



Beyoncé

*Lemonade*

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# Lemonade

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While Beyoncé was secretly recording what would become her sixth consecutive number-one album, *Lemonade*, I was making a secret recording of my own—nearly 10 minutes of my husband raging at me as he drove us home from couples counseling, the engine revving in the background, me repeating, “I’m sorry, so sorry,” and begging him to slow down.

Afterward, I locked my bathroom door and replayed my recording, becoming shell-shocked and sick to my stomach as I heard pieces of my spirit stolen with each word he screamed. That night wasn’t the first time I’d experienced my husband’s explosive anger—just the first time I’d caught it on tape. His rage blindsides me every time, leaving me hopeless, heartbroken, frustrated. Afraid. His rage numbs me. Leaves me dazed. Strangely, his rage never unleashes my own anger. But what if it had been my daughter begging “sorry” in a lover’s passenger seat? For her, my anger would come easily.

Was that how it was for Solange Knowles, Beyoncé’s little sister—that time in the elevator when she punched her philandering brother-in-law Shawn Carter/Jay Z in the face? Maybe that display of raw anger surged Beyoncé’s artistic juices to start flowing, yielding the top-selling album on the planet the year it was released.

*Lemonade* started streaming when I was thirsting for change, and it quickly shot to the top of my personal playlist. After two decades of my husband telling me he loves me but communicating the opposite, I’d finally demanded he get help to stop his verbal abuse, even threatening divorce if he failed to follow through.

I wanted evidence he was capable of a relationship based on mutual empathy and respect, not power and control. I understood change wouldn’t come all at once and might not come at all. While I was waiting and watching and quietly avoiding my husband, I couldn’t get enough *Lemonade*.

It poured from the speakers in my bathroom as I stepped out of the shower. It flowed as I dressed and left my wedding band to the side. A *Lemonade* tide pushed my mom-car through LA traffic—to the meeting with the divorce attorney, the real estate broker, the financial advisor. Even my rabbi for counsel and in case I’d need a trustworthy witness later on

My car windows sealed tight, I cranked up Beyoncé’s scream, “Who the fuck do you think I is? You ain’t married to no average bitch, boy!” then dialed it louder still for my favorite part when her voice frays Janis Joplin-style, “When you hurt me, you hurt yourself! Don’t hurt yourself!” I summoned my inner diva when she declares her resilience, “I am the dragon breathing fire, beautiful mane, I’m the lion.” I fed on her fury when she warns, “If you try this shit again, you gon’ lose your wife.” When the music stopped, the thought of tearing apart my family threatened to paralyze me. Then I’d press “play” so *Lemonade* could rain down on me again.

Her husband’s infidelity made Beyoncé regret the “night I put that ring on.” My husband wasn’t cheating, but it was a sentiment to which I could relate. I’d blindly assumed that as husband and wife we shared goodwill for one another. When the tone of his voice or his words I could now replay or the look on his face said he saw me as his rival and not his

beloved, it felt like betrayal. When accusation and denial rolled off his tongue while empathy was withheld, when he closed the door to understanding and intimacy by refusing to discuss a problem, it felt all like betrayal. Behaving with hostility instead of goodwill is “a wicked way to treat the girl that loves you.”

His weren't the lies or distortions of a stranger I could easily dismiss. I swallowed his shouted untruths about me, which led me to apologize constantly, reflexively—as I had that night in the passenger seat. So when Beyoncé proclaims herself so *not* sorry—“no, no, hell nah!”—I lapped it up, along with the refrain—“Middle fingers up, put them hands high. Wave it in his face. Tell him, boy, bye.” At night I laid awake worrying about custody hearings, but come daytime Beyoncé reassured me about what I couldn't fully believe, “Me and my baby, we gon' be alright, we gon' live a good life.”

I sipped *Lemonade* with intention, cultivating the mobilizing emotion of anger I'd lacked. While my husband read about verbal abuse, got therapy and practiced the art of respectful conversation, I refused to play cheerleader. I was in no mood to congratulate him for doing what he should have been doing all along. “All the loving I've been giving goes unnoticed. It's just floating in the air, lookie there.” It was his turn to be the giver.

My new tough-girl routine was part bluster, but *Lemonade* made me feel like that was okay. Instead of a facile storyline that begins with betrayal and ends with divorce, the album features “the baddest woman in the game” grappling with vulnerability, ambivalence and uncertainty—as when she snarls about a hardworking woman in 6-inch heels who doesn't need a man's financial support, and then lets her voice break, “Come back, come back, come back.” Or on “Sandcastles” when she dangles a double negative that leaves open the possibility of reconciliation: “I know I promised that I couldn't stay, baby. Every promise don't work out that way.”

My secret recording of my husband going berserk behind the wheel plays in the background of my memory while I listen to new words. I hear my own voice quietly insisting that a simple expression of concern from him—even just “I'm sorry”—would be everything. In the midst of his rage, I was trying to make him understand we could have a love that is intimate, fun, sexy and inspiring—a love that could “move mountains” as Beyoncé sings on “Love Drought.” But my husband couldn't hear me. He was too consumed with his need to dominate and control. For now, my husband seems intent to “put his best foot first” as James Blake sings on “Forward.” Time will tell.

By the time *Lemonade* comes around to “All Night,” Beyoncé resolves to “Give you some time to prove I can trust you again.” But the song ends with the future in doubt.

I listened to *Lemonade* the other day. It had been awhile since I'd played the album all the way through from start to finish. Now I have a new favorite moment. It comes between tracks when Beyoncé's daughter exclaims, “Good job, B!” and Beyoncé laughs that laugh that lets me know I'll be okay no matter how the story ends.