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Growing Up In An Ill House

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Growing Up In An Ill House

Suseth Fonseca

1.

I am her medicine
Until I fall exhausted in bed
I dream of peaceful conversations
Laughter being shared

But my reality is slightly different
It's a place where I cry and tense up
It hurts seeing my efforts not being appreciated
She says I waste too much time

But she does not know I do everything precisely
White rice quebradito
La carne jugosa y todo picado muy fino
I promise next time I will create the perfect plate for her

But nothing is perfect once those meds kick in
I suffer seeing her drugged up
She suffers when she is sober
For this reason, I believe we need help

But she believes I am useless
I rejoice when she says "Gracias por siempre estar ahí"
But then the medication kicks in and her joy is gone
I am a child of her illness.

2.

Physically, I became tired. Tired of multi tasking: from washing dishes to running across the room to put Downey in the laundry. I use my laziness as my resistance. I use it to resist her screams, and the fights. When I hear her voice, my body quickly becomes numb, and prepares to fight away her blows . People say I have become her. Su gemela de carácter y físicamente. I have built a strong attitude towards people, pushing them away just like she does to people who love her. She does not realize that I learned that from her, all she realizes is that I am rude to the people around us.

For those who stand on the outside of this bubble, it is easy for them to give unrealistic advice. I remember laying in bed one day, sick and tired: emotionally, mentally, and physically when my aunt got there and started commenting on my laziness. She said, "Mija, siempre estás dormida," but she does not realize I am exhausted from not being appreciated for my hard work. Then, my mom starts with her "Haces las cosas nomás porque las tienes que hacer," because I do not put effort into the chores.

These chores have become hectic, from bathing her, to feeding her, and cleaning the whole house. "No es fácil," le digo, but her simple response is, "Véte a tu cuarto." She shuts me away thinking it will teach me a lesson, but in reality it kills me even more. I have developed depression from this entire situation, I cannot fake a smile anymore. I have let my body become fat because I let her throw me in the darkness. In the distance, I hear her cries every night. She cries from pain, anxiety attacks, and being cold. It irritates me when I hear my father tending her needs at two and three in the morning, when he works at 5 a.m. My body chooses to get sick as resistance, but my mind forces me to continue because my father cannot do it all alone.

I miss my old self, the one before all her illnesses. The one who had a small waist with fitted thighs, no stretch marks or lonjas. Now, I am chubby with white stripes down my hips and inner thighs. My family fat-shames me whenever they get an

opportunity, her illness is the cause of my overweight. How can I take care of myself when her health takes up all my time? She only worries about my physical appearance, but she should also be worrying for my mental health – before I go crazy.

I learned not to feel anymore because she criticizes every time I am depressed. “¡Ay Suseth! Otra vez con tus pendejadas, nomás en la calle estás feliz tú.” However, when I am out with my friends, all my anger, stress, and depression go with me and I still walk around with a frown on my face.

3.

I used to just put my clothes away when she folded them. I would, or I used to, help her get things from the fridge because she could not bend over. We would make dad's bed together while she got ready. Mother and I would then clean the kitchen from top to bottom. We began from cabinet to cabinet, taking out all the expired cans. Then, we would make dinner for my father who would soon arrive, tired from work. I learned to make my special rice from my mother, the best cook in the world.

This all changed suddenly when my mother landed in the hospital due to a deadly infection in 2006. I remember staying over at my Tía Elena's house because my father and my Nina were with her. I would always ask my Tía how my mother was doing and she would only respond, “Well...” Her response was for a little girl and I was not a little girl anymore. Since then, I've had to say goodbye to my childhood and hello to motherhood.

My mother became physically impaired because the infection spread throughout her body, cutting off most of her circulation to her legs. She became dependent on a walker to move around, pero yo era su apoyo. At the age of ten, I became a mother figure to my sister. I had to take over my mother's role, no matter my age or my maturity level.

