

A woman clutches her bible as she walks into a group of mothers. She is within a city that she had never known until one month previous. To know a city is to feel ownership of its streets, restaurants, clothing stores, wine and coffee shops. To know a city is to know which grocery store has your favorite rye bread and ginger iced tea. To know a city is to have at least three places to escape to that no one else knows about or can find you within.

A woman clutches her bible as she walks into a group of mothers. She is beautiful in a striking way, but as you study her features closely she becomes very ordinary. She is blonde, mousey, tall, and lanky-- but strong and stern. She is not the type of woman who you can brush past without notice.

She has quit her job by this point. She has set her vision on being a mother. It is her calling she knows, but yet, she feels so unfulfilled by its offering. Its offering wales and begs. It sucks her breasts as it much as it extracts every inch of life before this year that she had known to be true, to be hers. Now it is no longer I, or we, or us two, but it, with us. It with me. It with him. It with both of us, always, now and forever. For what reason do we not exchange vows at the birth of a child, to honor and to love one another in weakness and in health? Is it because the bond between mother and child is far beyond the love that spouses have for each other?

She asks the group if it is because God has bound those of the same blood line so closely together that they can never truly break the love they have for one another? Is it because within our blood God inserts hormones that make the bond between mother and child irreplaceable, unmissable, unnamable, inescapable?

They say yes, in so many words.

Well then, why do I hate my child so? Why does his face look at me with need, hunger, and anger every moment of the day? Why do his wales ail me -- push me so far into my bed that the foam of the mattress covers my ears and I can for two moments, pretend that I am the me that existed one year ago before his birth?

I ask God, why?

Why do I hate my child, and why did God give me the child to mock the lack of love I have?

Dear Lord, I am plagued with unmotherly feelings. Please give me the strength to overcome this hatred for him that is so unnatural.

She misses the sounds of an office with its intellectual demands and quiet excitement. She imagines heading to a meeting, and executing each point with poise.

She misses the stroke of a brush, and the satisfaction of completing a painting that looks as real as a photograph.

The opening of a book.

The contrast of black coffee and early morning light.

She looks into the mirror and sees a woman of 30 years old with bags under her eyes, and great ideas for the future. She faces a great impediment, but she will overcome. This is what she had always yearned for as a child herself. She had imagined him into being with her scenes of familial love and beauty. She and her husband would create a being unlike anything anyone had ever seen... with her hair and his eyes, and he would rise above any life they had known.

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15 years later. He won't respond for 5 minutes, and her heart beats quickly to the idea that he may be doing something that she doesn't know, doesn't understand, or wouldn't approve of... She can remember when he was 5 years old with blue and white striped pants -- climbing all over her lap at the beach, feeling absolutely safe within her arms. He went everywhere she went in absolute adoration. He was the object of every bit of attention she contained. For so many years, she had woken up for him, risen for him, and moved for him.

He won't respond for 15 minutes, and she remembers the way his hair used to part so perfectly after she bathed him. She remembers how he used to cuddle up to her while she wrapped in his favorite towel with a monkey head.

He won't talk to her when she calls, and so she hands over the phone to her husband. He scoffs off murmuring about her obsession with his whereabouts. He doesn't know why she is so concerned, but concedes to the questioning.

Where have you been? What are you doing?

He returns happy with his responses, and tells her not to be concerned.

But, she's not concerned for his safety, really. She's concerned at his lack of attention for her needs. The tipping point she always expected, but never really believed to be true, has in fact, occurred, and she is left helpless. She doesn't recognize the child whose whereabouts she is unsure of, and can not comprehend his lack of respect for her authority.

A child must be bonded to his mother all of his days, and the day that he isn't, is a truly grave day. She must mourn his death now, before she expects a change in his temperament. But, why does no one teach us how to mourn for a death of a person who is quite alive. It's called ambiguous loss, she remembers. The death of something that one can't quite place. His body is there, but the connection they had is not. He no longer adores her, and she can't quite stand his mood swings and distance. She does love him, she convinces herself. He does love her, she knows. But, why has his heart suddenly morphed into something so unrecognizable? How can she morph her body to match his? If only she could read his mind, to understand what was troubling him so.

Does he drink? Does he have sex? God only knows. I hope not.

If only he knew how lucky he was.

But now, she is left with herself, a feeling she hasn't known for years. She looks in the mirror and sees an older woman with vitality in her eyes-- a yearning for the world that she feels won't respond to her needs.

What am I left with? Where do I go?

Dear Lord, I am plagued with unmotherly feelings. Please give me the strength to overcome this hatred for myself that is so unnatural.