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Ay Mija, 'sta Loca

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Ay Mija, 'sta Loca

Maddy Jackson

My mom dedicated “Love Like This” by Faith Evans to me when I was a kid. She would blast it on her stereo and we would sing it as we cleaned the house. She would tell me the only love she knew was mine and my brother’s. I believed her.

incantation of love // hechizo de amor

By the time I was four my mom separated from my father because he didn’t mature into being a dad. He wanted to party, drink, and smoke. My mom wanted to be with us, raise us. She wanted to be the parents she never had. My grandparents had difficult childhoods, which translated over to my mother’s. There was no affection shown in their families, no one said I love you, and for my mom that meant the same.

My mom craved affection and love.

She thought she found love with her ex-husband, my father, but as soon as they had kids it was over. He loved only her, and she found love in her kids. Like my mom said, *she never knew there was a love like this before*. Her parents didn’t show it and the person she loved became toxic to her and her kids. My brother and I were my mom’s solace in life. We were hers to love and show affection.

As a child I loved mommy’s love and affection. That was all I knew, and she was always readily available. But being smothered in love and affection lost its attraction when I was coming into my own personhood, separate from mommy, when I was discovering who I was or wanted to be. What I liked and didn’t like.

She didn’t know how to separate herself from me.

She didn’t know how to not worry.

She didn’t know how to give me space.

My mom's smothering love and affection became toxic to me. My mom took care of me, helped me get my needs met, but she did not give me space to grow into my own, to be myself. Out of worry, out of wanting the guidance she never had, she wanted me to fit into her ideas of who I should be and what I should do.

let the heart speak // deja que el corazón hable

She was possessive of me in a way she never was with my brother. In high school our gender roles became clear. James took out the trash, mowed the lawn, took the groceries down from the car. I cleaned the kitchen, prepared food, went to the grocery store (and other stores) with her. I also engaged in emotional labor for my mom. I heard her complaints about work and her social life. I constantly heard her complaints about my grandpa, my brother, and me. What she thinks I need to look like; what she thinks I need to do or stop doing. It was hard to escape this burden of emotional labor because she forced me to go everywhere with her. My brother did not share this experience, although he had his personal difficulties with her too.

One Christmas when I was fifteen I told her, "Ma, I've had it. I don't want to be expected to cook and clean. James' chores were over before the family arrived...and now he's playing video games with my cousins, enjoying himself, while my chores never end. Here I am preparing and serving food and drinks with you while James and all the other men in our family get to enjoy the Christmas *we* put together every year. *When will the roles switch? When will we* get to enjoy the holidays?"

"We do this for the family," she said. "To continue grandma's traditions. Don't be ungrateful."

I wasn't ungrateful, just resentful and uncomfortable by the gender roles in my family which I was expected to (unhappily) perform. Heteropatriarchy was confining me, and I couldn't escape. I complained about these gendered dynamics again and again and again and again.

Eventually my mom told me, "I like taking you everywhere with me because I enjoy my connection with you. It's different with your brother

because he's male and we're both females. We are emotional and like to talk, and your brother doesn't. We're wired differently that way. I feel like I have a special bond with you, and your brother is missing his bond with his father. I don't blame James for not wanting to talk to me."

I didn't say anything.

"I'm queer," I said. "Everyone in high school is too immature for me."

[I was sixteen responding to my mother's question, "Why don't you have a boyfriend?"]

"What's th---," she began, "Oh, I don't want to know."

"Well, if you do it's only a google search away."

I personally never considered myself as having a coming out story because I was never in,

but I guess this is my outing story to my mom. She doesn't remember this conversation though, but I clearly do since it hurt my feelings.

their name // su nombre

In my mom's mind, my outing story was when her and her friend met my ex-girlfriend when they visited me my first year of college. We were unapologetically holding hands and seeing us startled my mom. She gave me the eyes and her friend shrugged. It was funny. Humor's a good way to cope. Later that day she pulled me aside and told me I embarrassed her in front of her friend.

I knew I was queer when my sexuality was budding. I fell for my "same sex" friends who I had immense bonds with. My first make out session was with my best friend Gabby when I was thirteen. After that we always looked forward to being affectionate again. We never talked about our relationship as more than a friendship though, and we didn't show affection in front of our friends. I suspect this was a reflection of our Catholic school indoctrination which was absent of representations of

queer love. But sometimes in public, *when it was just us*, we would walk the streets of LA holding hands.

Sure, we got cat called and were told to do more than hold hands, but we fled still holding hands, not letting each other go. I never thought my “same sex” attractions were out of the ordinary. It was what I felt, and I didn’t question or condemn that. To me it only made sense I was attracted people I was close to and emotionally intimate and safe with.

Now that I’m 23, my mom understands I’m queer but now I’m trying to get her to understand I’m non binary. It’s a work in progress. She can’t help but see me as her little girl, the one she adorned with hats, dresses, and frilly socks.