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**I Get It from My Momma(s)
From the Fringe
By K. Danielle Edwards
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This Mother's Day, like always, I pay homage to my mother, of course.

And I also think of those who made my parents so - my grandmothers - indeed.

But this year I am deeply and intensely moved by thoughts of the women who preceded them. I'm talking about generations ago, years before my grandparents or parents were conceived. I'm talking about times still not-so long gone that I just can't "get over it," as some pundits callously insist. I am talking about the vantage point of those who might have futuristically viewed the life I now lead as the fulfillment of their prayers. I'm talking about the Works Progress Administration's slave narrative project and plantations that today require a cover charge for a trek into a sanitized nostalgia. I am talking about dilapidated barns surviving skeletally alongside highways and overgrown cemeteries dotted by nameless limestone markers. I am talking about painful times, beyond the factoids presented without feeling in elementary school. I am talking about when enslavement was the rule and black bodies but tools.

I am talking about further back than anyone living in my family can remember. I am talking about sifting through the few remaining embers of memory - and reigniting them with sparks of modernity. To achieve these ends, I have gone beyond anecdotes and context clues. I have ventured past plodding through archives, driving down unfamiliar roads that share my maiden surname, teetering pensively onto old slave land - meeting with descendants of the slave-owning clan - with whom I have even

shaken hands.

I am talking about going back to the Mother. And her Daughters. Through science, I have begun to unravel the "tangled skeins of slavery," as described by Harriett Jacobs. Through DNA testing, I have unveiled select mysteries of the double helixes that comprise my genes - and opened new windows into my identity and those who came before me. As a result, I am now having vicarious flashbacks of what life might have been like for the women who collectively live within and through me, an unapologetic, lock-wearing, full-lipped, wide-hipped African-American woman who recently discovered that I am actually 15 percent European (plus five percent Native American and one percent East Asian).

I am moving from feeling betrayed by my genes - the jolt that occurs when something goes from a casual probability to a confirmed reality - to now uplifting the matriarchs of old and playing in my mind the stories that family rumors and anecdotes have not yet told.

How did I get here? And what am I, really?

I am feeling sorrowful for my grandmothers - unknown generations removed - whose wombs became wounds, as they carried and birthed children implanted non-consensually. I am wondering how and if they learned to accept and eventually love their offspring who were a constant reminder of assault, violation and oppression. I am pondering if they purposely fell down some grand staircase or ingested some root potion in an unsuccessful attempt to eliminate from their person what might have felt like a parasitic leech. I am considering how her body was a source of climaxes and capital for slaveowners who made repeat nightfall visits to her cabin, conceiving yet another half-caste child who would eventually be bequeathed alongside a cow and a couch. I am hurting for her husband who was forced to stand by idly and watch or listen to the plaintive wails of his beloved and the unrestrained lusts of an unrefined "gentleman," whose genetic legacy was inherited by the children he struggled to love and rear as his own.

I am also thinking of clandestine affairs, hoping that in the midst of such degradation that at least one of my many mothers, years ago, made a conscious choice to love and lay with a white man. I am perhaps dubiously envisioning her asserting some degree of agency and autonomy, no matter how incongruous to the historical, social or political order. What if her resulting reproductions were a type of riot act, as she cleverly chose to bear babies who would be preferentially treated due to their mixed appearance yet instilled with a sense of unrelenting pride and identification? What if her mother wit was that calculating, careful and conscious despite the daily demands of slave life?

I feel an ambivalent blend of sadness and solace as my mind recreates the lives of these mothers. I think of the places and spaces, lives and lies, complete with dialogue, props and a cast of extras. I ask myself where I fit in this ensemble, as the psychic, genealogical and cultural continuance of a breed of women - mothers - who, like me, were comprised of much more than meets the eye.

BlackCommentator.com Columnist *K. Danielle Edwards*, a Nashville-based writer,


poet and communications professional, seeks to make the world a better place, one decision and one action at a time. To her, parenting is a protest against the odds, and marriage is a living mantra for forward movement. Her work has appeared in MotherVerse Literary Journal, ParentingExpress, Mamazine, The Black World Today, [Africana.com](#), The Tennessean and other publications. She is the author of [Stacey Jones: Memoirs of Girl & Woman, Body & Spirit, Life & Death](#) (2005) and is the founder and creative director of [The Pen: An Exercise in the Cathartic Potential of the Creative Act](#), a nonprofit creative writing project designed for incarcerated and disadvantaged populations. [Click here](#) to contact Ms. Edwards.

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