

Honor Thy Mother

By: Gracie Scroggs

I used to say I could never hate anyone.

That was, until I met Marilyn.

Dad married her only three months after Mama died of a stroke; I hadn't even had time to grieve the only person who ever truly took care of me. God only knows why that woman even married my pitiful excuse for a father. Dad can't stay away from a bottle of alcohol long enough to drive- let alone think about if I ate dinner or not. Manipulative women like Marilyn normally marry for money, but, due to Dad's constant spending on whiskey, they couldn't even afford a honeymoon.

"Just call me mom," Marilyn said to me the day after the wedding, gripping my arm a little too tight for my liking.

I snapped my arm away from her, hoping she would get the message that physical contact was not even close to an option.

"You're insane if you think I'll ever consider you anything like a mother," I replied, my acerbic tone echoing through Dad and I's, normally lifeless, kitchen.

She didn't like that. She didn't like that one bit. Marilyn struck my left cheek, leaving a red handprint. Hot tears flooded down either side of my face as I brought my hand up to touch my burning skin. Something changed in me that day. I was no longer the sweet, innocent girl my Mama always wanted me to be. I had never experienced anything like that before. Sure, Dad is a drunk, but he never hits or hurts me. He never even yells at me. He has never been an angry drunk- that is one thing I thank God for.

In that moment, I made a vow to myself: I would never give Marilyn any type of satisfaction again. She could hit me, yell at me, do whatever she wanted, and I would remain numb the entire time. Call me crazy—maybe that's what I am—but, at this point, I'm more than okay with that. I couldn't give into showing her what she wanted to see: a miserable little girl who depended on her. I will *never* depend on her.

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"Ashleigh, get me some water!" Marilyn commands from the living room.

I glance up from my math homework and find her through the crack of my slightly open door watching some sort of late-night T.V. show in black and white on our box television. Why can't she just get a job? She does absolutely nothing for this family except satisfy my dad's sexual needs. She's a waste of space.

"Get it yourself."

I watch as she grinds her teeth and takes a deep breath, clearly attempting to keep some sort of temper- she knows Dad doesn't like when she hits me. But he's not here right now. And I don't care. I'm not getting her water unless she's drowning in it.

“Ashleigh May, you better do what I tell you or you know what’s going to happen,” She threatens.

A challenge. I *love* challenges.

“On this episode of Marilyn Hill likes to abuse children,” I reply in a snarky tone.

The sound of her feet stomping the hardwood floor as she jumps up does not even phase me. And she hates it. She wishes that I winced at the sight of her marching to harm me. She wishes I cried and told her I was sorry. She wishes that I would just let her replace my Mama. But she will never replace Mama. No one will. I hate Marilyn; I decided I hated her the minute Dad told me about her. And, no matter what she does, that will never change. She thinks hitting me will make me learn, but it only makes my darkness grow.

“Hey, home-wrecker,” I say with a smirk as she throws my door open, causing it to bounce off the wall and swing back to her.

Her eyes narrow at me. Her teeth grind against each other. She’s about to swing. I know she is. I wish I knew what would break her- it’s the one thing I’ve been trying to figure out for a couple years now. I’ve insulted her so many times and not once have I gotten to her. She just gets angry at me- never upset or hurt by what I say. But maybe she just doesn’t let an 17-year-old girl hurt her feelings. I wouldn’t.

Sure enough, her fist meets my face, knocking me back on my bed. I bring my hand up to my nose to feel a slippery, warm red liquid oozing out.

“I said, ‘Get me some *water*,’” She roars.

She won’t hit me again. That’s the only upside about her abuse- it’s never repetitive at one time.

“And I said, ‘Get it *yourself*,’” I reply through my teeth, crossing my arms.

She lets out a puff of air through her nose and scowls at me. Sometimes I wonder who has a deeper burning hatred for the other. Maybe a little common sense finally kicks in because she turns around and storms out of my room, roughly shutting my door behind her.

