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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, names, incidents, organizations, and dialogue in

*this novel are either the products of the author's
imagination or are used fictitiously.*

Black Child
to
Black Woman

An African-American Woman Coming-of-Age Story

2ND Edition

by Cheryl Denise Bannerman

In loving memory of:

Tyrone Ricardo Bannerman,
Derek Bannerman, and Marie Parker

To those who:

*Doubted me
Judged me
Could not be flexible
Mocked me
Took advantage of me
Thought I couldn't
Put me down
Abandoned me
Refused to understand me
or took me for granted...*

This is for you.

Prologue

In a Letter to My Daughter, Maya Angelou writes, "I am convinced that most people do not grow up...We marry and dare to have children and call that growing up. I think what we do is mostly grow old. We carry accumulation of years in our bodies, and on our faces, but generally our real selves, the children inside, are innocent and shy as magnolias."

I was slowly becoming a woman, a responsible adult, and someone my parents could continue to be proud of, but the scared little girl inside me still spoke to me in times of duress. In between working a nine to five and a part-time gig on the weekend, I was maintaining a car and apartment, paying real-life bills, and building expertise in my field.

Dating was a whole other story. You know how they say opposites attract? Well, that would be a gross understatement when it came to my male selections. From bad boys to playboys; the jobless to homeless; and, even those with addictions.

I was going through the motions of life, but inside, the little girl inside of me was worried. The little girl inside of me wanted to save the sick and afflicted. The little girl inside of me was overcome with fear and sadness.

I was trying to repress her worries, but the ghosts of my 'childhood past' kept rising to the surface in a blur of faces and emotions. It wasn't until a trip back home for a tragic death in the family that it all became clear.

The house was full of family members and the soft whisper of empathetic voices, all trying to console one another. My mother's throaty sobs had now faded into the background. It was a sound I thought I would never hear again, after my grandmother (her mother) passed away.

I headed to my childhood room in the back of the house. It was exactly how I had left it years ago when I left for college. The four-poster canopy bed greeting me at the door always made me feel like a princess. The matching white oak bookshelf-dressers were lined with

books, porcelain dolls and trinkets from every phase of my life, all the way up to the day I left. As I rifled through the drawers I came across a small lined notebook. It was covered with doodles, but in the center of the front cover, was the word 'Journal'. The memories suddenly came flooding back. This was not just a book of poetry or short stories; these were the words of the little girl inside of me. This was what she wanted me to confront, to remember, to overcome.

I closed the door, sat down in the rocking chair by the window, and began to read.

JournalEntryOne:

Childhood

From a small town down South...

Hi. My name is Tara. Tara Walker. I'm just a child (nine years old to be exact), though sometimes I don't feel like one. I'm one of those kids that was tall for my age. But that's not all. I see and hear things I am not supposed to. Grown-ups are always tryin' to hide stuff from me, like I don't know already.

Trying to be a good little girl is not hard for me. I don't say much so it makes it easy to be the perfect little girl I am supposed to and expected to be. Good in school, no trouble at home, and I eat just about anything, so you can't even say I'm a picky eater. Sometimes I wonder why everyone always calls me "heavy-handed". I guess it's because I break things by accident, and also I'm kind of klutzy, I guess you could say. I'm much taller than most of my friends which makes me somewhat stronger than most my age. This is not something I do on purpose, but I think my mom and dad think that I do. Speaking of mom and dad, I guess you want to know about them, huh? Well, my mom works for this bank in Philadelphia called "1st Pennsy" I think. Anyway, she works all the time and mostly the late shift, so I'm stuck with my

brother watching me until my dad comes home. My mom is nice. She's very pretty, and very classy, from what I hear. I try to be like her and also listen to everything she tells me because she's smart.

