WEARING MY MOTHER'S HEART

Proverbs 1:8-9 NLT

…Don't neglect your mother's instruction.
What you learn from them will crown you with grace
and be a chain of honor around your neck.

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WEARING MY MOTHER'S HEART

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INTRODUCTION

My two grandmothers, whilst loving God, also each loved men who loved a different God. And in 1965 in the Gambia, born to African, Christian fathers, you weren't expected to fall in the kind of love that swapped your father's last name for a South East Asian man's. On both sides, my grandmothers were powerless against the pull of their hearts and chose love over tradition, boldly and publicly falling in love with men outside of their religion. To them, love should always come first. Before any career. Hearing their stories carves a space for compassion in today's less forgiving society. My parents are fruit of a new seed planted in our family tree. They were born from the audacity of love.

It is rare to look at a parent and find the right example and not just the right answers. I've never known someone to dedicate themselves to love and care as much as my mum does. At least not since her own mum, my grandmother. They keep that in common – it's a religion we are still guided by. This promise to each other.

And now, after 26 years of studying my mother and grandmothers, I realise that my mouth mostly speaks from the abundance of their love. Whilst recognising the necessity of progress, it's imperative to understand the stories that the women before us lived, to then understand why they think and reason as they do. Our experiences are vastly different. Naturally our opinions on love, race and womanhood clash hugely…but not our hearts. Our mothers' hearts, we still share.

Their hearts have always been more powerful than any rule or rationale, but never more powerful than their religion. How they have worn many hearts at a time and still survived is precisely how they taught me about God. And with God, they taught me power, and with power, they opened my eyes to politics, and with politics they showed me people…and from people, they gave me poetry. I hope that these poems bear that out as they lead you through reflections on family, identity, first love, grief, belief and resolution.

It took following their journeys
from Africa to London,
to understand why bravery was never a choice.
It was their only option, to survive.
I wear their hearts today, proudly…
Well,
at least I try

GRANDMA'S FORBIDDEN LOVE

And if all our love can ever be, is this moment,
eternity sink into a second,
pull our pulses into one.
Kiss me until the war of our histories
wraps a white flag around our tongues
and the rules of tradition
surrender to the rules of love.

ALL WE NEED IS...

I had someone to face life with,
and that felt like all I'd ever need
to survive the hands of this world.

HALVE A HEART, HALF A LIFE

How is it possible that you have flooded into my life
like this?
Before you, the todays and tomorrows lacked nothing,
the present was pleased, satisfied, whole, I thought.

Yet now I miss,
as if I was just delivered a heart
As if half of my brain has opened for the first time
and I am powerless but to think of how much sweeter
every tomorrow stands to be
now that I know you and know this love.

EVEN AN ISLAND NEEDS TWO

For 9 months, I filled my body with love
Stretched past my bones and became a home
I planted a heartbeat into the soil
Rained poems and prayers
Absorbed leaves into my bloodstream
Created a forest for you to come from
But you made a country of me,
Pushed entire seas between the plains of my skin
You taught my body to hold you
Stuffed my ears with your fingers and wrote a billion songs
to your rhythm
Wrapped me in your tablature
and we heard the world sing of how you wait
to meet us one day.

You put a new song to my ears.

I learnt to listen,
to be still

and I heard love breathe.

I untied my skin into the air
and felt your trust in every passing centimetre.

I carried the earth on my hips
Shared skin with destiny
Saw the world for what it could be
Because if sex could be this, then you are already our miracle.
We held head and hands and spoke with God about you
Asked him for your father's eyes for 300 nights
And whilst mine closed, He watched over you
making room for you to become.
Cracked my life into two
One for me and one for love.

Look at how love can double us
How it reteaches us trust and time
How 9 months can remind us
that union is the essence of life…

May we never forget

The traditions that hold
in hope of carrying us through
whatever the foreign world may put us through.