What's Learned From Our Mothers

by On_Every_Spectrum

Summary

There are three women Michael Burnham loved as a mother. Three women who taught her different skills and different ways of being. Three women who loved her. Three women who took worlds that weren't made for them and found ways to thrive. Each of them in their own way. From the moment Michael had told her mom that she had a daughter, she’d set her own course. And, these were the three women who'd loved her.

Notes

In this story there are references to Michael Burnham's hair. You should know that I am not black myself and am definitely not qualified to speak accurately about black hair. What I wrote here is primarily based off of what I’ve heard from my partner and assorted loved ones, yet I may well have gotten things wrong. I will happily accept and incorporate any feedback folks choose to give. And, regardless, please treat what I say with a grain of salt.
Michael would never forget the first time her mom had called her "baby girl."

She remembered being uncertain. Not scared. But, not really sure what to say.

She'd been so little.

Her memories from that long ago were never the clearest. She didn't remember all the little details.

Didn't remember when she chose to share. Or even how she did so.

She just remembered her mom looking at her. Taking a moment. Eyes soft and warm.

"Thank you for telling me, baby girl." She'd said earnestly. Letting the last few words rest soft and heavy.

Michael had jumped onto her mom's lap. Buried her head in her mom's chest. And, felt safe.

She couldn't have been more than five. She was probably younger.

It's funny how timelines get lost and blurred when the adults in them aren't there to pass down the stories.

Her mom was the one who asked if she wanted to change her name. She was named after her grandfather. Her mom's father, who Michael had never met.

She thought about it.

Took her time.

Knew that her mom would have supported her.

Ultimately, she chose to keep her name.

She liked it. It was a gift. Passed down from a grandfather she never knew.

She did grow her hair out. Started sleeping in a bonnet.

Sometimes her mom sat her down. Braided it into a tight protective style. More often, she kept it loose.

She was ten when she went on hormone blockers. It was six days after her birthday.

Her mom held her hand when they put the implant in, grumbling about centuries of medical research and still thinking the best course of action is inserting something into her baby's arm.

Michael didn't care. She'd never been scared of doctors. She just held her mom's hand. And, listened.

It was only three months later that her mom died. Michael heard it. Stayed quiet.

She was ten years old.
Vulcan was so different. Michael still couldn't quite believe it.

Amanda loved her. Michael was learning to call her mother. Learning to think of her that way.

She didn't call Michael "baby girl" though. Amanda was her mother. But, she couldn't be her mom.

They were so different. Amanda was quiet. Easily fading into the background. Yet, her love was strong.

Amanda tried to give Michael the tools she needed. Read *Alice* to her. Talked about what to do when nothing made sense anymore.

She didn't know how to braid Michael's hair. So, it stayed loose. Michael had always liked it better that way anyways.

It was so dry on Vulcan though. Always so dry and so hot. She had a hard time keeping her hair moisturized. Had a hard time taking care of it.

Michael started relaxing her hair when she started at the Vulcan Learning Center. The first time the other children's reaction to how different she and Spock looked veered more towards bullying than bewilderment.

Amanda didn't say anything. She'd learned how to fit in on Vulcan a long time ago. To wear long loose robes. To speak softly. To fit herself into others' expectations.

Michael grew up. She learned quiet mannerisms. So, different than the way her mom had filled any space she was in. So much more like her mother's quiet unassuming presence.

Michael cut her hair short. Found that on Vulcan it didn't feel too boyish. On Vulcan almost everyone had short hair.

She started taking hormones when she was fourteen.

Amanda found a way to ship them from Earth. Vulcans didn't have estrogen. It didn't make sense to produce them here.

There were so few Humans on Vulcan. And, fewer still who needed hormones other than the ones their bodies naturally produced.

So, Amanda found a way to get them. And, Michael finally started filling her body with hormones. Started puberty. Just one little pill every day. Such a simple thing, so complicated by circumstances.

Michael didn't even consider any other options. She'd learned to fit herself into a mold. She wasn't unhappy. She wasn't happy either. She'd learned to tuck her emotions away neatly.

She was twenty-one when she met Philippa Georgiou.

Georgiou reminded Michael so much of her mom. The way she filled space. Took command.

It was hard at first. Michael retreated heavily into her Vulcan training. Tucking her emotions away.

Philippa got through to her anyways.
Philippa who was trans. And, proud of it. Who wore that label like a banner. Who spoke of the fact that a mere two hundred years ago people were killed for being like them.

Brown and trans and women.

Philippa who was proudly Malaysian. Who wouldn't let the universal translator smooth away her accent. Who balked at the notion of a standard form of English. And, who still spoke Malay as well.

Philippa who insisted that the Federation and Earth and Starfleet hadn't come quite as far as they liked to think.

Philippa who took Michael under her wing. While still letting her chart her own course at every step.

Philippa Georgiou reminded Michael of her mom, but she was like no one she had ever met.

Michael came out of her shell under Philippa's guidance. Gradually learning to take space. Learning to let herself be loud.

She learned her history. Built community. Learned to be unapologetic ally herself.

When Philippa died, Michael stopped relaxing her hair. It seemed fitting.

She thought Philippa would have been proud.

There are three women Michael Burnham loved as a mother.

Three women who taught her different skills and different ways of being.

Three women who loved her.

Three women who took worlds that weren't made for them and found ways to thrive.

Each of them in their own way.

And, each of them had affirmed Michael every step of the way. In her identity. In her decisions. In her journey.

From the moment Michael had told her mom that she had a daughter, she'd set her own course.

And, these were the three women who'd loved her.

Watching her mom disappear back into that portal.

Remembering Amanda's disappointment with how she'd treated Spock.

Seeing Philippa Georgiou before her, so different than the woman she once knew.

Michael reflected on the legacy she bore from each of them.

It was complex. And, sometimes painful. But, it was hers.

End Notes
Yes, I'm aware that Michael is probably named after her father, but I headcannoned it this way forever ago and it didn't feel like an important enough detail not to take some creative license with it here.

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