

Sample #1: **Ny'airah and the Long Line of Strong Women** by MJ Perrin

As the only witness to the shooting of her deaf brother by a police officer, Ny'airah has been pushed to talk by her community who wants to vilify the police, her grandmother who wants justice for her grandson and the police who are eager to show the shooting was justified. What Ny'airah wants, is to be left alone so she can put it all behind her. Had it not been for her estrange father exacting revenge on the officer, she might have done just that. However, confronted with what her inaction has put into motion, she calls upon the spirit of her mother to give her strength to tell the truth. Her dilemma is how to admonish her father, defend a good officer's virtue while still holding accountable those officers reacting out of fear or hatred. This is her moment to declare her failures and undo them, by doing what she should have done from the start—stand and fight for what she knew was the right thing to do.

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MOMMA

Not all fights are worth fighting, Ny'airah. You don't have to fight every battle. When someone says they got yo back, be careful, cause now, you're a shield for theirs. Ask yo'self, are they worth you dying for? There'll be lots of times when you're told what to think and that it's the right thing to think. But don't you take their word for it. That's yo call. *You* hav'da know it's the right thing for *you* to do. And once you know that, then you stand and fight for it. Don't you ever back down from a righteous fight. Never.

The spirits evanesce as NY'AIRAH joins  
GRANNY, MARCUS and DeVON.

DeVON

Hey, there you are.

NY'AIRAH

Yep, here I am.

MARCUS

Ny'airah, try and relax. It'll be a mad-house out there, but don't worry. Granny and me will stay right by yo side the entire time.

DeVON

And I'll be behind you, so we got you covered.

GRANNY

All right, let's get going. Plenty of people waiting on us to get there.

NY'AIRAH

Stop! Just... Stop. I'm not ready.

DeVON

It'll be okay. Once this is dun, things can go back to normal.

NY'AIRAH

I wish it was that simple, DeVon. But I'm thinking normal has left the building and it ain't never coming back.

MARCUS

Maybe the old normal, but you'll find a new one. It'll be okay.

NY'AIRAH

Always good for a pep talk, Marcus. Thanks for that.

GRANNY

Get yo'self ready on the way there.

NY'AIRAH

Um-hum, that's not happening. I gotta tell you all something, before I say it to anyone else.

GRANNY

Ny'airah girl, people are waiting. We need to go.

NY'AIRAH

Granny, I ain't leaving here, 'til I say what I gotta say.

GRANNY

Why you always gotta be so difficult? Why can't you just do what you supposed to do?

MARCUS

Just hold on Granny, we got time. They've waited this long, they can wait a little while longer.

GRANNY

(displeased with Marcus' support of Ny'airah)

Go on and hurry up with it then.

NY'AIRAH

You all know that I followed Jason because of Vin, but then I got vague after that, saying I didn't remember stuff. So here's the rest of it. When I saw Jason and Vin, it wasn't long after that I heard Vin shouting for Jason to run. Vin, he's like gone in a flash. But Jason, he didn't get what Vin was saying, so he was still there when five-o rolled up. One cop chased Vin, the other told Jason to get on the ground. That's when he took off running, and the cop chased him.

GRANNY

That's everything the cop dun already said. What you got new to add?

The replay of NY'AIRAH's memories resume behind the scrim. Freezing in her thoughts when the officer takes aim.

NY'AIRAH

The cop shouted at him to stop, but he didn't know 'bout Jason being deaf. So I shouted to him, to the cop, telling him Jason was deaf and couldn't hear him. I shouted over-and-over for him not to shoot. I didn't think he was hearing me, 'cause he stopped. He just stopped all of a sudden. He stopped so he could take aim at Jason. I saw him, then I heard it. It was so fucking loud. I saw the gun jerk back and I couldn't do anything but stand there and watch as Jason fell to the ground.

GRANNY

So now he's on the ground. How was Jason a threat to him then? He didn't hav'da fire those last two shots that killed him.

There's no stopping the replay. The officer's movement to take aim, lingers.

NY'AIRAH

He wasn't planning on killing him. Everything was fine until Jason made a sudden move. That's when the last two bullets were fired. He wasn't trying to kill Jason. Only stop him from running.

MARCUS

What makes you so sure of that?

NY'AIRAH

'Cause I can't get what happened out of my head. And no matter how hard I try to, I just keep on seeing it play through. Each time making me more-and-more certain that what I remember, is exactly what happened.

MARCUS

Which was what?

NY'AIRAH

He lowered his aim. At first, his arms were straight out in front of him, head high. Then they dropped, just before he fired his gun. He changed his aim to hit Jason in the leg. He wasn't trying to kill him.

GRANNY

What about the gun the cop said he saw? There wasn't one found on him.

NY'AIRAH

But there was a gun, Granny. I think Vin was about to give it to him when the police showed up. He had to have seen it. It wasn't like they were trying to hide it.

GRANNY

But you saw for yo'self. There was no gun to be seen anywhere around Jason. And he couldn'a ran much with a bullet in his leg. So why did he hav'da shoot him?

