

Between a Mother's Love

Finding a mom, is as hard as having one.

By Sydney Scalia

I write this sitting in the kitchen sink. Most of me is happy, most of me is sad, and most of me doesn't know what to believe.

The sink is below a small square window with hand stitched crappy curtains on both sides. I am sitting here writing this, as I look out occasionally watching the passers pass by and the go-er's keep going. Some leave flowers, others other's do not. Those that do not, must have known the real truths behind my mother's eyes such as the nights she beat us senseless after the alcohol became the water to her dehydration of a job and men. Our trailer home was everything and more to her, but a hell hole to her kids. It was like God had seen it, and moved mom out of the way. And the devastating news of a rape and murder did little to change me and my sister's minds about staying or leaving. Our mother knew nothing about love nor how to give and show it. Her kids were simply furniture to her trailer to be used at her disposal, beaten and worn down every night by her drunken tornados. Chrissy and I knew not of normalcy. Until the day she died, only then did the sky clear and we saw fresh flowers at our feet and we hadn't shed a single tear, at least in public, and everyone's condolences were out of happiness for our freedom. But where would that take us?

Part I

I had normalcy once. Or at least what I think I saw, is what I think was normal. It was spring and I was on a swing set. It was late in the day and the sun blasted orange over the metal tops of the trailers and peeked through the oak trees shining on the gravel and the dust in the air as my mother pushed me. I felt like I could fly. That day my mother pushed me on the swing, and pushed tiny glass bottle after glass bottle of golden yellow liquid that smelled bitter and sour. She wouldn't let me drink it, and hurriedly drank four or five before I could pitch a fit. Slowly those days disappeared. Maybe it was because I grew up, or maybe it was that I knew deep down my mother could never leave a drop of alcohol. And maybe I thought she was just sad or crazy. But my mother's type of crazy was never for fun or for the laughs of her daughters. One minute she would treat us like we were the only two things in the whole wide world worth living for, and the next I could feel her hot flesh rip right across my skin knocking me to the ground making me wonder what I did to deserve another black eye. And after turning 12, I found each day

became harder and harder to outrun the raging evenings that beat me into the dirt and threw me against brick walls.

It was my mom most times, and partly her endless evening male “visitors” partaking in drink after drink. They conjured up reasons for every hit, slap, grapple, burn, or dowsing such as leaving a cabinet open just a crack so you could see the expired cans of food. This was my normalcy. Other 12 year old girls knew nothing of the same, and it was that fact that drew me to the beginning of defending myself. And then my sister was born. And I had never once in my life wanted to defend something more than my own life, but my sister. She was born from a different dad of course, and I can’t remember if it was the middle aged construction worker who always seemed dirty, or the younger looking frequent gambler who had a good swing and never missed an eye. I remember biting him one time, and it felt good but it never ended well. He left me with a scar across my collar bone after finding a nearby shard of glass. I think it was a beer bottle. But he never touched my sister. He may have tried but I always spat back. And at night after he had left I told her stories about kings and queens and dragons and knights, hoping that would be here normalcy for her to remember. I’ve never stopped storytelling since. She’s only five.

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Today is Sunday. There are people everywhere. And not the kind we know or have known for as long as they have been here, but strangers in uniforms scanning through our house with their clipboards and their caution tape. Our house is now a public spectacle. News vans crowd the dirt lots and onlookers stand outside our driveway. Our mother has just died. Well not just now, more like last night. According to police, she was raped and left to die by the train tracks, two minutes from the edge of the park. Chrissy doesn’t know. She still thinks mom is gone since last night when she went out to “visit some people.” She’s sitting on our frayed and legless couch reading a story book. I has no reason to question her innocence when bringing up the news of our mother’s death being that she knew she was a bad person who did bad things to us. An absent mother in death is no different to Chrissy than an absent mother alive. Why should she have to know at so young an age? She doesn’t.

After a while, a female police officer suggested a ride to their station for general information and questioning. I had to leave Chrissy with our neighbor Luna, a lead singer in an all girls punk rock band, so I could go for a few hours. I always have this fear in the back of my mind that Chrissy thinks I’ll leave like mom always did. I made sure I told the police officer that I will stay for no longer than three hours.

“So you’re Alice Marsh right?” Her name is Officer Turner.

“Yes.”

“Ok...We have your file right here. Looks like you’ve been through a lot huh? Abusive mother, bad neighborhood, and it looks like you raised your sister right?”

“Yes.” The room is blank and I am sitting at a desk in the center of it. There are no windows and one mirror that I know for sure is a two-way. There are shadows on the other side.

“First off I will state that I am sorry for your loss. Abusive or not, you lost someone who raised you.” I find myself gripping the chair so hard, my knuckles are white. Did she raise me? Or did I raise me? Or did this world raise me as best it could watching me slip through it’s sad fingers every time I was hit or slapped. So I raise my eyebrows. And she clears her throat uncomfortably.

“Well, it says here you are 18?” I nod.

“And your sister, Chrissy right? She is five?” I nod again. She writes a note or two, and circles the number 18 on a piece of paper. Looks as if I am a suspect almost. I won’t lie, I almost thought of killing her one night. It was the one and only time she had hit Chrissy, and I snapped. I shoved her hard and made her nose bleed and I felt a sense of rawness and filthy anger boiling from my cheeks. But as far as we know, a pack of men could’ve killed her, even if I thought to first.

