

Opal Palmer Adisa

A FAMILY BUILT ON LOVE



Mother

She was a mountain, but once she disappeared for six months like the wind on a parched day. I itemized all my transgressions. If she were to return and forgive me, I would be ruthlessly devoted, she would never have to question my love or beg for my obedience.

Father

He could turn off his love like a faucet. For most of my life I doubted it, wanted some confirmation. It was not enough that he said it. It was not enough that he sent me cards on my birthday. I wanted to see it pour from his eyes.

Sister

I pretended she was my twin, loved when we wore identical clothes, when our mother braided our hair the same way, but we were not alike. I was talkative and fearless, longing for the horizon beyond your yard while she had no desire to venture beyond our front gate.

Brother

I fell in love with him that Thursday afternoon when I laid crying on my bed because I couldn't figure out my geometry problem. He wiped my tears then showed me how to calculate the answers. At his soccer game, when the crowd chanted his name, my stomach flip-flopped.

Uncle

I watched with amazement as he effortlessly chopped up the vegetables with speed. Later, when he set up his easel and replicated the house on the hill with detailed exactness I knew his fingers and eyes held a universe of truth. He was a chef with an artist's heart.

Aunt

She chuckled a lot, it appeared as a living sound cradled between her neck and bosom. She would cook each of us whatever we wanted, and served us with loving indulgence. We could count on her to turn a blind eye on our antics, as she sat, eyes distant.

Grandmother

No one speaks your name. There is no picture of you. Your oldest claims she doesn't remember what you look like. The youngest says, people tell her she's the spitting image of you, the middle child asserts her love for you, and I, your name-sake, carry on your spirit.

Grandfather

Tall and lean as a coconut-tree, you strode to our gate, wearing a felt hat flat on your head, cotton shirt and woolen slacks in the fire day. Always your smile warmed me long before I ran and grabbed hold of your hand that clasped mine as a friend.

Nephew

If the maxim is true: we love those things that remind us of joy, then you are my treasure-box full of surprises. Each time I open you, I glimpse a past fuzzy with age, but my body is washed with the feeling of immense pleasure reflected in your smile.

Niece

A gift, but not a present, you sneak into my life, eager to please, wearing the look of hunger in your mother's eyes --the need for approval-- imposing over your own raw smile so confident to leap, legs scaling over the wall. I watch you, my heart a trampoline.