

The Anger of Loving You

by Jordyn McMahon

The house I grew up in never seemed to be settled. Floors creaked at the slightest shift, almost as if they were listening. Doors were always half closed, never fully shut, like someone had left them that way in a hurry. You learned to measure your voice within the house, making words sit on your tongue before letting them out.

A kitchen chair was pulled out from the table on an angle, misplaced, like a warning. Some days the house felt too quiet, the kind that made every tiptoe echo. Other days, it shifted without warning – the slam of a cabinet or someone stomping up the stairs. Glasses left half full scattered on the countertops, fermenting into molding experiments. Barely enough room for the bags of marijuana spilling into the spaces between them. Where was I amidst this mess? Though I was her daughter, her baby, only a single picture hidden on the fridge among the pinned neglected bills.

My mother was not well, and her instability shaped everything and everyone near her. The people I loved most learned to move around her carefully, choosing words wisely, or not at all, because even speaking might make it worse. A look, a tone, something slightly off. She gave the house its personality – her voice bleeding through the walls, rising and falling without warning, until it shaped the house into something I was always bracing myself for.

She hurt me, not always loudly, not always in ways that others could see. There were moments when I would do something simple and watch it backfire, her expression changing before I even understood why.

I couldn't spell "alligator" at seven, but I knew how to sit still in a room where it didn't feel safe to speak. A smile on the bus ride to school, a white glittery dress that didn't belong to the day, chosen because nothing else was clean. Lunch was a dented ravioli can, sent to school without any way to open it. Clothes in rotation for days at a time. Empty detergent bottles sat under the sink, some smelling less of chemicals and more of poison.

I learned to stop speaking mid thought, to weigh my words before letting them out – hoping for a good day to come. I stopped moving through the house carelessly – like it was safe, but instead moving like I needed to be ready. I grew up faster than I should have because there was no room for softness.

Doors slammed hard enough to make the walls feel closer. Voices rose until they filled every corner, while objects became part of whatever came next. Silence followed because speaking about it felt heavier than staying quiet. Home was not a place to rest; it was a place to endure.

The architecture of my childhood did not settle slowly; it collapsed in a blur of motion. The violence finally had an end when she turned her anger toward my brother one night.

We moved with the same urgency we once used to dodge the warped floorboards and droopy ceiling tiles, but this time, the stakes were our own lives. As we drove down backroads at 110 miles per hour, we watched my mother chase the car until she was a small, fading point of anger in the rearview mirror. We weren't just driving away from a house; we were outrunning a woman who had spent years ensuring that *nothing was ever her fault*. The escape was the last loud moment before the heavy silence of my new life began – the moment I stopped bracing myself for her volatility and started breathing for myself.

There was a void where a mother should have been, and for a long time I believed that void meant that something was wrong with me. But as years passed, I began to notice something I hadn't before – calmness. The emptiness hurt, but it did not harm me the way her presence had. Still, I can admit what once felt impossible to say: leaving her was painful, but it would've hurt more if we had stayed.

In the house where I spent my days, silence was never peaceful; it was a “brace”, a shared breath stretched between the slam of a cabinet and the next rise of a voice. I measured my own worth against the days she would disappear without explanation, wondering if I was worth being remembered. I had been raised to believe that a mother's presence, however destructive, held the roof up. She closed and sealed the doors; fathers, grandparents, aunts, and uncles were all locked away, one by one, while I watched her swallow the key.

I prayed for her to get better, holding onto the idea of ever having a kind mom. But the structure of our home taught a harder truth: some people never really get better. I stopped praying for a different mother and started learning how to survive the one I had.

Watching other girls my age with their mothers is a kind of quiet torture. At sixteen, I am surrounded by girls who are “best friends” with theirs, sharing a softness I never had. While they have a constant source of support, I am left to manage the void where a mother should have been, a space I once believed meant I was broken. There are still nights where the absence becomes heavy, and I grieve the version of her that never existed.

It aches to realise she controlled access to love so tightly that she locked herself out of my life entirely, choosing destruction over her own children.

I am mourning a ghost. Yet, even through the pain, I recognize that this emptiness hurts, but it does not harm me the way her presence did. I am learning that I would rather miss her from safety than be destroyed by her in a house where there was no room to breathe.

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