“Yes.” She looks up from her papers and I can see a face of worry. Worry for me and for Chrissy. And somehow I know what’s coming next. The horror story of all kids with no parents. Orphans.

“Listen Alice,” she sighs, “I will help you in any way I can for you and for your sister. We are happy you are both alive and away from that environment. We had never had much knowledge of the situation in which you were both put in since birth. And now that your mother has died, that situation will change effective immediately and only the best will be provided for you both.” I look her in the eyes. I want to here the whole truth.

“However,” she pauses. Her eyes shift from mine and dart towards the ceiling as if there was a better answer. We all know there isn’t.

“You Alice, are 18. A legal adult. You are unfortunately too old for foster care.” She said it like it was a surprise. Like a shockwave hit the police station, and the shadows behind that mirror are gasping as we speak, and maybe one of them has fainted.

“And due to a lack of schooling, no current job due to that fact, and no money,” she exhales long and softly. “Social services will not give you custody of your sister.” I can feel tears in my eyes starting from the inner corner and forming their reservoirs to be soon over flowed broken by a single blink. There was a part of me that knew, and part of me that wished mom was still alive; only if it meant I could have Chrissy and we could get out whole. Not in pieces. She saw it in me.

“As for you, you will receive aid and assistance from a women’s abuse program in Oregon if you choose it. You’ll receive therapy, job options, and help with schooling. Being a legal adult, you have the option.” I shift my eyes to my feet and then back at the desk. The desk pulls in my vision and focus and I can’t look up.

“No.” I say. Officer Turner clasps her hands. I can see she’s on my side. She looks as if she has kids of her own. A mom. A woman who would never separate her own kids, let alone

any she's working with. But somehow that's not enough. Not enough for her to protest, even take me and Chrissy to wherever the sun seems softer and the air feels lighter. My side has nothing for her to stand on. No ground. I am floating.

"Alice, I know you don't want to lose your sister, but you will still be able to contact her and she wouldn't be adopted without your consent. You have to think about her." I stiffen. Chrissy has been mine since 13, from a father who wasn't mine, yet connected through the idea of a mother who we knew existed. I had been her shield, a selfish shield in every right reason. And now it was my selfishness in my own questioning of a better life for her, or holding on and never knowing if we could make it to the next week. So I nodded, relinquishing my selfishness.

The next few days were hushed. We gathered what was ours, and nearly sleep induced, we crawled our way to a safe house. Chrissy slept and I played the guard of our castle, watching over the sleeping princess, knowing most of our dragons had been slayed. Oregon was soon to be my castle, or more like a shack for a nomadic gypsy. Chrissy would keep her castle and her world of a princess through her eyes, the way it should be. And for the first time in a while, I was scared. I had never been scared of my mother since I was 13. I always knew I could take a fight and feel nothing. And that's what I had felt these days: nothing. Until, this one moment. The moment where my life was uprooted and thrown to the winds to be blown across chaos and fear.

"I will never leave you."

"I am coming back."

And all of the world fell silent to watch I, the gypsy girl's, next move, and to watch Chrissy, a broken princess, to break even more.

Chrissy's eyes swelled with her tears, and I a single tear broke from it's reservoir. I was met with a pleading, gripping hug and a one hour flight to Portland, on a metal bird I had only seen in movies. I had fastened the idea that I would be ok. Alone, but ok.

I sat in my seat on the plane, slightly terrified of the thought of flying through the air in a metal tube, and thought of my mother. This was something unusual and had always been a thought never worth the time of day or night for a single word inside my head. But I found myself thinking about that god damned swing set. The one off the side of the road, in a dirt patch, with a chipping wood stained picnic table not too far behind it. And I thought of me. And how happy I was to be sitting in that swing, my mother's seemingly kind face beaming at me, even if she was dropping those mini shot bottles into the gravel, and wiping her mouth clean of what I thought I saw, even when she knew I saw it. The sun was always orange, and the trees softly shook with the breeze.

Oregon didn't look that way at 6:00 PM on a Thursday one hour after I had left everything I thought I knew and loved or hated, far from the place where normal had a hard fist and a bottle of something bitter laying on the rug and stinging my eyes. Instead, there was rain, and lots of it. I had never had rain. That was never normal. I never had rain to wash away the alcohol from my eyes, or the bruises on my chin and cheek, or my own mother's guilt when she saw what she had done the next morning in a frenzy of tears and "I'm sorry."s. So i ran into it,

standing there for a few long moments waiting for the impossible, waiting for normal, waiting for my sister to step off a plane just behind me, and waiting for my mother. For my mother to walk into the rain and gently push me into what normal should have been for eighteen years like the swingset and the sun setting orange, and the oak trees just before they were knocked down like I was when I was 12 and many times before and after. I wanted her to step into the rain so it could drown us both as I scream at her for all the damage and the scars and the bruises and burns and the alcohol and rage and fear and guilt and tell her I am glad she is gone, just before I tell her, "Don't leave. I love you."