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illuminating a Broken Mirror: The Light of Grief

Abstract

Tash Deacon is a care-experienced first-generation scholar and recent graduate of Durham University. Throughout her life, she has been no stranger to strong feelings of guilt which manifested far before she could find the words to label them. She wished to venture beyond her home city but learnt that meant leaving the people she loves behind with only the lessons they taught her to carry her forward. Juggling that pain is still a fine art. She swears one day she will show her Mum how wide the world really is.

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TASH DEACON

illuminating a Broken Mirror: The Light of Grief

I did not know how broken my life was until I was kneeling. The mirror was first cracked and then broken—distortion was mandatory. What remained in the warped reflection was a jagged and ingrained sense of guilt that would not leave no matter how I rearranged the fractured pieces. My life was severed into chunks, a body horror sweetheart, disposed carelessly among my timeline, defined in the ways my expectations had been twisted, marked by each disappointment. Potential remained, but I was preoccupied with how ugly my life looked displayed upon myself like segmented lines of light. There were days I could barely meet my own eyes—every surface, even the most tepid waters, were distorting and clouded by grief.

I have kissed grief and, more frequently, made it my bedfellow—anything to not be alone with this disordered sense of self. The guilt, an apparition, whom I pleaded with to make me more than its shadow as I spent years silhouetted and full of burning hatred. It advised me in hushed tones and late-night clawing to alight the parts of my identity that I felt made me undesirable and to use my body as tinder. Guilt was destructive. The embers still glow lightly in the pit of my stomach, prone to flare in moments of vulnerability, and when the mask of perfection falls I burst into flames. My guilt could not be held at bay if I didn't feel every moment was worth the pain. Self-destruction to return from the dark—a sacrifice, or perhaps, a phoenix from the ashes.

I have always felt like a black sheep, and this manifested into actions intended to separate myself from my herd as much as possible. I needed something tangible to hold up to the light. Academics were my answer. My studies remained a constant and unwavering Shepard even in the darkness of grief. I continued to watch over my shoulder. Conflicted and hoping my family might follow my North Star, I was half-way across the world before I realised the impossibility of such a thing. Instead, I wear my name, my traits, any connection to them, like a badge. Anything to make them a part of my experiences. Once I accepted that they were fallible and experienced grief much in the same way I did, I found the heaviness of my family name to be an easier load to carry.

Mum saw me, instead, like a wolf picking flesh from out of my teeth. She never thought me to be the black sheep and speaks darkly of my time away at university. Selfishness, in any form, bloomed my grief. As if I went to university just to hurt her, or maybe she blames me for getting away, for wanting to get away. Mum's resilience is something unavoidable. It hangs in the air around her. Sometimes I think she deserves my life more than I do. I hope one day to be able to bring her with me.

University seemed to make the world expand. It was so much larger than I had fathomed as a child. And the escape to a space that lacked four walls, helped me to disentangle my identity from all the doubts that had plagued me. I began to accept that maybe the mirror would be broken forever but, in each shard, I see a memory that helped me pull through. And when the light hits it, the illumination is the prettiest thing I have ever seen.