



## DON'T BELIEVE THE HATE

**Jamilah Lemieux** isn't buying TV portrayals of sisters behaving badly. She knows better

**I**n a recent episode of the VHI reality series *Basketball Wives*, Tami Roman tries to beat up castmate Jennifer Williams, who she thinks called her a bitch and criticized her for once relying on food stamps. "If you call me a f---ing bitch," Roman threatens, "you're gonna have no f---ing teeth." The show is typical of TV fare that paints Black women's relationships as marked by bickering, hollering and backstabbing. Switch the channel to Bravo and *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, and you just might become convinced that Black women are one bottle of moscato away from turning loud and mean, even with those we've known for years.

These aren't the experiences I have when I get together with my sisters. My girls have dried my tears, moved me across state lines, helped me pay the bills, and taken care of me when I was sick. The beatdowns on reality TV aren't what I notice as I walk the streets of Brooklyn, where I see Black women laughing, living and loving one another. And they're definitely not what I know about my sorority sisters in Alpha Kappa Alpha, who support one another through births and losses, through new marriages and painful divorces—sisters who love fiercely and have one another's back no matter what might be going down.

Sometimes we just have to turn off the TV and remember that we are *not* perpetually at war with one another. Take a look at the Black women you know—our play cousins and aunts, our church groups and community circles, the girls from our freshman dorm who keep us on point well after graduation, the crew at the beauty salon, the other Black girl in the office. There is no mistaking the fellowship that marks the places where we meet. No matter how the media tries to represent us, we know our true strength lies in our girlfriends, sorors, BFFs or whatever title we take as we hold each other close in the name of sisterhood.

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## WOMEN I LOVE

**asha bandele** discovered a universe of best friends

**T**he last time I had a best friend, a girl who was my five-call-a-day, tell-everything-exactly-the-way-it-went-down type of girl, I was 13 years old. She was 15. Both of us lonely Black girls in Whiter-than-White prep schools, we found home in the music we listened to, the food we ate, the boys we crushed on. We loved each other from that singular place known only by teenagers: thick, desperate, sticky, messy, beautiful, terrible. We hitchhiked together and hung out in urban and suburban parks with bad boys who were trying to be good and good boys who were trying to be bad. We read Nikki Giovanni and wrote poems and never thought there would be a day when we would not be together.

After high school we both shipped off to college and grew apart. It was not as sad as it might sound. It really was an acceptable end to our story. Still I missed her. I wanted what I imagined others had, the best friend going all the way back to taking baths

together. I wanted that long arc of history, the soul who knows you deep down past the masks you wear. But that was not my story.

In the 25 years since my best teenage friend and I broke up, I looked for her replacement in every sister's face. Then it dawned on me that in trying to choose The One, I was casting out The Many, the universe of women who have held me up, called me out, saved my life. It wasn't one sister, superwoman-like, who threw my baby shower, put salve on my emotional wounds, or nurtured my dreams. Instead, I have an ever-evolving roster of women. Breakups, births, deaths, silly times, serious ones, I don't even have to make a call to share the moment. She or she or she or she has already called me to laugh or cry or rant or pray or just hold the space in silence. She is always there and she has always been there. And I love her more profoundly than I ever could have imagined in that teenage lifetime ago. □

**asha bandele's** most recent book is *Something Like Beautiful* (Harper).