I release the tension in my muscles and fall back onto my pillow. I shut my eyes tightly and imagine Mama all dressed and ready for church, her smile beaming at me as she told me she loved me. She was an angel. I suppose she really is one, now. I’d give anything for her to hold me again and make me feel safe and loved. I know Dad loves me, but only because I’m his daughter. He doesn’t know the first thing about me. Mama always showed a genuine interest in the things I was passionate about. I remember the day I ran in the door with excitement to tell Mama I had been chosen for the art show. She ran up to me, picked me up and spun me around, telling me how proud she was, and she even got off work early to come see the show. Tears sting my eyes thinking about the memories, once again reminding me that I was never truly able to grieve Mama. I’m about two years behind in the grieving process. In fact, I think I skipped the ‘denial’ step all together. The entire thing was made all-too-real the day Marilyn moved in.

A sudden sleepiness comes over me, and I lean over and pull the little string to shut the lamp on my nightstand off. I hum the lullaby Mama used to sing me every night: the only way I’m able to fall asleep.

I finally doze off only to be awoken shortly after by a *bang*. Dad's home. I may hate being woken up every night by the sound of him coming back from the bar, drunk and knocking into things, but it at least tells me he made it home alive. He might not be the best dad, but I still love him regardless.

I shut my eyes again, hoping to go right back to sleep. It should be fairly quiet now unless Dad puts on one of his new Johnny Cash records that he feels the need to yell every lyric along with. But, to my surprise, I don't hear Dad yell-singing. It's something different. Something coming from their room next to mine: his and Marilyn's voices barely even muffled by the walls.

"You should be grateful I'm here in the first place when all you do is drink," Marilyn says, her tone sharp and voice raised.

I've never heard them argue. I always wanted them to, I thought it would bring some sort of sick joy to me. But I don't like this. It brings back the memories of Mama and Dad having screaming matches while 8-year-old me hid under my covers, wishing they would stop. Memories I hadn't thought of in years.

"You know that I love you," My father slurs his words.

"Did you forget what I did for you? Get rid of that woman that kept getting in the way of us?"

There's no way she's talking about—

"Marilyn, I never asked you to do that to Rebecca," My father once again slurs his words around.

My heart drops into my stomach. My knees go weak. Anger and hatred burns through every inch of my body. Rebecca was my Mama's name. It wasn't a stroke. Marilyn Hill killed my mother.

"Well it sure fixed things for us, didn't it darlin'?" Aside from that little brat," Marilyn snaps.

I've heard enough. I muffle my hearing with pillows and smile as I drift to sleep.

My eyes open to the sound of a pan clanging in the kitchen. Of course, the Saturday ritual: Dad goes out to breakfast with his friends while Marilyn makes bacon and eggs for herself, and I'm left with whatever is left in the pantry.

I slowly crack open my bedroom door to peak at Marilyn. She's sitting on the couch, as usual, eating her breakfast and reading the newspaper. *Perfect*.

Step by step, I tip toe down the hall and out to the garage. Immediately, I spot exactly what I'm looking for. I sneak back into the house, coveted item in hand, and go into Marilyn and Dad's room, where I pack up her stuff into the one bag she brought when she moved in. One bag should be easy enough to get rid of.

I creep into the living room, right up behind Marilyn, and I swing the largest shovel I could find on the back of her skull. I'm careful not to hit her too hard, of course. Her

unconscious body falls over on the couch, luckily only bleeding a little bit. I smirk, satisfied with myself.

I grab one of her wrists with one hand, shovel in the other, and I drag her across the hardwood floor and out the door that leads to the outside. Thank God she's skinny. I pull her through the grass, far out into the woods behind our house on 5 acres of land. Dirt and mud stain her skirt as I drag her, now powerless against me, body. I laugh maniacally. There's a rush in my veins. It's true what they say- revenge *is* sweet.

I reach the perfect, strategically hidden, spot and puncture the ground with the shovel. I dig and dig until the hole is just the right size, and I toss the shovel aside, just for a moment.

Hands on my hips, I stand, looking down at Marilyn, recalling everything she ever put me through. I bend down and bring my index and middle fingers to the side of her neck. I grin. A pulse. That wonderful, wonderful pulse.

I pick the murderer up and throw her, still alive, body into the hole.

Another smile, perhaps a devilish one, spreads across my face as I begin filling the hole with dirt and whisper,

"It ain't murder if I bury you alive."