Poem on Love

**Culture and Love**

Culture and Love  
  
One glance from you takes my breath away  
One smile will bring me to my grave, I must honestly say.  
God must be so intelligent to create the person you are  
Because your existence brings me comfort near and far.   
Culture has been effectively strong, that no one could ever forget   
For all girls to have affairs,  
It should be kept a secret.  
Respect is all that counts   
In a unique culture like mine  
To show it to brothers and elders so our love can shine.  
This culture has been keeping us apart  
Yet, so strong like a stone is what lies in your heart  
You’re the most unique person I’ve ever met  
And loving you is something I’ll never regret  
Days coming by and I still don’t believe  
That in just a few months it’s time for you to leave  
Saying goodbye is the hardest thing  
Nature morns even birds won’t sing  
Crying of pain because you won’t be here  
For only brightness shines when you are near  
So look back on the memories we could share  
Deep inside you’ll see my smile and how much I care.  
  
We just completed the poetry unit in my sophomore literature class and the above is one of my student’s final projects. Between Colette’s poem, and a conversation with one of the Micronesians on staff - Eleanor, I am slowly gaining more insight into the culture here in Chuuk, though I’m certain I’ll never reach the point of comprehension.   
Eleanor has been dating her boyfriend for about 9 years. They went to and graduated from Xavier in 1999, and have both come back to work here for the year. She is half Pohnpeiian and he is Chuukese. In the Chuukese culture, men and women are not allowed to be seen together alone. Thus, there is always a lot of segregation at any function or event – with women together in one group, and men fraternizing in another. Irregardless of whether the two people are friends or more than friends, it is a disgrace to the females’ family for a male to be seen alone with her. For example, there is a senior Chuukese female at Xavier now who in her freshman year was dating a Pohnpeiian senior. Often times they were found sneaking off together to different corners of the campus or to the huts behind the classrooms – typical teenage behavior – you know you’ve done it at some point!! Though I’m sure you’ve never encountered the wrath of irate male family members because of it. The male relatives of the females are extremely “protective” in the sense that they would resort to violence should a male disrespect their family by being found alone together. Because a lot of the students here at Xavier are related to each other, as in this case, many a fistfight has broken out as a result of ignorant violation of this custom.   
Eleanor was explaining how she cannot go into town alone with her boyfriend because of her male relatives that live on island. Even though their relationship is very public in the sense that they have made all of their relatives aware – it is still “taboo” (and that in itself is an understatement) for them to be together without being married and should her Chuukese uncles see them together, they would most likely beat up her boyfriend. Eleanor made it seem as though the reasoning behind this mentality is that it makes the women seem like tramps if they are alone with gentlemen without being committed – ring on the finger. If a couple wants to see each other, it must be in a group setting – with other people around. She was also explaining how if they were in Pohnpei, it would not be as big of a deal and they could come and go as they pleased, but trying to maintain a relationship here in Chuuk is unbelievably difficult.   
Collette’s poem, turned in only a few days after this conversation, expressed so many of the same feelings Eleanor had been speaking of as far as being a female in Chuuk.   
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These lines though so simple, are so powerful in that I can see firsthand – and feel through her poetry the frustration of being kept apart from the one you love – not because of distance but because of a cultural standard that dictates what the heart must feel. I’m sure it is difficult for the gentlemen as well, but the double standard lies in the fact that it is not as though a gentleman’s family would go and attack the female for being alone with a male. It is as if girls are in need of protection and are not entitled to make their own, or publicly affirm their decisions regarding their personal affairs. She is constantly forced to make this choice between her heart, and her attempt to appease her family. Listening to Elle talk was intriguing but almost surreal – I could hear the words she was saying, but there was and still is this inability within me to process them properly and understand - and I feel almost ignorant for my incredulity.   
  
Coming from a culture that demands an equality of genders – particularly coming from a single sex high school that promotes the empowerment of women, and being raised by parents who have always ensured that my gender was never an obstacle to opportunity, it is very difficult to juxtapose my beliefs with the way of life here. I apologize because my words are not intended to be judgmental though I don’t know how they could be construed any other way….