

**OUR STORY:  
KINDRED THE FAMILY SOUL**

The first time I met Fatin, I heard him before I saw him. I was in another room and heard a sweet voice singing on what sounded like a demo.

I remember hurrying to see who it was and that was the first time I laid eyes on Fatin. No, it was not love at first sight but I did love his voice. He was introduced to me as a songwriter who was going to help out on the album that I was working on. He got right down to business and asked me to sing, thus the beginning of our love story and the answer to the most commonly asked question, "What came first, the love or the music?"

We did not have a long courtship, eight months to be exact. He opened up to me, told his moms about me. We talked about religion, marriage, kids, the future but most of all we talked about music. How we loved it, how we made it and how it disappointed us. We both spent our teenage years striving for stardom. Getting further than others, not as far as most. We were both talented, young and really wanting more than what we had. We both struggled with fitting into the industry. Being raised in very spiritual and moral families, we wore it on our sleeves and this didn't quite fit the image of the typical oversexed R&B dude or chick. So many things brought us together. Very little kept us apart. However, there were haters. AH, YES THE HATERS.

*"You haven't known him for very long."*

*"Do you really love her?"*

*"What will you do for money?"*

*"It's just infatuation."*

I mean they weren't all together wrong but we were very determined. We hit some walls but we climbed them. "It's just us against the world baby!"

One thing about this business is it's very easy to believe that your time is up. In fact, you kind of try to prepare yourself the moment you choose music as goal. It seems like we decided our time was up, accepted it and moved on in no time. Before we knew it we had landed smack dab in the middle of a working class West Philly neighborhood complete with row house, pregnant belly and a hand-me-down couch. By the looks of things you wouldn't believe we had ever lived the lives of artists. Singing. Writing. Traveling. We were "THE DANTZLERS." It was nice.

It also came with a job. Yes, ladies and gents, a real live nine-to-fiver. I know what you're thinking, city bus driver right. Nah, kiddies...the videos are fiction. My husband sold electronics and appliances and he was good at it. In four short months he went from salesman to assistant manager. Yes, indeed we were civilians and lovin' it. As to be expected the desire to perform still burned, just under the surface of course.

What was a simmering ember grew to be a full grown crackling fire once fate (God) intervened. I went to visit my mom so she could cuddle with our newborn son and the phone rang.

"Hello."

"Babe?"

"Hey Babe!"

"I lost my job."

*SILENCE*

After another whole day of lamenting, I returned to our home. Fatin had a solution in mind.

Kindred started haphazardly and awkwardly. I had a musical past and so did he. I called my contacts and he called his. Some responded and others did not. We landed right back in the same circle we disappeared into one year earlier. The underground Hip Hop and alternative R&B scene (which later became known as neo-soul). The Roots, Jazzyfatnastees, Jaguar, Musiq, Jill Scott, Bilal, Lady Alma, Aries, 37009, Flo Brown and a host of others converged on a small club in Old City Philadelphia.

Some jam sessions we used to attend at Roots drummer Questlove's home morphed into a "Women in Music" series called the Black Lily. It started out with just Flo, the Jazzies, Jag and Nou Ra from 37009. We became the fifth act on the strength of our relationship with them and of course my ever-present ovaries. We started out performing as Aja and Fatin, going on as the first 10 people arrived at the club. We would hit at 9:15 p.m. at an event that did not end until 2:00 a.m.

We won some people over, still others did not believe. Unfortunately, looking back we were more like a broke ass Peaches and Herb than the next Ashford and Simpson. We gigned a little but money was scarce. We were always fighting to get musicians to play for us (a live band was essential). I remember once we had a gig and our bass player and drummer canceled hours before to take better paying job. In between "the Lily," which happened every week, twice a week until they closed it in New York, and a small gig here and there, WE WERE BROKE! Fatin worked odd jobs to make ends meet. A flower shop, delivering box lunches and a homeboy hustle every now and again. (No drugs of course).

