

Maitha Al Suwaidi

“Nada” Spoken-Word Performance Audio Transcription

Maitha: I’m— I’m just feeling some type of way. I keep holding the tears back because it’s the last time we perform, and I’m just— Oh, my god.

So I want to end the same way I started. I performed this poem on the first day. It’s called “Nada,” and it’s after my mother, and it’s for my mother.

[Rock band plays distantly in the background]

I remember the day I was born only because I was told the story over a hundred times. I was the first daughter, the first granddaughter, and I think my uncles were slightly disappointed that I was a girl. Little did they know that I would grow up to be manlier than all my other cousins combined. I mean, I ran faster, cried less, ate more, and always made sure I had my mama’s back.

I remember the day I was born. My mama wanted to name me Samar after the moon’s ever-present comforting shadow. She wanted me to be the blackness of the night. She wanted me to be the late-night romantic conversations in the desert. She wanted my beauty to stem out of my name. She wanted me to become a poet, an Arabic poet, though. But according to my grandmother, Samar was not traditional enough.

“What about Maheba?” my mother suggested hopefully. Maheba is the love my mother longed for all her life, for she was too busy giving it to her younger siblings. But my father thought that Maheba was too traditional, too old, and he wanted his daughter to have a young soul like his.

My mama agreed to call me Maitha eventually, and when I asked her why, she said that it pleased everyone else.

You see, maybe what my mama endured for nine months was not enough for her to name her firstborn. It wasn’t enough that for nine months my mama carried my fragile body and her fragile body. It wasn’t enough that for nine months, my mama had cravings yet selflessly fed her twelve— thirteen younger siblings before eating.

My mama tells me her pregnancy was easy, but I know it wasn’t. My mama is selfless like that. She cries and aches only during her *sujud* so that we never see her tears fall. And when she’s done praying, we only see swollen yet smiling eyes.

You see, my mama is like me. [Speaking in Arabic]

I may not be the Maheba or the Samar you wanted. But I am Maitha. I am Maitha. Maitha, the fertile land where you can plant all your love in, and, without you knowing, Mama, you planted

in me the love that I needed to heal the broken people I have loved. You planted in me the faith that I needed to put my pieces back together when my love was broken. You planted in me deep-rooted pride in who I was, am, and choose to be.

And no matter where I end up, Mama, I will carry this ever-greening land within me. The land that you planted, nourished, watered. And all of its harvest will be from you and for you.

Thank you.

[Audience cheers and applauds]