Sometimes my mom is upset because of my dad. You see, my dad drinks acka-hall (that's a bad drink), and my mom doesn't like it too much. Sometimes their fighting wakes me up and I can't get back to sleep for a long time. My dad's really cool! He's funny and he takes me everywhere. He works at this lumber company where they sell wood and when he has to take me with him to work I get to pretend I'm building all these neat things with hammers and nails. I get lost in my own little world and even forget to have lunch! My dad takes me everywhere! Oh, wait, I said that already. Sorry. Well, this may seem weird to you but I even go with him to the bar. It's a place where all these people meet every day or weekend, I think. They drink that stuff my mom doesn't like and play pool (some boring game with sticks and balls), and video games. Whenever I go there I would drink soda from these tiny little glasses and eat snacks from a bowl and play video games. My favorite game was Space Invaders. Pinball was cool too. Everyone treats me great. It's like I

am a movie star! Whenever I run out of quarters I just get more from my dad. That is my typical Friday or Saturday night. I guess my mom is at work. I don't really know.

Most nights during the week I have to stay with my brother, Pookie, if my dad didn't come straight from work, and most times he didn't. I think he had to get a drink that we don't have at home before coming home. My dad's a good cook and I like it when he cooks dinner for us. I like to help in the kitchen. Unfortunately, my brother (whose real name is Isaiah Jr.) is not a cook. Don't get me wrong, he makes the best french toast in the world, but that's it! I get tired of it every night. So recently I started to just have a bowl of cereal. My brother and I love cereal. We could have cereal for all three of our meals in a day. Oh, I forgot to tell you my mom and dad's names, Rosalie and Isaiah Sr.

Sometimes I wish I had a different family. I love everybody, but things get rather strange sometimes around here. Isaiah is the only brother I have that stays here, but I think he'll be gone soon. I don't know why, but it's just a feeling. My parents argue a lot about him. I think my brother is in trouble or something. Anyway he has tons of

friends, because they are always calling and coming over. Sometimes when he babysits me I go over to one of his friends' houses and he goes out. It's okay though, because other kids are there. Most of the time though I just go across the street to the reverends house. He's a round, jolly man who gives me candy and juice and we watch game shows together. The Price is Right is his favorite.

Sometimes I get lucky and one of the older daughters come home and I get to play dress up in their room and listen to them talk about grown-up woman stuff. As soon as my dad gets home from work I rush across the street to greet him with lots of hugs. One funny thing is when my dad drinks that funny stuff, I get tons more hugs. He's funny. But mommy doesn't think it's that funny.

People fight a lot 'round here. I have another brother, Darrell, who acts weird a lot. I think I heard mommy say he was a little "off". I'm not quite sure what that means but he screams a lot. Him and his wife move around a lot with my niece and I heard they fight a lot! Sometimes he comes over here using bad language and upsetting my mom and dad. It is really scary! I mostly just hide in my room in my favorite

little corner until it's over. One time he and my brother, Isaiah, got into this big fight and they were punching each other. It started at the front door one Sunday morning. It ended up all the way in the back bedroom, where they busted through the mirrored closet doors. I think my dad broke it up. Darrell left the house mad. After the fight was broken up, my parents called me for breakfast where everyone ate like nothing ever happened.... For some reason, my daddy's home fries and scrambled eggs with cheese didn't look as tasty as they usually did and there was this lump in my throat. All of the sudden I busted out crying and ran from the table to the security of my room. I will never forget that moment. I kinda felt like everyone thought I was crazy and upset for no reason, like I just imagined the whole fight. Maybe I did. Oh well.

My life is filled with school and friends to play with, but I am still lonely most of the time. I taught myself to play games that require two or more people by myself. I can play Easy Money by myself, I can play I Declare War by myself, and I can even play Uno by myself! Playing with my dolls is the most fun. They can talk, they can walk, and they go on trips and everything. I do their hair and makeup and always

clean up after I'm done. I think I am very neat and clean, just like my mommy. Speaking of trips, I go everywhere my parents go. My mom and dad take me to fun places with my aunts and cousins some of the time. I go to Virginia to Bush Gardens, and Hershey Park and Kings Dominion and I also go to islands in the middle of water. Most of the trips are planned through this lady at our church. It is soooo hot on those islands! I think I even remember one time when my dad had that bad drink when we were away and mommy got really mad at something silly he did, because it makes him act silly, and they had a fight. But, I was used to it, so it's really no big deal.

