

Maternal Bonds

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“Mom?”

Jared walked into the silence of the living room. His sight focused as he rubbed his eyes. The TV was asking if the next episode should be played. Jared didn't recognize the show. Looked like some 90s sitcom. His mom must have fallen asleep. It seemed early though. She was usually watching TV until the hours before dawn.

She sat in the recliner in the middle of the room. Jared approached her but stopped when he felt a chill sweep through the room. Slowly he reached out and placed his hand on her shoulder. It was cold.

“Mom?”

He came around to face her. The color had already drained. Her eyes were glossy and grey as they stared back at him. Her mouth hung slightly ajar. He reached out to close it. It was stiff. He pulled out his phone. Who should he call? 911? He wasn't sure. It wasn't an emergency so he called one of the Property Managers.

“Hello, this is Sara.”

Jared liked Sara. He doubted she had any thoughts on him.

“This is Jared. Apartment 712. My mom's dead.”

“Have you called anyone?”

“No.”

Silence.

“I didn't know what to do.”

“Don't worry. I'll handle it. Don't touch anything until the paramedics arrive.”

“Okay. Thank you.”

Jared waited until he heard a knock at the door. He opened it and a pair of paramedics greeted him. An officer stood behind them.

“We got a call.” the Officer said.

“I found my mom.”

Jared moved to the side and motioned towards the living room.

The paramedics moved past him. The officer stayed next to Jared.

“When did you find her?”

“About half an hour ago. I came out of my room and found her. I’d been in my room most of the night.”

Jared wondered if there was anything he could have done. He guessed she’d been dead a couple of hours.

The paramedics rolled her past him into the hallway. The officer and the paramedics talked. Jared didn’t pay attention to what they were saying. Her birthday was last week. She turned forty seven. He’d taken her out for dinner. He thought that was nice. She didn’t. She had always been like that. Ungrateful.

The officer spoke.

“Sorry for your loss. We’ll be in touch. Do you have someone you can stay with for the night? It can be hard to stay.”

“No. I’ll be fine.”

The officer didn’t push but Jared could tell the officer didn’t want him staying in the apartment. They left anyways. Jared went back to the living room. The recliner sat there. Hollow. She spent her days in that chair. He reached down to touch it. There was a coldness to it. Like the coldness of a fever. He curled up on the floor in front of the recliner.

The loud buzzing of the door woke Jared up. Jared couldn’t remember why he was sleeping on the floor. His mind felt hazy. He went to the intercom hanging next to the door and let whoever was buzzing into the building. After a minute there was a knock on his door. There was a delivery man with a package when he opened the door. Jared signed for it and shut the door. Turning around he saw the empty chair. He remembered now.

She was dead.

She had died last night.

He set the package down on the counter and started to open it up. He felt like he was in a dream. It was a new microwave. She was hard to take care of. She was hard to live with. He lifted it out of the box. It was black. It was just him now. What was he going to do? Jared examined the controls. He looked at the notes the company had sent him. Jared's stomach growled.

He didn't need to work on the manual right away. They usually gave him a couple of weeks to type one up. If she was here he would have to make her breakfast. But she wasn't. He wasn't sure how he felt about that. His stomach growled at him again. He didn't feel like cooking. And he didn't have to have something delivered. Now that she was gone she couldn't demand he stay in. He could actually go out and get breakfast. Jared grabbed a jacket and went out with a smile on his face.

Jared enjoyed the breakfast sandwich. He enjoyed eating it in the park. That would have never have happened before. He would have had to have been home as fast he could be in order to be there to take care of her. That's how it was if he had to go out. The joy that morning had been soiled though the second he walked into the apartment. The chair, empty and shriveled, was a shadow of her.

He was never going to be rid of her until the remains of her were gone. Opening the door to her room he smelled her stench. That putrid and stale stench. Of musk and dried sweat. Some of her clothes were scattered across the floor. He went to the closet. He tried to keep everything of hers organized. It made it easier. If she demanded something he could easily find it for her. He looked down at the stacks of boxes. Her entire life. Jared grabbed the first box. The air in the room grew very cold.

Jared looked around the room. He thought he could see the shimmer of something in the corner. He blinked. It was gone. He was just imagining things.

