

THE DAUGHTER OF WISDOM
by Amaara Raheem.

Narrator:

There is an old woman who lives in a hidden place. She sits and she waits for the lost and the wounded. They say she lives among the rotten granite slopes, near an old river. She travels south in autumn and carries firewood on her back. She is called the daughter of wisdom. Her sole work is collecting bones. She is known to collect and preserve that which is lost to the world. Her cave is full of all manner of things - bones of the deer, the rattlesnake and the spider but her specialty is said to be soldiers killed in war. She creeps and crawls and sifts through the mountains. When she finds all of the bones she assembles the skeleton until the white sculpture lies before her, a young man in his prime. Then she sits by the fire and things of what song she will sing.

(Florence sings a song)

And when she is sure she stands over him and sings out loud. That is when the rib cage and leg bones begin to flesh out. The daughter of wisdom sings louder and louder and the soldier begins to breathe. She sings so loudly that the desert shakes and as she sings the soldier stands up and begins to run. So it is said that if you wander the desert and it is near sundown and you are a little lost or perhaps even wounded, then you are lucky for the lady with the lamp may find you and give you some healing - healing of the soul.

(Walk hurriedly down aisle)

Fanny: Your arrival Florence, is the kind they recommend for a war or a battle.

Florence: Do you mean to say, mother, that I am late for the feast?

Fanny: You are indeed, come in quickly now.

Florence: It was Mary Clarke's fault. She made me linger in the market place.

Fanny: Sit down quickly child or else dinner will be cold.

Florence: I'm sorry Mama. (in line)

William: For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful.

All: Amen.

Fanny: Florence

Florence: Yes Mama

Fanny: Have you seen Richard today?"

Silence.

Fanny Florence

Florence: Yes Mama

Fanny Have you seen Richard today?

Florence Yes Mama

Fanny: And?

Pause.

Fanny: Richard came calling this afternoon. He was very distressed.

William: He said you had refused him, Florence.

Fanny: And we said there must have been some great misunderstanding.

William: Richard Monkton Milnes is a perfect match for you, Florence.

Fanny: And you cannot possibly have refused to marry him.

Step forward to audience.

Silence.

Florence: Today I am thirty. Now no more childish things. No more love. No more marriage. From now on I will think only of the Lord and his will.

Fanny: Oh for goodness sakes. That's the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard.

William: You are the most difficult child there ever was, Florence. Haven't we given you everything?

Florence: Yes, Papa, everything and more.

Fanny: Mr. Milnes is an honest, kind and decent man and it perfectly awful of you to refuse him.

William: What is it that you want, Florence?

Florence: I have three paths among which to choose. I might have been a literary woman, or a married woman, or a hospital sister. God has spoken to me and called me to choose the third.

Fanny: Oh no, not this again!

William: It is beyond my understanding, daughter, how you could possibly want to work in such a squalid place.

Fanny: Hospitals are completely ridden by disease and they smell so evil.

William: Speak no more of this, Florence. You are not going to live with those those awful drunkard women. No daughter of mine is going to live in a cage and walk around in a gown caked with blood.

Fanny: The very idea is horrendous. It is awful of you to speak of it, Florence. I can hardly finish my supper. It is a ridiculous notion and we forbid it.

Florence: For goodness sake, it is as if I said I wanted to be a kitchen maid.

Walk off, stop, face ahead.

William: Why can you not be satisfied with the life that satisfies so many people?

Florence: (to audience) When I was sixteen, God called me and commanded that I do his will. I am now thirty Papa, and I have rejected marriage after long years of contemplating its benefits and its costs. But I am still not free to do as I choose. (turns) If I cannot do God's work and be a hospital sister than I see nothing desirable but death. When God calls there is nothing to do but follow. Tell me what I am to do but listen to the voices in my heart?

Dinner is finished in silence. Stay on.

Mary Clarke: Florence, you look awful.

Florence: Hello Mary. (walk back)

Mary: Oh my dearest friend, what so ever's the matter?

Florence: Papa is furious and Mama cannot even bring herself to speak to me.

Mary: You told them, then.

Florence: Yes, last night.

Mary: Will they let you go?

Florence: They cannot stop me.

Mary: I am proud of you my dear.

Florence: Are you Mary? Really?

Mary: You are the strongest, bravest woman I know.

Florence: Mother says I am the weakest and most disappointing creature ever born.

Mary: They will see, Florence, they will see. One day the whole world will see that you are an angel of god and are doing his work. It may be hard now but one day the whole world will thank you.

Florence: Oh Mary, why is life so hard?

Mary: Because without a wound there is no beauty.

Florence: Thank you Mary, for your words and your deeds.

Mary: When do you leave?

Florence: Next week.

Mary: I think that the Institute for the care of sick gentlewomen is a perfectly respectable place for you to work. What did your mother say?

Florence: She was aghast.

Mary: Poor Florence.

Florence: I am 33 years old now Mary. There is no more time to waste. I know Mama and Papa do not approve but I must do what God commands and I shall begin it now so God help me.

Mary: He will, dear friend. He will with all his heart.

Florence: I hope all this misery I have caused is not in vain, Mary.

Mary: You are about to enter the heyday of your power, Florence.

Florence: Yes, I am, and God willing I will do what must be done.

Mary: Amen.

Walk off.

Sidney Herbert: Your majesty.

Queen Victoria: Good afternoon Sir Herbert.

Herbert: Good afternoon your majesty.

Queen: What news of our men?

Herbert: Our men are recovering wonderfully, ma'am. Under the wonderful work of our sister Florence Nightingale.

Queen: Ah yes, the lady with the lamp.

Herbert: She has worked endlessly, Ma'am. She and her hospital sisters have saved many, many lives. The Crimean war is particularly bloody and torturous. Hundreds of wounded men arrive every day across the Black Sea, many of them starving and frost bitten and half naked. Any other woman would've packed up and gone home long ago but Florence is not daunted. She has organised a hospital and somehow managed to obtain everything from sheets and medicines to socks and toothbrushes. She has had filthy wards cleaned up and painted, she has hired a house and set it up as a laundry where bedding can be washed. She has completely reorganised the kitchens. Some of the army doctors have resented a woman interfering in their work and called her a nuisance but she is certainly formidable your majesty, in her quiet and determined manner she always manages to get her own way. She has worked endlessly compiling reports, suggesting improvements, organising stores and even writing letters for soldiers. Each night she walks nearly 4 miles of corridors visiting the soldiers, trying to make them as comfortable as she can. In this place of suffering, she is a saint, your majesty.

Queen: Yes, Sir Herbert, I have had many reports from our men, one of which states that some men actually kiss her shadow when she passes.

Herbert: Even the roughest soldier would not swear in her presence, Ma'am.

Queen: She is a national heroine, Sir Herbert. Donations are pouring into the Nightingale fund and there is much interest in her work. I have for her a gift – will you deliver it to her yourself, Sir Herbert?

Herbert: It would be an honour, your majesty.

Queen: Tell her from me that this diamond brooch is simply a token of my gratitude. Tell her that there is no way our nation could ever repay her.

Herbert: Yes, your majesty.

Queen: I have had the brooch inscribed, Sir Herbert. Read it if you will.

Herbert: "Blessed are the Merciful."

Queen: May you and Florence keep up your good work Sidney, and God be willing this awful war may soon come to an end.

Herbert: Thank you Ma'am.

Queen: God speed.

Everyone sings a song.

Narration

The End.

Requires:

Oil lamp and matches.

Words of Wellsprings

Top

Cloak