Just One Story

Chera Broadnax

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I don’t think I breathed the whole time
Or if I did, it wasn’t deep enough or worth remembering
I tried to keep my eyes on the pages
I kept telling myself, just read the book
But I couldn’t
My eyes kept moving forward to the top of the screen trying to gauge the response of the teacher
If I could not see myself speaking on the video, I wouldn’t have known I was reading
All I could hear was my heart beating
All I could feel was my chest rising and a light sweat start to break
This shouldn’t be an issue I remind myself
But the silence between me requesting to read a story featuring a Black female protagonist and
the teacher agreeing is deafening
When I can’t hear my heart, I hear the ringing of the silence and the panic that ensued
I feel the apology for asking that I swallowed as it sits in my chest
I have done nothing wrong
It is Black History Month
How can I do this internship and not read at least one story about a happy Black family?
How do I justify that?
I can’t
So I read the story
And when it was over everything hurt
But I smiled
And on we went, back to the regular programming, some bullshit about a fucking bear.

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