Hey, I forgot to tell you about my other brother, Enrique. I call him Ricky. He is truly the coolest. I hardly ever see him because I heard he works a lot and is very busy, but he's fun. Whenever he comes home to see me he says, "Heyyyyyy, how's my girl?", and I get a big hug. Sometimes he brings a girl with him. She's usually pretty cool, and pretty. Vikki was his latest girlfriend. She was really nice and for a while they stayed with me and mommy and daddy, but not for long. When they finally got their own place, I used to visit a lot when my mom and dad had to work. It was kinda

weird when I went over there, because they would usually leave me alone or be in the bedroom and never come out. So I would just watch TV or look at some of the magazines they had. But I don't think I was supposed to be looking at them, because naked people were in them and some of the pictures and words were bad. Actually, most of them were bad. I felt bad afterwards for looking at it. I asked God to forgive me and he said he did, and I believe him. Anyway, that was the last time I went over there, because I think they moved after that.

Every Saturday was the same thing. All my aunts and cousins packed up from Jersey and went to my grandmom's in Philadelphia. We had fried chicken and rolls and for dessert we went to the corner store called Frank's for ice cream. I have to tell you about my aunts. They are so funny. All of us just laugh all day. My Aunt Maryanne is truly funny. She tells a story like no one I know. She is the foster mother to all my cousins, Corin, Liza, and Ivana. She is Shana's (another cousin) grandmom. Her real kids are Terri, she does hair and bakes really good stuff; Keenan, he is in and out of jail a lot and makes her cry; and Marvin, the father of my cousins, Mark and Danielle, he has a tire business or

something like that and is really friendly. Aunt Maryanne cooks great! She is always taking care of these kids for this agency and then loving them so much she decides to keep them, which is cool 'cause I get more cousins. My other aunt is named Aunt Terri. She is the mother of my boy cousin, Lorenzo. She is always smiling and has this funny laugh that makes all of us laugh even more. She lives in Deptford with her husband, I think, whose name is Teddy. Uncle Teddy drank the same funny drink my dad did and wasn't home much. I think he was a fireman. Don't think I would want him in charge of rescuing me though. Anyway, she seemed happy all the time. I love my whole family a lot.

Anyway, back to the story. This Saturday was no different. After we got our hair pressed at Miss Lucille's at the corner salon we all felt pretty. All my cousins are my favorite playmates, especially Corin. She was my best friend. We all went back to grandmom's that day and ate and went for ice cream afterwards. Our favorite dessert was the wafer ice cream sandwich with the vanilla, chocolate and strawberry all in one. Mmm-mmm good. Ice cream is my favorite. My dad gives me some every night before bed in a bowl. It was always Breyers. I love my dad.

Anyway, after dessert we were all playing and went across the street to Michael's house and played some more. Michael has a crush on me and it kinda makes me blush when he talks to me. Sometimes though he says things about my body I don't like, him and my cousin Lorenzo. Lorenzo is my favorite boy cousin. He is the son of my Aunt Terri. We play a lot outside pretending we're camping through the woods and stuff at his house in Deptford. I kinda look up to him because he's bigger and tells me exciting things sometimes. He has the neatest electronic games. There's just one thing that bothers me. I am not sure if it's wrong or not, but it happened last Saturday. Me and Lorenzo were upstairs at my grandmom's in Philly 'til our parents came to pick us up and he said he wanted to try something and to lay down on the bed. I don't know why I agreed so easily, maybe because I trusted my big cousin. Then he asked me to pull down my pants, so I pulled them down a little to my knees. He then pulled his down and tried to put his thing on my middle part. All of the sudden grandmom yelled for us!! We jumped up, pulled up our pants and ran downstairs. We haven't talked about it since then. I feel really weird about it and I will never tell a soul. That means nobody.

Anyway, let's talk about something else. You know I feel like an only child because I am the only little girl in the house. I have imaginary friends and talk to them all the time. I write a lot too. Stories about all kinds of things, even poems, and let my mom read them. My mom 'praises' me all the time. That means she tells me how good I am. My mom and dad say that I can do anything I want and be anything I want when I grow up and I believe them. I like to sing too. I listen to a song over and over until I have it memorized and then sing it over and over. I like to sing to the songs my brother, Isaiah plays. I forgot to tell you he plays the piano very good, or is it well. Anyway he plays George Benson, "There I Go", Angela Bofield, "People Make the World Go Round", and Patti Labelle, "Somewhere Over the Rainbow". My favorite song was "Black Butterfly". Last Saturday my mom called all my aunts and cousins over to hear me sing it. Afterwards I had to go to bed. I also sang "Street Life". I don't know who sings it but she sings really good. My brother is the best piano player in the whole world and everyone loves him, mostly me. I think my mom and dad do too. Tonight was a bad night for him though. He kinda took my bike and mommy was mad.