As he carried her belongings out to the dumpster he thought of all the things he could do without her. He could go out. Have a social life. Find a partner. Have sex!

Jared had a girlfriend once. And only for a couple of weeks. It was in high school. His mom hadn't been as sickly then. Jared's girlfriend had been named Amber. She had red hair and he liked the way it would shine in the summer.

They had been each other's firsts. Out hiking one day they found themselves alone with only a large tree for company. Its branches stretching out and covering them. He sat against the tree as Amber removed her jean shorts. Her pale skin matching his. He held her as she grinded against him. It had been the most amazing moment of his life, to be there with Amber under that tree. But his mom took that away from him. She found the condoms he thought he had hidden so well. That was hell. She made sure he never saw Amber again.

Since Amber, his mom always made sure he could only be there for her. She pulled him out of school. Over time she got sicker and sicker. Jared thought she might have let herself become weak on purpose. She could always guilt him into taking care of her. He could only get a degree through online study. He resented and loathed her. But she had a hold over him. At least she did.

Jared heaved the last of the boxes into the dumpster. He went back up to grab the mattresses. He didn't want to touch them. They were covered in her. But he forced himself to drag them down to be taken away. When everything else was out only one thing remained. The chair.

He knew he should get rid of it but he just couldn't at the moment. He was tired. He understood he was free. He wanted to go out. It might be awkward, but his mom had taken so much of his life. He needed to catch up.

Before getting ready to go out he sprayed air freshener through the apartment. It wasn't strong, but his mom's stench still lingered. Jared was determined to get rid of it along with everything else to do with her.

Why hadn't he gotten rid of the chair? Again his mood was ruined upon seeing that stupid chair again. Jared had been in high spirits. He had a few drinks. Got the confidence to approach a few women. He knew he wasn't too desirable. Not with his mother's grooming. God! What his life could have been without her! He got a number at least. That was a start. To something better? He ignored the chair and went straight to his room.

Why did you leave me?

Jared froze. It was the sound of his mom. Words formed by her puffed and oversalivated lips. His room became cold. He saw something shimmer near his bed.

I needed you.

Were you out with some whore?

I am all you need.

Jared turned around and left his room. A chorus of his mother's whispers followed him. Everywhere felt so cold. And the place started to smell like her again. He wanted to gag. What was happening? He needed to breathe. As he felt a hand on his shoulder he ran out of the apartment.

Jared breathed as much of the cool night air as he could. Out here it was quite. Was he going nuts? Probably. Maybe it was the drinks. He had spent so much time bending to her every whim that his mind didn't know how to handle her absence. He was just seeing things, hearing things. He had to let himself adjust.

Jared knew he had to march back up to the apartment and face her. It wasn't real but the memory of her was. He needed to face that. He had been too weak earlier to deal with the damned chair but he had a renewed sense of conviction. The chair was the last vestige of her. If he forced himself to destroy that chair he could truly be free from her hold. With clenched fists Jared marched back up to his apartment.

That fucking chair. The only thing of her still in the apartment. He approached it. Her smell was stronger. The whispering swarmed his ears. He covered his ears and shook his head back and forth.

“Go away! You’re dead! I don’t want you!”

The whispering stopped. Jared covered his mouth. It was the first time he had ever said it out loud. The misery. The burden. She was dead weight to him. Not even in death could she let him be free. An outline of an apparition began to appear in the chair. Jared backed away. The apparition wailed. Picture frames adorning the walls began to fly across the room. The chair rocked. Cupboards and drawers slammed open and shut. The TV turned on and blared sound into the room.

Jared had had enough. He wasn’t going to stay here anymore. Not with her. He could get an apartment anywhere else. He wanted to be free. Needed to be free.

Approaching the door Jared saw the microwave that had been sitting on the counter rise into the air. He tried to move as fast as he could but she was faster. The microwave smashed into the side of his head. His legs buckled. His face was weak. He tried to pick himself up off the floor. But he couldn’t. The smell got stronger. Jared whimpered. He had trouble breathing. His mind began to go. He screamed out in one last act of defiance. But it didn’t matter. He would never be without her.