Finally we got tired of chasing the "click" musicians. I mean everybody played for us at least once. One of the most popular being hip hop *über* producer Scott Storche. Other familiar faces would go on to do everything from become a member of the rock band Incubus to write a hit song for Michael Jackson. All of them played for Kindred at one time or another. Anyhoo we had to come up with a core group – a group of musicians loyal to us and who took our music seriously. That became Ted Kenny on keys, Shareif Hobley on guitar, Jermaine Childs on bass, Julian Brown on drums -- THE BAND – HAAAAAAAAAAAAH (angelic sound effects here).

These great people consisted of regulars from "The Lily" and old friends of Fatin's from back in the day who wanted in on the new scene. They helped us to develop our sound and what would soon become our signature stage show. But more than anything they showed up.

Okay, so we had a band but what we really needed was material. We had been singing like three songs. Songs we had written believe it or not over Hip Hop beats. We would play the beats for the band and they would play it or something that sounded close. We added a cover song or two, and goshdarnit, we had a set. Aw, shit things were rolling now. People were

actually coming to "The Lily" to see us. Meanwhile we weren't Aja and Fatin anymore. We were Kindred.

It seemed like overnight we went from the walk-in music to the last act of the night. By then we had added Sonny Giddiens, Tamara Hudson, and Jamillah Wadell on background vocals as well as Radji Mateen, Jarrett Miles and Daud El Bakara on brass. We were killin' it if I must say so myself. Songs like "Rhythm of Life," "The Family Song," "Hurry Up" and "Alright," and few of our patented cover songs seemed to bring the house down like people heard our music all the time. Rich Nichols (who manages The Roots) used to tell a story about how "the Lily" would attract a lot of hardcore hip hop fans because of its affiliation with The Roots. He had observed how they would stand there through our first song -- their faces tight, arms folded waiting around for the open mic. But as each song would pass, the scowl would loosen and the arms would drop and a smile would appear.

We felt like Superman. During the week we were regular ass Clark Kent, but on Tuesday we could fly ourselves to any destination we wanted. We were still broke though. We caught the trolley down to the club and back home. Our cable was bootleg but had the essentials. Our son was still an infant and didn't take well to being away from me. I would nurse him and run down to do the show so I could be back in time for his next feeding. In fact the first Black Lily I ever attended was in New York (pre-Kindred). Fatin kept the baby and I went to New York to participate. I missed my baby so much that I retreated to basement of the club to an empty bar room. I sat there, my breasts engorged with milk, crying in pain (both physical and emotional). A girl came over to me and asked if I was okay. I shared my problem and we cried together.

That girl was Jill Scott.

So things were hard. No nannies, honey, we had babysitters -- Fatin's godsister, his brother, my mother, his mother. The whole family chipped in. They really believed in us. Without them we would have NEVER made it.

Performing led us to a meeting that truly changed things forever. As we became staples at "The Lily" other acts joined the party. Aries, Floetry, and Jazmine Sullivan, to name a few. Philly was on fire. The Roots had won a Grammy. Jill got a deal and so did Jag and Musiq.

Everyone but us.

Jill and her husband (at that time her boyfriend) invited us to the crib for a talk. They encouraged us to talk to Steve McKeever, the president of Hidden Beach Recordings. Soon after he came to Philly and we knew he was coming to the Lily. Now mind you he wasn't the first exec to come looking for us but he was the most inconspicuous. Complete with long-sleeve GAP t-shirt and sneaks, he was the picture of a rich guy who did not care about money. He blended in and watched the show from the floor not a table. We inadvertently sang one of his favorite songs, and it was as if the angels signed our names (so to speak).

Getting a deal by no means solved our problems in a "happily-ever-after" kind of way. Before our record came out we would welcome yet another baby into the world, gain and lose band members all within what's considered the most challenging time in a couple's life. In the first two years of our marriage, we argued a lot. We made love a lot. Mostly, we just tried to stay strong and trust God. Attempting to understand your role and succeeding in marriage, music, business, family and community continues to be our life's greatest challenge, but we step to it

like soldiers. We attempt to complete this mission not just for ourselves but for our little generations to come.