



Natural Beauty

Leslie DuBois

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Over the next year, can Mahogany Brown learn to love herself ... and her hair?

Damaged. Stressed. Out of control. Those words could describe not only Mahogany's hair but her love-life. When she realizes that she has spent the last seven years being someone she's not in order to please her man, she decides it's time to take control and find out who she really is. Join Mahogany's journey of self-discovery ... through her hair.

This novella blends fact and fiction as it relates real-life advice and tips for the newly natural sister.

Natural Beauty Details

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From Reader Review Natural Beauty for online ebook

Tina says

This book is equal parts humorous chick-lit and a loving ode to the journey a black woman takes when deciding to wear her hair natural.

As odd as it sounds, for some black women, wearing your hair the way it comes out of your head can come as a bit of a culture shock. History, Popular culture, media images, and even corporate culture have collided and created a 'wall of sound' that has insidiously shaped our notions of what is beautiful, desirable and an appropriate way to look. And, not surprisingly, those notions very rarely fell in the favor of the black woman.

So we have adapted and conformed. What woman does not want to look beautiful by the standards of her society? What person can refuse to consent to a mode of dress or appearance in order to secure a job and fit in?

For women in general, the personal is very often the political. For black women that personal as political can often settle squarely on her head.

In comes this book which uses the main character's Mahogany's transition from a life of relaxers and weaves to a natural style as a framing device and metaphor for her changing love life.

Each chapter heading is a phase of her transition and begins with the chapter 'Relaxed.' When we first meet Mahogany, she has been in a seven year relationship with her Indian boyfriend Vinyay (Vinny) and he has yet to propose. This bothers her. What bothers her more is that she has never, not once, met any member of his family. The obvious reason for this is that he can't tell his family about his black girlfriend. That is true and it isn't. It is more than just being in an IR relationship on the down low. One of the reasons I like this book so much is that is is never just that simple.

In the course of the book we realize that Vinny does love Mahogany but he is too immature to own it. We learn that his family isn't really the problem. The racial thing it too hard for him to deal with.

What comes next is reminiscent of that song in that commercial 'I'm gonna wash that man right out of my hair.' Mahogany, in a moment of in vino veritas, realizes that the time, money and effort she spends on her hairstyle -- a style that she was maintaining because Vinny liked it so much -- was not worth it. So she does the Big Chop.

Thereafter each step in her new hair journey becomes another step away from that relationship and toward another one. Not only that, but in learning how to care for her natural hair -- something she has never had to learn before -- she is also learning how to care for her heart.

Hence, we meet her grumpy co-worker Trent. Trent and Mahogany have this great hate-hate relationship that morphs into an uneasy detente and then into attraction. Another In Vino Veritas moment shifts their relationship irrevocably. I was totally on Team Trent here.

The book is told in Mahogany's first person POV and she is hysterical. I just loved her. She has exactly the type of life outlook I want all my best girlfriends to have.

But beyond the romance, the book is excellent in a bunch of little touches. Mahogany & Trent's workplace and boss are a hoot (they celebrate Arbor Day in her office with a costume party, mandatory). I'd love to work for that guy! Mahogany's first date post Vinny breakup is with a guy whose name all the characters riff on (I thought it was a typo in the book at first, it wasn't). And his outlook on life...well... Mahogany realizes she needs to run far away. Trent's family was wonderful and I love how Mahogany just cold invited herself to their Thanksgiving dinner. This all in addition to some good, real life practical hair advice for the woman going natural.

This was a fantastic book. And by the time Mahogany had gotten to her full on Angela Davis fro', I was cheering for her and Trent.

I only wish it were longer or we got an epilogue or something. It is categorized as a novella and kindle page count has it at 173 pages. It felt meatier than most novellas and I don't feel like I got shortchanged in the story. But still {{whines}} I wanted more time with them. {{/whines}}.

Treece says

Rating: 3 1/2 stars

A delightfully funny book featuring Mahogany Michelle Brown who goes on a life-altering hair journey after the break-up of her seven-year relationship to a commitment phobe with racial issues.

Each chapter opens with Black natural hair-care advice and a positive outlook on possibilities. This is a point of interest for anyone not familiar with this subject and always wondered about it.

This book has it all and shines in its own way. There's humor, romance and a ton of delightful observations.

Overall, I couldn't stop reading and there were no slow moments, just a light-hearted fun fest rushing to a brief but satisfying ending.

Juanita Johnson says

I don't often like chic lit. And I don't usually give five-star ratings. I'm not particularly fond of interracial relationship books because they tend to be more about people falling in love because of what they look like. I'm pretty lazy about writing reviews as well. But I loved this book. I started with a sample and had to have the entire book immediately. I enjoyed all of the references to natural hair. I could have read an entire book with just the references. I love, how in the end Mahogany falls in love with the inner spirit of a man and THEN notices his appearance, as opposed to longing after some Prince Charming based on what most chic lit books provide I only regret that it wasn't longer and didn't give us more of their story after they get together.

