

Blood Harmonies

To remember my mother crouching in our kitchen, putting into place a new floor of ceramic tiles, is to remember her blood hopes, her effervescent hunger to keep the feet of her five kids from slipping into the wrong kind of slide. Stay one with one another, in blood harmony, she would say, meaning brother and sister, Muslim and Muslim, blood and blood. Pointing down at the tiles, she would say, Look how the pattern comes together, forms a larger mosaic of meaning. You should live like this. Most of the time, I nodded my head, not knowing how else to respond, agreeing because it was simpler. But sometimes, standing there, looking down at a floor not yet finished, at naked patches revealing a history of vinyl, broken and stained, I would think, I just can't be happy living so small, so safe. Then I would see, in those unfinished places, the face of some girl I had met the other day, whose name I never asked, knowing it was pointless... I would stand there in the kitchen, thinking how badly I wanted to know that girl's name, to believe in it like a new religion, like my own blood, how I wanted to let myself fall in love with her, because that girl had smiled at me, because that girl was real and alive, not like one of those phantom wives my mother saw in her dreams and spoke of in metaphors.

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