

[REVIEW] Bound by Grief, Bound by Love

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'Like a hum in the forest', these words are swirling around in the deep recess of my mind asking to be let out. It took a while but it finally found an exit - these winged words set a flight reading *The Separation* by Iryn Tushabe. They make their unhurried way out of my mind, taking on life form on the blank pages before - a quietly elegant clamour for what to let out first.

The Separation is a feast of descriptives capturing the journey of a 'privileged' immigrant seeking knowledge in a constant grief laden tug of war between what was, what she knows, and what might yet be. In constant conflict with her evidence based cause and effect persona - one built on tangibles is the 'heroine' grappling with loss and subsequent grief. A reach to stay connected to those departed held back by a fear of not understanding how. A learning that life does not listen nor move to our reason or dictates - it refuses to follow the course we look to prescribe for it - our protagonist in this story never in the dimension she expects, sees her grandmother at Christmas.

There is a knowing that allows the familiarity of the use of a first name in Tushabe's story. She after all gives an intimate invitation to walk with her - having the privilege of being let into her mind through her words.

My first glimpse into Iryn's notion of deep rooted love is through the time honored ritual of a shared drink across generations - lemongrass tea, sweetness with an edge, intensely tepid like life when left to travel down unsweetened by love. A Grandmother - warmly spreading her love for her deceased child to her living grandchild. Iryn introduces the reader to how across generations, knowledge is passed of things physical and spiritual. How, well beyond the life of the present, there is a constant connection to a loved one irregardless of time and temporalities. Constantly, Iryn references this ritual anchor between a Grandmother, Kaaka and her beloved grandchild, Harriet - she of great intellectual prowess off on a PhD adventure in Regina, Saskatchewan.

As a serial economic immigrant (labelled 'expatriate' if my honey melanin flowed cream or caramel instead), I recognise Harriet's struggle with being in a strange land, observing the antics of two teenage girls and their blue tinged tongues enjoying slushies on a cloudy but sunny afternoon.

Twisting my tongue around newish words, sitting alone watching life as one knows it passing by beyond the glass of an apartment with no trees in sight. At the mercy of a professor - overseeing the worthiness of my lived research output - or not.

Iryn in *The Separation* evokes in the reader, the deep feelings of loss - of a mother unknown, a Grandmother beloved and the echoes of sheer interest between a Father and his daughter. She however leaves one panting - albeit on a wandering spiral - with a glimpse of hope. Hope that something beautiful emerges between the nephew of a stranger, who opens the door to help a frightened, grief stricken, lost & fearful woman in an unknown land. She moves sometimes abruptly between what was - peeks into a time of sharing, a mother's love for her departed daughter, unmet expectations between a father and daughter, the grief of a child having lost her mother early to a snake bite - with no access to healthcare close enough to save her. Forgetting her face - helpless to hold on to the sight of pencils in her sewing mistress mama's afros - memories from childhood taking flight the older she got. I feel you Harriet, for I too have lost a parent to the harsh hand dealt to one in a land with corrupted healthcare, constantly looking at moments captured in photos so I don't lose the memory of the shape of my Father's laugh lines.

This story leaves one wondering where some of the unexplored paths lead to - the tension-ridden Father-daughter relationship she hints at between Kaaka and her Father. Does it come to a head? What happens beyond the delivery of the message that Kaaka is gone beyond the River? With Harriet's conservation efforts - of the wildlife sanctuary, of traditions set alight by Kaaka, of love that transcends the natural - afterall Kaaka's comforting arm on Harriets shoulder hints at an acceptance of a key struggle between believing the seen and knowing without sight. An unfettered joy erupts when she accepts that indeed Kaaka remains with her - like a projected image only fuller, fueled by life beyond these shores, connected by love.

I find myself randomly in my day, 'seeing' beyond the final pages before me, clamouring for more of Iryn's words - there has to be more beyond the words currently captured in *The Separation*. Looking around the corner - wondering will Harriet set alight the spark in the eye of the nephew named after a god - Ganapati, self called Ganesh? Will her neck bound by a dozen cowries find warmth in the arms of this 'stranger' precipitating the merging of two cultures in a 'foreign land'? A glimpse beyond the horizon of grief - will they find love? Because again you see life without Love, Iryn seems to say is bland like tepid lemongrass having lost its edge, no sugarcane syrup sweetness remaining.

So Iryn, 'my eyes are growing eyes' - I want to read more!

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