, ways that it can be implemented into a woman’s life.

In another part of her essay, Lorde discusses the differences between the erotic and the pornographic. She writes:

The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling. (Lorde 54)

In the play, SB’s agency over her body and her sexuality is taken away from her after the video is released. Although the audience doesn’t see the video itself, they do see the demoralizing and dehumanizing comments made by those on the internet. In SB’s reaction, we see the effects of the pornographic on one’s feelings. SB loses control of her body. Even in her music, she begins to sense without feeling, as shown by the lack of comfortability with the dancing and the music that she sang. Yet, SB and Kara see this as the only way out of the pornographic, to lean into the sensation. As the audience soon sees, though, this is incompatible with SB’s nature.

In one of her essays in *Sister Outsider*, Lorde says, “For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (112). By trying to claim her sexuality in the face of sexualization, she is unable to find the joy that she needs. In the pornographic, SB loses herself. She begins to hear things that aren’t said and begins to fall into bouts of anger and depression. While Lorde is not against anger in *Sister Outsider*, rather saying that it is useful if it is “focused with precision” (127), SB’s anger does not bring her any peace. She is lost with no community to turn to.

Until BWEATAS, that is. For me, Black Women Entertainers Across Time Against Sexualization is an intervention toward the erotic. The three singers allow her to feel again, to “share the power of each other’s feelings” (Lorde 58). They watch over her, and when she needs them, they are there. While they may not physically be there, SB feels them and feels their emotions.

In SB’s connection with these women, she is able to understand what must be done. They sing without an audience, with only their connection holding their harmonies together. Lorde writes, “my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea” (56-57). In the harmonies and in their dance, SB and the chorus of singers find the joy that they so desperately need. They find connection. They find the erotic, the chaos.

While the world doesn’t change, SB changes. The internet continues to be a vile place, even in the end as we see some of the comments under SB’s livestream. Nonetheless, SB learns that the sharing of her feelings could possibly change things. By leaning into the erotic rather than the pornographic, she was able to reach out to other people like her, those who had been tossed aside or dehumanized.

In the end, SB finds the joy in singing again, returning to her roots. By finding connection with her mother and her fans again, she feels joy. Further, she publicly announces her newfound embrace of the erotic. She refuses to be silent, something that another one of Lorde’s essays, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” encourages. Lorde writes, “…while we wait for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us” (44). SB is never fearless, but she does feel the weight of that silence. By sharing her own story and hearing the story of others, SB discovers that she is not alone. While the pains of the past are not gone, SB moves past despair. She learns to live in shared feeling and in the erotic capabilities of her music.

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