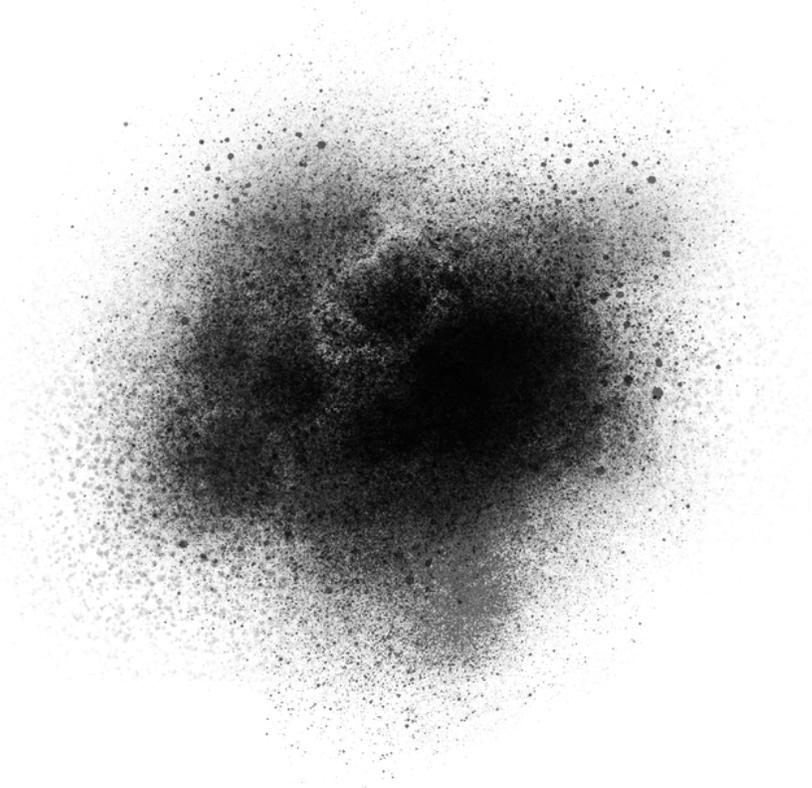


## Healing.



The first time I healed, I didn't know I needed healing. What I did know was that I needed help.

--

I had recently "failed" (read: been less than perfect) at a project I had been working on for a while, and my whole world, and the walls I had built within it to protect myself, had begun to disintegrate before my eyes.

The feedback I'd received from my supervisor was constructive, if not gentle,

if not loving,

if not kind.

But,

I had failed.

And in so doing, I had become a failure

(in my mind),

there was no recovering from that.

---



The day I failed, and in the months following,

I believed that failure—this magnitude of failure—was the worst thing I could do to myself, my family, and my community.

I believed that as a Black person, I was not allowed to fail, even a little, and definitely not a lot.

I believed that my failure would be seen as our collective failure.

I wondered which doors I had closed, and for whom.

I wondered whose chance I might have stolen,

Whose image I might have tarnished,

And whose path I might have blocked.

And I felt ashamed.

--



The day I failed, and in the months following,

My shame threatened to devour me,

to consume me,

to destroy me,

to break me,

to erase me.

And then one day,

the threats stopped.

--

That day, and in the months following,

I withdrew into my self and into my head

And I began to break my self,

To erase my self.

To destroy my self.

---

The first time I felt some curing, I didn't know I needed it. What I did know was that I desperately needed help before I ended my self.

--



The first time I healed,

I sat in the doctor's office staring at the floor, my salt-stained winter boots and the tears pooling between my feet.

"You are depressed," he explained, "and you have anxiety. How long have you felt this way?"

"All my life," I explained.

"It just got really bad after I failed, and I knew that if I didn't get help, things would get worse."

The doctor scribbled something on his notepad and explained that he would refer me to a specialist. He wished me all the best and told me to take care of myself.

I told him that I would.

And I thanked him.

--

I didn't know I needed to heal, that I could heal, that I deserved to heal, until I sat in the counsellor's office and she explained to me that it's OK to be less than perfect.



--

She was Black, like me. When I spoke, she listened, and I knew she understood.

She told me to be particularly loving to myself in the winter. "It's harder for us then, you know?" she said.

"Yes. I know," I said.

I told her about the weight of Black exceptionalism that I had carried with me all my life, and how something that once made me strong was now crushing me and killing me.

--

When I cried,

Her eyes softened.

--

She offered no words of sympathy,

No words of consolation,

No empty promises that things would get better.

When I cried,

She listened.

--

And when I stopped,

She spoke.

--

She is a fundraiser, a traveler, and a writer. She manages her depression and anxiety with medication, counselling, exercise and the love and acceptance she has been showered with by friends and family. She is a proud dark-skinned Black African woman.