My chores became the kitchen, laundry, mopping, and her hygiene. My childhood life withered away without my consent. I learned to cook everything from fajitas to bistec ranchero con arroz rojo, bien cocinado. I cooked meals a ten year-old child should be eating, not cooking. I had to perfect each of her favorite dishes because otherwise she would not eat what I cooked. I learned how to cook some of her dishes, but she also had to adapt to my way of cooking. She analyzed the plate when it got to her table as if it were a life or death situation. "La cebolla no se pica así, le falta sal, la carne está blanda o muy dorada, el pescado no me gusta tan aguado." Her complaints were a sharp knife cutting away at my dedication.

I had the dedication to exceed her perfectionistic expectations, but the wounds I incurred have not healed. I still mess up preparing certain foods, like overcooking the meat, but she has slowly shaped me with her sharp knife. I will never achieve perfection in her eyes. As a result, ironically, I have fallen in love with cooking because she has taught me so many meals with her strong attitude. The only thing I was able to perfect was the love I have for the kitchen.

Once again, I am her gemela, mother loved the kitchen before her illness attacked her. When it was time for her therapy to walk around the house, my body would become numb. This happened because I always knew a lot of screaming was coming my way. I always made a mess when I cooked. She would come by the kitchen, and I am not exaggerating here, but her first step into the kitchen was a step coupled with a thousands complaints coming my way. "Esto no va aquí, que tiradero tienes, porqué no limpias antes de cocinar." I could never please her. My body, numb and stuck in the kitchen, realized her illness made her very cruel.

I remember the happy mother who used to lay in bed with us chanting, "¡Ahí viene el monstruo de la laguna verde!" and started tickling us until we fell off the bed. Then she would start singing, "Que Laureles Tan Verdes," just to annoy us. Then, my little sister Naty and I would leave her and go sleep because she had annoyed us already.

Now, I wish even her annoying self was back from the medication, because the current cruelty is affecting me. I miss my old mother. I wish I enjoyed her more before all this happened to her. Since my old mother is now drowning in medication, I have become her helper. Drowning her with 6 pills in the morning and 10 at night. The pills put her to sleep. Only then could I get chores done before she could wake up and order me to do them. I find a relief when she is asleep because she does not pressure me to clean her way. I give the chores proper attention to make them perfect for when she wakes up, and sees how nice the house looks. Then you will find me praying that she wakes up and notices the difference

4.

Nurses running back and forth, beating machines, blinding lights, and prayers whispered by my family. Un Padre Nuestro y un Ave María. It all started with el llanto that prohibited la válvula to close. I was diagnosed with a window in my aorta that leaked blood into my lungs. I lived in an ICU incubator for 18 days. A premature baby in a crystal glass bed where I was connected to multiple machines, keeping me alive. The two nurses, my guardian angels, were always watching over me.

Un Domingo, 21 de Septiembre del 1996 estaba en un cuarto oscuro donde yo estaba conectada a muchos aparatos para mantenerme viva. A priest, my parents, and my family arrived at the hospital where a cardiologist was waiting for them with life-changing news.

I was only two months old when my heart was surgically removed and placed in a machine where it would pump on its own. The machine pumped all this strength and courage into my heart to continue living. Fuí un milagro. Tengo que seguir viviendo porque Dios me dió otra oportunidad para seguir en este mundo. Me dió una oportunidad y fuerza para poder lidiar con cualquier obstáculo. Con la Virgen de Guadalupe a mi lado pude salir adelante.

The scar runs seven inches, starting from my collarbone and down. A scar that the world can see with clothing with the slightest cleavage. A scar that might make me appear fragile, but it is a constant reminder that I am stronger than I seem. Yo pude sobrevivir una operación peligrosa y yo puedo sobrevivir todo obstáculo que la vida me ponga al frente. La máquina que le dio fuerza a mi corazón, me dio fuerza a mí para sobrevivir y enfrentar los maltratos, y gritos de mi madre. Esos gritos y maltratos me pueden tumbar, pero yo me levanto y sigo adelante.

Everything I have gone through with my mother, has worked like the machine that pumped my heart. The screams, the unappreciation, everything has pumped strength into me for whatever challenge may come my way.