Gisele Walko says

4.5

It took me a little while to get into this, and I was surprised at the abrupt ending at 85%, but this is well written and adorable, and I loved all the natural hair stuff.

Josie Ann says

I'm usually not one to read novellas, but I couldn't wait to read this one for two reasons: one, because Leslie DuBois is one of my all time favorite authors and I would read anything she published, even if it was only five pages! Two, I'm currently in the process of transitioning from relaxed to natural hair, it's the best hair decision I've ever made! Anyway, the novella tells the story of Mahogany Brown and the journey she goes through with her hair and discovering herself. After her break up with her boyfriend of seven years, Mahogany chops all of her hair off, which she regrets the next morning. Throughout the novella, as Mahogany hair starts to grow out, a piece of herself starts to grow as well. Aside from the characters, one thing I absolutely loved about this novella were the names of the chapters. I also enjoyed the tips as well. As someone who is in the early stages of transitioning, I can definitely relate to Mahogany's love/hate relationship with her curls. Overall, I thought this novella was really cute and helpful. Thank you, Leslie DuBois for writing such an amazing story...and for writing again! I seriously wouldn't be able to function without your novels!!

Brittany says

A natural novella

I loved everything about this book. I gave 5 stars it's a true love story without all that sex. It gave me chills I can't wait to read more books of hers as well as more books like this.

Anino says

There are times when after I've read something that's incredibly *hardcore* (I.e. sexually explicit, freaky, nasty, too naughty for words), that I need something that will cleanse my palate.

In my opinion, this book was very good. Not only was the story evenly paced, but the characters were multidimensional, and the natural haircare advice was awesome.

My only issues (with this book) were the following; a few moments of lag, and an abrupt ending that cheated the reader out of a proper Epilogue.

Other than that, this is a stand alone book that won't leave you in a funky state of withdrawal until your next installment fix... Err, the next installment.

Giving this one: 3 well-deserved stars.

Daph says

What do I think... ?

First: I LOVE the cover art. It reminds me of something my dad used to have hanging on the wall back in the 70s. Truly is beautiful.

Second: I truly enjoyed the theme of the book -- a young woman is forced to make a HUGE change in her life and journals it through her hair. I'm not sure how many of us are consciously aware of what we do to ourselves and how it correlates to the state of our heart. Mahogany Brown's journey from rocking weaves to afro puffs was emotional (I've been transitioning for a few years and have yet to do a Big Chop despite a strong desire to). Although the moment of the BC wasn't a surprise, and the appearance of the sagely, bohemian sister-in-law a bit trope (I have one of those, too), I found these women 100% relatable.

Third: Mahogany's romantic situation was believable. I can see how she was with Vinny. How they managed to stay in a relationship as long as they had. It actually kind of made me scared for my daughter who is a college freshman (not that I'm trying to marry her off); I don't want her to be with someone by default to look up in ten years and realize the truth about them. That's what happened to Mahogany (ugh. That name grated on me until she explained the reasoning behind it towards the end of the book).

Fourth: This is what didn't earn the book more stars for me. Trent. Mahogany goes through this huge break up, and rightfully, she's worried about her cubicle-mate who has the reputation of being a bit of an a-hole. Maybe I nodded off or something, but aside from her internal narration about her struggle to keep it together in front of Trent, I felt nothing pass between them. Sure, he was aloof, but the whole tension between them felt forced. I understand it was the result of a misunderstanding, but it needed a little more finesse. When Trent's actions reveal his feelings to the reader (a little too quickly, IMO), he's more of a sad sack than hardened man.

Yes, Mahogany lets her defenses down with Trent a little bit, then he's all in love, but she's hung up on Vinny. And then Vinny's sister shows up. Then Vinny shows up beating on his chest. Yeah... I could live without love triangles.

I wish there was more time getting to know Trent. He's not a major player in the book--her hair is. The haircare tips are cool. I want to try some of the styles suggested, but I wanted a little more connection with Trent. His family was great, but all of that was so rushed. That's saying something for me, the non-romantic romance reader.

Perhaps my issues with the book lie in that it is a first person POV and I prefer third. Trent is an interesting character. Mahogany is too, but out of them all, I'd rather spend more time with Trent and the sister-in-law.

Fifth: The author sets scenes nicely. There was minimal time wasted on clothing details, although I rolled my eyes at some brand name dropping. Ms. DuBois did an excellent job painting a clear picture of the people and places in Mahogany's life.

All-in-all: I liked the book. It isn't a bad use of time or three bucks. It is cleanly written with minimal grammatical errors. Above all, it's a cute, fun read, but I only 'liked it.' I really wanted to 'love it.'

