

Resignation: A Monologue
by Ben F. Locke

A black woman sits at her desk, typing away at her laptop. She's trying to compose an email but keeps going back and forth, deleting and editing, but not getting anywhere. Finally, she stops, deletes everything and jumps up from her desk to address the audience.

Dear Board, Dear Artistic Leadership, Dear employees, Dear,cast, Dear crew, Dear donors, Dear theatre community, Dear anyone who will listen,

4 years ago I was appointed as the Artistic Director of a predominantly white theatre, in a predominantly white town. Me. My black ass. In the midst of the pandemic, in the midst of Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, in the midst of We See You and all the EDI "efforts," in the midst of the entire racist, ignorant and violent history of America, it was me you hired.

I should have known better and don't get me wrong, I did. I knew this was simply lip service. I knew there was no genuine interest in me specifically but a really nice brown skinned band-aid on the gigantic boo boo that is American Theatre. I knew that whenever something is on the brink of ruin, it's Black women we turn to, never before, never after but only in the deep trenches of chaos are we called up, sought after or even thought of. And don't get me wrong, there was not a moment when I thought that I was not qualified, I am. I am overqualified in fact. Overqualified in knowing how to run an organization, overqualified in dealing with crisis, overqualified in dealing with the inevitable racism, criticism, complaining, "What about-isms," threats, misogyny, mansplaining, gaslighting, lying, lack of support from all sides, and people telling me how they can do my job better despite my years of experience, degrees from the top universities and being a Black woman my entire life. I know you will never see it that way. I know you will forever think you did me a favor by hiring me to essentially bring you out of an impossible situation, which I did. You're welcome.

I have proven my value, my intelligence, my innovation, my heart, my compassion, my vulnerability, my strength, my leadership over and over again yet somehow, somehow, it was never enough to see it important to ensure that we never get to where we are today. I was never important enough to protect. The theatre, yes, the theatre community, yes but the woman uprooting her entire family to risk her and their safety and sanity? No. It wasn't enough when I expressed my concerns when I interviewed for the position. It wasn't enough when I was first announced and a slew of racist comments were made. It was enough when a donor told me to my face that they were pulling away support from the theatre simply because I was a Black woman and was in over my head. It wasn't enough when I started getting death threats. It wasn't enough when I was harassed in the grocery store or walking around town or by people brave enough to show up to my home. It wasn't enough when my daughter was kidnapped for a full day and I cried myself to sleep for months after she was recovered

because I had to sit with the fact that my strong, Black woman complex had put her in danger. I cried that people felt that entitled, that empowered, that fearful of a Black woman in charge that they took from me so comfortably, devastating my whole world, forever changing me and for what? I cried because the institution has yet to address the root, has yet to take a stand that isn't rooted in tolerating the oppression but in vanquishing them, in making it so unbearable to be racist, to be hateful and have so little regard for kindness and empathy and basic human decency. I cried because all we ever want is to do our work and go home, to create our art and exist but that apparently is some faroff fantasy we may never see in our lifetime. I cried because when I came to you about my thoughts on resigning, it wasn't about how to keep that from happening but the best way to make it happen.

I did my best to save this theatre. I have always believed it was my duty to preserve American Theatre but at what cost? What is the theatre we're saving? Who will be left? I look around and all the best and brightest are nowhere to be seen. Like me, they have been put on a pedestal, only to realize it was a chopping block. We are losing too many people we need and all because we want to uphold all the worst parts, the worst people, all the most trite traditions that don't breathe life into the inevitable world we're heading towards. Theatre cannot claim to be leading the way when there are no batteries in our flashlight. We cannot claim to be putting on mirror on society when it does not extend off the stage. You cannot ask us to save you while in the same breath drown us. We can all be saved, if only you wanted us all to be saved. As long as there is more outrage for a Black mermaid than there is for a white supremacist, this theatre cannot be saved. As long as more compassion is found in ideas and unfactually sound think pieces than there is for people, for communities exposed to daily violence, humanity cannot be saved. My arms only have so much they can carry. I cannot save everyone by myself. My bandwidth is only so much.

My priorities have shifted and my lifeboat gets smaller and smaller with each passing day. So I thank you for these past 4 years. I have met some of the most talented, kind, courageous, selfless artists and people it was my pleasure to meet and work with. I have created some of the most memorable art in my career to date. While I had my lowest lows, I've also had my highest highs. I will never forget what I'm capable of, what theatre is capable of, what humanity is capable of when we truly lead with fearless love, intentional care, and bold imagination. So thank you. I will forever cling to those memories and experiences with the highest hopes for a brighter future but it's time I take a step back and say, it's time for you all to get to work.

The woman takes a moment to let relief, tiredness, anger and whatever other emotions she has left in her body. She takes a deep breath and goes back to her desk, with a clearer head, ready to write her email. She sits and types. It's short, sweet and to the

point. With a breath of release and maybe even a smile on her face, she gets up and leaves. Projected is her email which reads: "I chose me. I resign."