
CROWN WORK
SELF-REGULATION, BEAUTY & BELONGING
FOR BLACK & MUSLIM GIRLS AND WOMEN
With Love From Ameenah Cheryl Shaw
CROWN WORK | CONNECTING THE DOTS | RESTORING THE CROWN | INHABITING THE SELF

CHAPTER 5: SELF-WORTH

The Firstborn Daughter — When Love Comes with Comparisons

Amirah arrived on a rainy Thursday morning after seventeen hours of labour.
She was tiny, loud and utterly perfect to Samira.
Her skin was a rich brown, and beneath her little cotton hat was a beautiful covering of thick, tightly curled hair.
Samira spent hours studying her daughter's face.
The tiny nose.
The full lips.
The extraordinary miniature hands.
She had never felt love quite like it.
When Farhan's mother arrived at the hospital, she cried with happiness.
"Alhamdulillah! My beautiful granddaughter!"
She kissed Samira's forehead, embraced Farhan and immediately began making plans for an aqiqah celebration.
For those first few weeks, Samira felt surrounded by love.
But as Amirah grew, the comments began.
"She's getting quite dark now, isn't she?"
"Maybe she'll lighten as she gets older."
"Oh, look at those curls! Hopefully they'll soften as she grows."
They were rarely said with malice.
Often, they were accompanied by smiles, kisses and expressions of affection.And that was what made them so difficult to challenge.
How do you confront someone who is simultaneously loving your daughter and subtly suggesting that some of her natural features would be better if they were different?

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Samira tried.

Once, when Amirah was three, Nusrat was helping her get ready for Eid.

The little girl had a magnificent head of thick coils, which Samira had moisturised and styled into two fluffy puffs.

Nusrat examined the hairstyle.

"Very cute. But next time, perhaps straighten it a little. It would look so much neater."

Samira felt her stomach tighten.

"Her hair is neat, Mum."

"Of course, of course. I just mean easier to manage."

Amirah looked between them.

"Is my hair naughty, Nani?"

Both women went quiet.

Nusrat laughed gently.

"No, darling! It's just very big!"

Amirah touched one of her puffs.

Samira recognised the expression on her daughter's face.

The confusion.

The beginnings of self-consciousness.

That evening, while removing Amirah's hair accessories, Samira told her how beautiful her curls were.

She told her that Allah had created people with different colours, textures and features.

She told her that her hair didn't need to be straight to be lovely.

But as she spoke, she felt an uncomfortable sadness.

Because the world was already teaching her daughter lessons that Samira would spend years trying to undo.And the comments didn't stop.

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As more children arrived, the comparisons became almost routine.
Ibrahim, their second child, was lighter-skinned than Amirah.
"Ahhh, this one looks just like his daddy!"
Yusuf inherited Samira's deep complexion.
"He's going to be a strong boy, mashallah."
Layla had loosely curled hair.
"Oh, she's lucky! Such easy hair!"
Then came Hamza.
And finally, little Ruqayyah.
Six children.
Three boys and three girls.
Six beautifully different combinations of features, complexions, personalities and hair textures.
Yet somehow, certain traits continued to attract more admiration than others.
Samira began to notice how the children themselves were learning the hierarchy.
At seven, Amirah asked why her sister Layla's hair was always described as "good."
At nine, she asked why people said Ibrahim had been lucky to inherit his father's complexion.
By eleven, she no longer wanted to wear her hair out to family gatherings.
"Can you just braid it, Mum? Really neatly?"

Samira understood.
And because she wanted to protect her daughter from comments, she often agreed.
She told herself she was making life easier for Amirah.

RICH ROOTS DIALOGUE

Crown Work

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By Ameenah Cheryl Shaw

Continue the reflection.

You have read three pages of Samira’s story
from Chapter 5: Self-worth — printed pages 66–68.

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