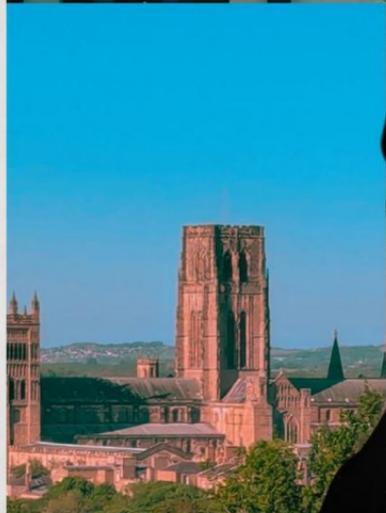


Not All of It Was Mine to Carry



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Preface

These identity stanzas are a potent elixir or trigger words that awaken the spirit. Words help guide hands as simplified blueprints. Words shape the cathedral's architecture from the shadows, guiding every curve and column, even though they vanish once the structure stands.

Alternatively, it can dismantle the human condition.

This poem is beyond prayerful (personal conversation with a Higher Power); as it is unapologetic (open forum).

This piece takes the readers on a literary pathway to truth. Yes, the truth about humble beginnings is packaged in wordplay.

Bethany Camille James writes in a rich spiritual tone—original, raw, and richly hers. Her themes span the full map of the human experience, each one offering a window into her ever-evolving identity.

Finally, these identity-drenched stanzas act as polished two-way mirrors showing both poets' collaborative becoming. They invite all who engage with their work to taste the richness, weight, and wonder of becoming fully—and unapologetically—human.

“The human condition in pliable words.” ~CP

What carries the through line in this piece is faith. As collaborators we come from such different backgrounds, places and

with certainty our own identity. However, through family and community roots we find that faith influences our words more than I anticipated.

I personally don't go to church, no; my prayer is with pen and paper to the gods of the page. Words are the pulpit and I will not fear blending silence and ethereal-ity. That being said, I'm surrounded by it. My home county is home to one of the oldest cathedrals in the world. It is hard not to be awesome and stimulated in equal measure to that which built it, peoples hands, peoples faith. In something better despite the muck. In something more in spite of always having less (more and more these days).

What I think this poem speaks to the most is people's ability to understand each other regardless of any real or imagined barrier created by identity or faith and the politics of it.

Being **you** is important; most of *us* get that.

If you don't, well...
Maybe you just don't
know who **you** are.

**“The really important thing to be was yourself,
just as hard as you could.”**

(Sir Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens*)

Not All of It Was Mine to Carry

I've made mistakes, but the ground beneath me was already
cracked.

I used to think everything broken
in me was my fault
until I met stories like yours, where the world
tilts against
a person from birth to economic status.

*Financial Boa Constrictor wrap around for a struggling smuggler's
bank account, choke the life like a moth-filled wallet; the usual
nocturnal beacons drawing the addicted to a safer place of being; at
least while they're away. Swallowed whole by the gorging world:
easy targets due to fiscal deficits and lofty ideals; soft tissue damage
and chemical meals.*

Some things are carved into
our lives before we take our first breath.
like a silent illness, like a town with
no safety net for the falling.

*Realization dawns: breakages
aren't always the end.*

*Cleaning up the workshop floor as again the chiseling begins in
earnest.*

*Wooden iconography covers a cluttered bench; tiny gods; goddesses
in stained oak.*

Faces of antiquated saviors.

*Surreal horrors unseen adorning these whittled figurines, I
choose to carve from this rot in the woodwork of me or— was? I'm
easily led to self-disbelief...*

I've made choices. I can't dress up
with good intentions
but I've also been shaped
by storms I never asked to walk through.

*Asking for fundamental change without sacrifice is like asking sand
to just become glass. Without subjecting each grain of that son of a
beach to ungodly heat, unbearable pressures. Blown into shapes by
blistering winds; mangled and beautiful?*

*The chandelier shares kinship
with broken bottles.*

It's hard to forgive the girl who fell behind
others while clawing for air
but I see now she was not born
with clean hands and endless chances.

*Forgiven girl's full figurative changes, only waiting for the pendular
swing, to remove the dirty mitts from handling the filth they deal
with; societies afterbirth.*

You remind me that survival

sometimes means standing in rooms we hate
and that leaving takes more than wanting;
it takes the map no one gave us.

*Cellular level waiting; keys for locks that hang on another's belt.
Clicking on that decisions are made live on as an elusive echo in
the DNA; our actual spirit song.*

If I could hold that past self, I would tell
her she was not weak
just carrying weights built into her
world, heavier than anyone should bear.
And maybe this is what forgiveness looks like:

*Maybe this is a pastel stained sky appearing through the skylight—
that usually only shows the shade of regretting every choice made
in a life. Depression doesn't allow much room for daytime. But
we're here standing together alive in the daylight*

Not erasing the harm, but knowing
some of it belonged to the world—
not me.

*Struggling to forgive myself / lodeborne beings belonging to the
world, carrying it all while just trying.*