Here's how it went - Daddy wasn't here, as usual at night, and she let him have it when he got home. It almost seemed like I was watching it tonight but I wasn't really seeing it. I felt helpless. Mommy screamed she was sick of daddy coming home drunk and then he screamed something else back. The screaming went on for what seemed to be hours. The screaming was like fingernails on a blackboard, cutting into you so deep you kinda shivered. Then I think my mommy broke down. They went from the living room to the kitchen where my mom grabbed a sharp knife and tried to kill my daddy!! Luckily he was strong enough to fight her off, get the knife out her hand and finally calm her down. I couldn't do anything but just stand there staring blankly like this was happening to someone else but me. Afterwards, daddy left and mommy said that I was going to live with her, and daddy and her were not going to be together. I asked tons of questions but I don't think she heard me. She stood in front of her bathroom mirror and rolled her hair in silence. I am lying here in bed now trying to imagine what it will be like to live with just my mom and I am also trying to get the image of mommy with the knife out of my head. I can't seem to

sleep. I think I'll get up and watch TV or something. Nah, maybe I'll just lie here.

It's the next morning and no one is acting different. It's like last night never happened. My mom said we are not moving and that was it. That's good, because it would probably be weird just living with her anyway. I wish I knew what the fight was about though. My friend Michelle is coming over today. She's my best friend and she is leaving soon. Her mom and dad are taking her away to Nevada, wherever that is. Anyway, this will be one of the last times we play Barbie together. She loves my townhouse and van that I have. The townhouse has an elevator with 3 levels. I want a house just like this when I grow up. The kitchen is on the first floor, the bathroom on the second and the bedroom on the third. The van had a kitchen, bathroom and bed also. Michelle was tall like me, so was her mom. They were both pretty. She was quiet like me too and was the only girl in the house. She was an only child. I liked playing at her house. I wish she didn't have to move away.

Michelle's dad was a big man with big shoulders, arms and hands. He wore glasses and had an afro like my dad. He was

okay. He argued with her mom a lot and I only liked him a little bit. I think he scared me that one weekend I stayed overnight with Michelle. In the morning Michelle and I took a shower together in the big grown-up bathroom with the pretty glass doors. Her dad kept trying to come in the bathroom to see us. I don't like grown-ups to see me undressed. He finally left us alone. Anyway, Michelle goes to school with me too and I'll miss her a lot. Now who will I play dolls with? My mom got her a present for going away. It's a neat alarm clock and I got one too. The numbers are real bright and it plays music. I'm going to keep mine forever! I hope Michelle keeps hers forever too.

In the neighborhood there's not many kids I play with. Mostly the boy across the street, name Ronald and his friend, Varnell. Also, the tall, skinny black girl down the street named Alexia. She was okay some of the time, but one day we were on my swings and she was mean and hurt me and we didn't play together after that. I heard she has a lot of boyfriends already. The other two sisters I played with on the corner were white. I did used to play with them a lot until their dog bit me on the forehead one day. I'm afraid of dogs. Ronald, or Ronnie, is a good playmate. We ride

bikes and play in the dirt and swing on my swings together. We talk about everything and listen to music also. He is fun to play with, even for a boy. Somebody told me yesterday that he liked me, but I don't believe them. Boys are yucky and they always look at my body funny. Anyway I don't like boys!

You know, about what I said earlier, about the sisters on the corner that were white. I didn't mean nothin' bad by that. It's just that I hear things and see things. My parents say white people treat us different and that's a fact that will never change, but they tell me not to treat anybody different because of their color. I'm allowed to play with anyone I want. I just wanted to tell you that, in case you thought I was "begadiss". I think that's what my mom and dad call it.