

Casey Baron

C B and the Braided Whoopi

Even before my birth, Whoopi Goldberg and I apparently were destined to share a life together. Okay, that's a lie. Because even though I grew up watch *Sister Act*, and hearing my mother recite pieces of her many other projects, I have never actually met the woman. There is no physical connection between the two. So maybe I shouldn't say her and I, because that's not even remotely close to the truth. It's probably more accurate to understand that the woman has followed me around like a *Ghost* since my birth. *Sister Act* released in 1992. I was born in 1994. January 14th to be exact. My mother matched the two of us sometime between '98 and '99 (she can't exactly remember). Or maybe it was my father, because he's the one who sent the tapes over. I asked him once if the only reason he sent it had to do with Whoopi being a black actor, he told me he doesn't think so. I think that is partially why, even while my father appreciates the standards and general mindset of white Americans, there is only so far away you can go from your roots before you return.

One of the few film recollections I have from my childhood revolves around watching *Sister Act* on VHS with my mother and my sister. Over, and over, and over again. My family is religious to say the least, and there are conflicting views simply between the four of us, but that's not what this is about. It's not about the fact that my mother sent me Sunday school as a kid. And that we would embark to church every Sunday right around 9 am. As a matter of fact, this isn't even about how that film shaped my current burning desire to be a part of the film industry, and indulge in it like rats would with thrown out food. This is all about Whoopi's identity as one of the faces of black America, and how even while hating her recent actions, I wish that I was her.

Whoopi Goldberg has just released a new book titled, *If Someone Says "You Complete Me, Run."* I'm not telling you this as an endorsement of her book; this is not an indictment of her book. I haven't even read the damn thing. But I'm almost certain it will end up on the New York Time's Bestseller's list (which apparently means a lot less than you would think), because of multiple reasons. I'll engage in them just to show off my wit and fancy, and to waste considerable space and/or words. For one, Whoopi has been on a media circuit tour to promote the thing; attach your name to Stephen Colbert and only good things can come of it.

"Why should I run," Colbert said. Referring to the title of the book.

"They know why," Whoopi said. This prompted a succinct applause from the audience and a grandiose grin from Whoopi. *Got 'em, hook, line, and sinker.*

Maybe this bit was just a part of the natural reactions of a late show crowd. Everyone is excited, hyped up to take in the presence of whichever big star is on the docket for the night. But I don't think so, I think this is Whoopi realizing the contemporary perspectives of her audience. I don't believe in overly romantic expressions of love myself. *You complete me*, that's such a ridiculous statement to me. Why weren't you complete before? Why can't we just add to the overall essence of each other? Whoopi knows exactly who her audience is, what they want, or perhaps even what they need. Another aspect, and the most important of the details in regards to the book's impending success is its genre. It's self-help. And beyond that, it's a self-help book about love. Who doesn't want advice about love?!

I wish I could take advice about love, but I don't think any one person can fully understand everything about another person's love life. It's all just generalized statements. *You should be understanding of each other, make sure to compromise, forgive but never forget, remember to approach things with a new attitude.* Romantic comedies weren't big in the 90's

and 00's for no reason. And just like she did at the beginning of my life with *Sister Act*, this book is shaping how I feel about the current state of shit.

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The questions usually run through my head like the mishmash of challenges Hercules dealt with. It's funny, because at one point I remember myself really wishing for the confidence to be stronger. I had taken several creative writing classes up to that point. Between high school and the beginning of my college career, I had to have written enough to feel comfortable with whatever outcome the day would have brought. The weather was sticky bun from the oven hot, and I wore shorts and a t-shirt to accommodate the agreement. As I walked up the small hill towards the Williams Building, my calves began to tighten and a gnawing occurred within my teeth. I was ready to run back to the freshly registered Honda Accord in the parking garage and dip. But I made the walk. Stepped into class. Took a seat somewhere in the circle and was ready for everyone to take a look at what I wrote.

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I've only read one self-help book before and it was called *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. I read it in middle school. That series has gone on to sell more than 110 million copies in the U.S. and Canada. Also, worldwide retail sales of *Chicken Soup for the soul* branded products exceeds \$2 billion.

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As I sat in the class, Micah called my name and piece out for the entire ring of fire to hear, and everyone pulled out their printed copy of my story. I don't get sweaty palms, but I do get stuttered speech in times like these.

"I like it, I really enjoyed the wording," Rebecca said.

“Yeah, I agree. And that opening scene where it turned out that the snake was about to eat your sister was just a dream? Yeah, that was awesome,” Nicole said. Nicole is the type of girl who will find something she likes in a person, and if it really resonates, befriend them wholeheartedly. She’s also the type of girl who will ask if you want to smoke a bowl a couple days later.

Then the negative hits came.

“I think it’s good, but he’s missing a conflict,” one girl said. I can’t remember her name. Isn’t that funny?

“I really enjoyed it, but I think the antagonist could have been better,” Steven said.

“Yeah, I agree. There are some cool things in here though, and I think it could be really awesome,” Nicole said.

If I wasn’t blocked by so many people in the circle, I would have darted out as fast as I could.

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See, I never saw myself leaving my home to head for the warmth of Reno, Nevada’s bosom at a tender age. I still don’t now. But Whoopi instilled in me an appreciation for music, Broadway, and acceptance. She was, by and large, a degenerate in the film who found her way through the unlikely help of a convent. Now she’s hoping many seeking advice, or maybe just a “good read,” will cling onto her new book. But I can’t support this one, Whoopi. Not for the life of me.

Have you ever thought about writing something; *wait, start over*. Have you ever thought about making something and think to yourself; *this is gonna be the best shit ever?* Like, this is

gonna be so good, that everyone in class will have to read it and say, “wow, how the hell did she do that,” and they’ll scurry to your email address or maybe your phone number, just to get a hold of you before someone else does. Just to capture the secret of your motherfucking brilliance. I’ve never had that moment. Not once. Any time I have sat in front of a computer screen for an assignment or a standardized test, my faculties failed me in terms of production. And it has been with a sense of dread because deep down I know, it was not as good as it could have been.

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“The very qualities that make self-help one of publishing's most despised genres -- its formulaic simplicity, its reduction of human beings to cartoonish types, its unrelenting optimism -- also make it popular with people who rarely read any other kind of book.” – Laura Miller, *The Last Word; The Golden Age of Self-Help*.

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But really though, it’s like working up towards this thing, this unexplainable intangible thing that might as well be a newborn kid – *stop, no one really cares about the perceived difficulties of creation, they just want the finished product, everyone just wants something cool to hang on the wall once they’re thirty* - yet you can’t make it. I can’t make it. Because as much as I may try to shield myself in the cloak of a soccer jersey and macho bravado bullshit, every time my fingers tap one of these Chiclet keys, I feel as though a baby chick would upon birth. I fear this shit, man. The writing, the sharing, the judgment. Sometimes I wish like I was Whoopi. In sync with my own ideals, aptitude, and ability. I want to be able to place my face on a television screen, and express my ideas without the fear of potential backlash or disagreement. To be that guy is the goal, but the path to getting there, to actually doing it, is more probably built through

years of doing and failing. Hell, I think I want to be grander than Whoopi, I wanna be like Kanye; adept with a penchant for simply not giving a; *well, you can finish that one.*