NY'AIRAH

There was no way he coulda known that for sure. Granny, if I had been him, I mighta shot Jason too. 'Cause for that one split moment, I thought maybe Jason was reaching for a gun. To this day, I still can't figure out what he was thinking. He had to know he was likely to get shot. I just don't know why he...

DeVON

Why didn't you say all this sooner? Why let this drag on like you did?

There are moments in life when the desire to stop the flow of overwhelming odds isn't strong enough. Times when we ask ourselves, do we fight it, or do we give in to it. Of course, such immense odds are not subject to control by anyone or anything. There is no real choice; the tidal wave of emotions will overpower anything rational.

NY'AIRAH, gradually losing control of her sorrow, her pain, her regrets for so many reasons, for so many people she never once thought might get hurt in the wake of her silence.

NY'AIRAH

'Cause all my life I've been taken the blame for Jason. Anytime he got into trouble, I'd step in to say it was me. Everyone thought he was the good kid with a bad sister. But this one time, I didn't know how to take the blame, and I didn't wanna say he was in the wrong. I wanted time to think, but I couldn't. So I just kept quiet, hoping and praying it would all work itself out for the best and I'd never hav'da say one way or the other.

GRANNY

And you plan on telling *this* to all those people? You don't think that cop woulda shot him dead anyway? You go tell that story and everything we been fighting for will get set back, all 'cause you think this one cop was trying to do right. Jason mighta dun wrong, but there's a heap of other black men who didn't do a damn thing to get shot dead by a policeman.

NY'AIRAH

Then those are the battles we should hold our ground on and fight. Not the ones where a good cop, a caring cop, ends up in the hospital fighting for his life. And he's there 'cause I didn't stand up to face a whole lot of people tired of having reason to be angry. I know that feeling. It's what's keeping blacks from hiding and from running scared and being silent like we were taught to be. But we can't lump 'em all together like they do us. That's just not right. Isn't that what you always preached? Do right or live with the price for doing wrong.

GRANNY

One good cop out of how many?

NY'AIRAH

I don't know Granny. I don't think anybody knows that. I tell you what I do know. I'm not gonna fight this battle with you 'cause I know it's not the right one for me. One of these times, when I believe the fight is a good fight, I'll stand behind you and shield yo back. But today, I'm gonna go tell a bunch of people that a good cop, a good man, is dying for the wrong reasons. And I'm one of 'em. If you still wanna walk beside me Granny, that's great, 'cause I sure would love the company. But if you can't, no worries. I won't fall down 'cause you ain't there to hold me up.

GRANNY

I always said you were like yo mother. She fought with me on just about everything. I suppose now, we're gonna fight all the time too. Yo momma, she did you wrong.

Words said at a particular time in a particular way can trigger a response otherwise kept in check. They can alter the molecular make-up of a person disciplined to hold back, reconfiguring the harmless, into objects of destruction.

GRANNY said those words, transforming NY'AIRAH's remorse into a shield and dagger.

NY'AIRAH

I got no problem with being like Momma. But you doing Momma wrong, by saying she didn't teach me to be a strong woman. If I had died in daddy's car, she woulda been so ashamed of me for *not choosing to live my life*. She didn't do me wrong. She taught me a whole lot more, than you could ever imagine she did.

MARCUS

You have to admit, Granny, there ain't many people who stand up to you and not be thought crazy for doing it. And you know that's true. (pause) Anything you gotta say to Ny'airah? 'Cause this is the time to say it. Let's get it all out and dealt with.

Silence.

DeVON

You ready to say yo peace?

NY'AIRAH

I'm never gonna be more ready than I am right now.

MARCUS

Granny? Last chance. ... Okay then. Let's get it over with.

Just when you think there's nothing left to be said, one word leads to many more.

GRANNY

Charlotte always had to go her own way. She wasn't afraid to say what she was gonna do. Or what she wasn't gonna do. Told me plenty of times to back-off. Charlotte wasn't the kind to scare easy. I was never ashamed of her. I was just scared for her, and for all of you. Dre got in her head so bad, I ain't never seen her in such a mess. But when it came to you kids, especially you Ny'airah, she knew she had to pull herself together. It took her a good-long-while, but she did it. What I gotta say is too late for yo mamma, but it ain't too late for you to hear this. There's no way you woulda became this woman, if yo mamma wasn't the woman she was. If you know you're right about this, then let's go on and get it dun. But don't you dare let them other policeman off the hook. You tell 'em there needs to be more cops who truly care. You hear me? You tell 'em we need more good cops out there. Enuf to outnumber the scared ones and the ones full of hate. Cops brave enuf to stand up and hold the bad ones accountable. You say what you gotta say, but don't you let them other policemen go free. You gotta hold them up to the light, 'cause it's the right thing to do. Can we agree on that?

NY'AIRAH

That works for me, Granny. I got no problem doing that.

GRANNY

Okay then. Let's go. ... Marcus, wait there. Ny'airah, you lead the way.

And behind them all, is a long line of strong women.