

## Who Am I?

Hand in hand, she guided me across the hot tarmac into the cool backyard. It was my mother's favorite place with the morning dew, her daily check up on her baby plants, and communion with nature. Her time was spent equally nurturing and loving every one of her vibrantly blooming flowers. I was her companion as she sought to share the spiritual connection with nature. The magical realm of pure beauty. My seven-year-old self was mesmerized by my mother's deep obsession, the different flowers' colors, and shapes. Opening their arms through the crunchy soil, sprouts surface into the golden daylight ranging from lime green coconut leaves to pristine white orchids and shockingly pink camellias. Each unique flower, some pied and some patterned, satisfied me with its delicate designs. Our feet touched the moist soil as we laid down in the tickling grass; I lost my mind and found my soul in the contrasting colors of seedlings and full blooms. Above, leaves fell, breaking delicately off the tree branches. The canopy of trees gave me a sense of protection and disconnected me from the exterior world. Bird chirps, tree rustles, and wind whispers were the only sounds present besides the rush of the trade winds in the boughs above.

Day after day, I grew in fascination with my mother's magenta, white, and yellow Bougainvillea flowers. She would trace her fingers down each vibrant root, showing the differences in germination and origin. My curious vision expanded, and my questions grew as I discovered more about this rich, unique, and multifaceted kingdom. Why does the Hibiscus tuck itself away for bedtime and blossom in the daylight? Why are bees so frequently attracted to the perennial lavender pollen? As I grew older, the nature of plants, the greenery, the colors, the depth, and the diversity carved a deeper understanding and appreciation for my diverse background.

I am as diverse as that garden. My roots and foundations lay beneath the soils of Turkey; my branches extend outward and my limbs embrace the unknown. Interestingly, the fabulous state of Nevada is where I took my first breaths and is a part of my composition. However, without any distinct memory of America, I was taken back and raised on the antique carpets of the oriental city of Istanbul. The scents of fresh bread, juicy kebabs, steamy sweet tea, and crispy baklava never failed to inspire my senses. Sounds of crows and spoons hitting the edges of teacups became a component to a distant memory as we packed our suitcases to travel to the opposite side of the world. As a callow second grader, I started growing up in the middle of the blue ocean waters of the Caribbean as a pale, curly brunette Eurasian. The islands of the Dominican Republic and Sint Maarten were now my home for the earliest years of my life.

The garden was a mishmash of plant types and flora divisions, much like my own diverse background and ethnicity. Flourishing sprouts and seedlings replaced old, falling leaves and bent branches. Each growing memory and era represented the leaves in my divergent core. My mother showed me how each contrary colors of magenta, white, and yellow saplings still share a common terrestrial ground. No matter their differences, they grow independently but still live in harmony together. Accordingly, I too have become a cultivator and a caretaker, perhaps not the

type my mom was in her garden, but one capable of finding my place in any environment in which I am immersed. I will be the cultivator who navigates through the complete obscurity of chromatic cultures, forcing me into unfamiliarity and uniting with curiosity. More importantly, I will be the one who will water and sustain all remaining insignificant pieces of seeds, nurturing their growth with meaningful memories and fresh beginnings.