"HAVING A BABY INSIDE ME IS THE ONLY TIME I'M REALLY ALIVE"

ANONYMOUS

This young black woman living in a Boston welfare project in the early 1960s probably never read Modern Woman: The Lost Sex and never tried to pattern herself after such ideal TV mothers as Barbara Cleaver (Leave It to Beaver) or Donna Reed (The Donna Reed Show). Instead, she finds her own very personal and poignant reasons for embracing motherhood.


They came telling us not to have children, and not to have children, and sweep up, and all that. There isn’t anything they don’t want to do to you, or tell you to do. They tell you you’re bad, and worse than others, and you’re lazy, and you don’t know how to get along like others do. Well, for so long they told us we couldn’t ever go near anyone else, I suppose we should be grateful for being told we’re not going to get near enough if we don’t behave in the right way—which is the sermon I get all the time now.

Then they say we should look different, and eat different—use more of the protein. I tell them about the prices, but they reply about “planning”—planning, planning, that’s all they tell you. The worst of it is that they try to get you to plan your kids, by the year; except they mean by the ten-year plan, one every ten years. The truth is, they don’t want you to have any, if they could help it.

To me, having a baby inside me is the only time I’m really alive. I know I can make something, do something, no matter what color my skin is, and what names people call me. When the baby gets born I see him, and he’s full of life, or she is; and I think to myself that it doesn’t make any difference what happens later, at least now we’ve got a chance, or the baby does. You can see the little one grow and get larger and start doing things, and you feel there must be some hope, some chance that things will get better; because there it is, right before you, a real, live, growing baby. The children and their father feel it, too, just like I do. They feel the baby is a good sign, or at least he’s some sign. If we didn’t have that, what would be the difference from death? Even without children my life would still be bad—they’re not going to give us what they have, the
birth control people. They just want us to be a poor version of them, only without our children and our faith in God and our tasty fried food, or anything.

They’ll tell you we are “neglectful”; we don’t take proper care of the children. But that’s a lie, because we do, until we can’t any longer, because the time has come for the street to claim them, to take them away and teach them what a poor nigger’s life is like. I don’t care what anyone says: I take the best care of my children. I scream the ten commandments at them every day, until one by one they learn them by heart—and believe me they don’t forget them. (You can ask my minister if I’m not telling the truth.) It’s when they leave for school, and start seeing the streets and everything, that’s when there’s the change; and by the time they’re ten or so, it’s all I can do to say anything, because I don’t even believe my own words, to be honest. I tell them, please to be good; but I know it’s no use, not when they can’t get a fair break, and there are the sheriffs down South and up here the policemen, ready to kick you for so much as breathing your feelings. So I turn my eyes on the little children, and keep on praying that one of them will grow up at the right second, when the schoolteachers have time to say hello and give him the lessons he needs, and when they get rid of the building here and let us have a place you can breathe in and not get bitten all the time, and when the men can find work—because they can’t have children, and so they have to drink or get on drugs to find some happy moments, and some hope about things.