Rosie J. says

The ending left me feeling like there was more to the story of Mahogany and Trent. *I hope so.*

MsKingsPens says

This was like a Beyoncé song... okay, but not nearly as good as the fans would lead you to believe.

Camille Adams says

What?...no sex?

A good read for 99 cents.

Megan says

I have been natural for four years now and I enjoyed reading about different hair styles and types, for that, I wish I would have gotten my hands on this book sooner.

I loved how she incorporated the emotions that go through exploring your hair in its natural state, and how sometimes you want to cut it all off again, perm it, braid it, or weave it just to have *something* to do with it. I remember those feelings so well.

Mahogany has been in a seven year relationship with Vinny. They met in college and after almost a decade of being a couple, she wants to take their relationship to the next level by getting married. Vinny wants to take things to the next level too, by buying a house for them. A ring would have been much cheaper. One night drunk and feeling heart broken, Mahogany takes out the scissors and bestows her anger on her hair. The next night she is as shocked as anyone would be. One day she has a long beautiful weave and now she has short, gorgeous coils. What's a girl to do? Call her best friend of course!

Throughout the year Mahogany's hair grows as well as her as a person. For the first time in a long time she has to learn to get on without her boyfriend of seven years. She has to awkwardly get out and date and awkwardly find ways to deal with her hair. As Mahogany discovers new styles for her hair, she discovers love as well.

(view spoiler)

Ren says

This is a great book for women of color. It really teaches acceptance and I love that we took that journey with the heroine towards accepting her natural beauty. It was also very entertaining, I smiled and laughed throughout the book. The only downside was the romance with Mahogany and Trent. Their relationship felt a little rushed and I wish the author took just a little more time to develop their relationship. Overall, I think it was a good book!

I would read it again and I'm honestly sorry I waited so long to read it.

The FountainPenDiva, Old school geek chick and lover of teddy bears says

"There is nothing wrong with short, nappy hair. Hair is hair," she had said. "Straight is beautiful, curly is beautiful, nappy is beautiful. If you don't believe that, how will anyone else?"

And let the church say AMEN, hallelujah and pass the popcorn!

I seldom give books the \m/ rock on but Natural Beauty was amazing! For a novella it got everything right and was humorous to boot. Better still the female friendships were on point--no hater-ation going on here. Few things piss me off more than female friendships (especially black female friendships) that are either non-existent or dysfunctional. I loved the natural hair tips, some of which I already use to great effect.

I even forgave the wince-worthy naming of our erstwhile heroine Mahogany (though I still think it's like a huge sign to readers--"oh look, one of those multicultural books"), especially as her awesome sister was named Marin. Oh did I mention her awesome sister Marin? Marin of the sisterlocs and the good advice about "it's just hair"? And Carnece of the shoe army with her down-to-earth sass and willingness to ride or die (or help Mahogany cover up a homicide).

Mahogany is a successful and self-sufficient social media specialist, and unfortunately has a rat of a boyfriend, an Indian man named Vinyay who is that man-child with commitment issues as well as a race problem. After seven years, he buys her a house but not a wedding ring. He's not interested in marriage with Mahogany for the obvious reason. Mahogany is done when she finds out his parents met his roommate, but not her. She cuts her hair and cuts him out of her life. And both are going to undergo some serious growing pains. Add to this is a growing curiosity then attraction to her acerbic co-worker, blonde and blue-eyed Trent.

And OMG, how many of us have come across a "brotha" like Jaames? No that's not an accident. He was "Jaames with two A's". Eleven kids and an issue with interracial relationships? Don't let the doorknob hit you where the good Lord split you!

Mahogany struggles with the hair as she struggles with her feelings for the ex as well as discovering there's more to her co-worker than just sticking dollar bills into a jar and sarcasm. The transitioning from weaves/relaxers to natural read true to life as Mahogany has days she loves her hair and days she wondered "what the hell did I just do and why"? I never went through that after having made the decision to not relax

or weave, but I get the societal pressure she and black women deal with to have 'acceptable' styles or to fit a caucasian ideal. That's why it's been awesome to see actor Lupita Nyong'o being celebrated so highly. It's also why I hope more IR novels will do a better job showcasing black women's diversity in color and hairstyles. If we're not seeing the covers for our books that better reflect that diversity, then we need to start creating and filling that niche.

I hated for the book to end, and I hope Ms. DuBois revisits Mahogany and Trent soon.

Selly says

I am a fan of Ms. DuBois' writing and I am Asian. Yes, Asian girls do have hair problem too. Don't we all? ;-)

I found this story interesting and refreshing. I had a hard time picturing Trent as a loveable character with his antics at first but he grew on me. He and Mahogany deserved their happy ending and I'm glad they finally got it. Thank you for this sweet story, Ms. DuBois. I'm glad you're back! Looking forward to your next one.
