

Mother and Child

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Mother and Child
Eliza Hughes

Since I was born, there was another person inside of me.

—

My parents look at each other and then the doctor in horror. I imagine I'm nearly dropped from my mother's arms onto the cold, unforgiving tile. But, instead, she tells him the words that would define the rest of my life:

"It can't be. Not me. Not *us*."

"That doesn't happen," my father concedes. "It's the liberal lefties. They're indoctrinating college kids and making them into adults who think this kind of thing happens. Well I'll tell you what." He takes a step towards the doctor. "You're not pulling that shit with me, okay? I'll report you to the manager, your supervisor, the FDA. Whoever. Don't tell me that bullshit. I don't believe it. It doesn't exist."

"But, sir, if this isn't addressed, it can kill your child—"

"What's gonna kill my child is if you force this agenda onto her."

—

My first memory formed at ten. I had wanted to play soccer. In gym class, the feeling of chasing after something let me escape from myself. In there, I was not seen—we had no numbers, no way of identification. Though you may have been told to cover someone, or critiqued, what mattered was the team. You were just an accessory. Other than that, you could do whatever you wanted and no one cared.

But my parents had told me that was not an option. Instead, I was forced into a confining, bright pink leotard just like all the other nearly elastic, decorative, frilly clothes I had to wear my whole life. Ironically, they put me in a tutu, the one thing I had that let me take up space.

It was putting on that leotard, against the confining latex, that I felt it for the first time. It was like when I accidentally locked the door on my father—his knocking had pounded and resounded into

the house. I had gone to open it, but my mom pushed me to the side in case it was a danger. Instead, he had entered, which wasn't much better. It wasn't really his fault—I just felt things would be simpler if he were gone.

“Mom,” I say. “I feel weird.”

“You have nothing to feel weird about. You should be excited! It's your first rehearsal.”

“But I do. And it hurts.”

“Get in the car.” My father interjects. “And stop being hysterical.”

As I lower myself into the seat, I feel as if something else falls with me. It cascades through the knit interior meant to hold and into an abyss which I could not see or name. I may recognize it at first, but it becomes something I do not know.

—

I excuse myself from ballet. I try to go through the motions, but the pressure and knocking radiating inside of me builds into a wave of sensation. The teacher does not, or pretends not to, notice me until I begin to cry.

“I have to go to the bathroom,” I say, because that is the closest I know to what is happening. When she relents, I toddle across the hall and enter the small, tight space that is the women's bathroom. I sit on the toilet, but nothing comes out. It's just wave after wave, slowly becoming an ocean. I feel salt in my skin, my organs, in every cell. I begin to push, but that only makes it worse. When I look down to check if anything happened, I get nauseous. I let out a cry, which made things even worse.

There was a single drop of blood in the toilet.

—

“It's just your period, honey. You get that when you become a woman.” My mommy tells me as she fills the little purple cup with water and pours it over my head. I knock back into the tub, and my mother drops the cup into the soapy water. “What's wrong?”

“I feel it again,” I say.

“That happens. I’m sorry,” my mommy croons.

“But you said–”

“That’s disgusting,” daddy interjects as he crosses the bathroom to his office. “Kids shouldn’t know about that stuff. Just get her clean.”

Mommy obeys daddy.

—

The rest of my school career is a blur. I make acquaintances, sure, and even some people I’d call friends. No one knows about the pushes and pulls that invertebrate through my body. I’m not sure how, because they’ve become a lot worse now. Maybe it’s because it started on the first day of class.

It should have been easy. We go around the room, introduce ourselves. When it got to me, I paused. The eyes picking me apart on all sides of the room made me trapped. Ironically, I didn’t feel seen either. I stared back at them, my ambush only causing a ripple in a movement powerful enough to ambush. The general joins them, reminds me of our plan of attack. If I don’t get this over with, my rank will most definitely change.

The sound that defines me pounds not only into the ears of those around me, but through my body as well.

I double over, grabbing my stomach desperately. The classroom stands. Bodies surround me. The centered one rises, makes them all sit. I rise, and stumble my way down to the bathroom. I can’t see it, but I can feel its pull. It is the women’s bathroom.

My organs are kicked like the black and white balls I would send flying across the courtyard. Feet clap against flesh like the hands of the teacher and my teammates. The feeling is both familiar and not. Supposed to be and not. Wrong and right blend together in this series of movements.

A toe creeps out from under me.

The whistle is blown for a foul I cannot explain.

—

I fully understood during ‘that time of the month again,’ as my father used to say whenever I was extra moody as a teenager or when my mother wouldn’t have sex with him. Except I seemed to always have it; it was a regular occurrence I’d find blood in my underwear, but no one ever believed me. If they did, they just said it was my period. No matter how many fucking times I told them otherwise, no one understood what I was going through. So I gave up trying to convince them, and would always nod my head whenever my mother asked. She pretended not to notice it was the third week in a row she had to buy me extra pads, and I pretended to eat the chocolate she saved for me after dinner.

The kicks had become a regular occurrence. Whether I was with one person, surrounded by others, in the library, at a party. The only times they ever seemed to offer any relief was when I was alone or on the field. If it had been a usual one, I would have ignored it. Every year it seemed like they grew more angry and volatile anyway. That being said, now they were *P.O.*ed. But this one was different—like I was trying to let out the world’s biggest shit.

So I walked across the hall and locked myself in the bathroom.

The women’s bathroom.

When I pulled down my pants this time, I had an idea. I’d learned that when you get contractions, you push. As I never had a baby, I didn’t know what those felt like or pretend to, but it seemed like the closest thing to what I was feeling.

So I did it.

The blood flew out of me like the water running towards the sand. For a moment, I thought it would be infinite. The deep red would take me with it and push me towards something that was uncertain, but certain in the sense I would be destroyed. Which I knew even then would be easier. I also knew that wasn’t an option.

It did stop eventually, but that wasn’t nearly enough to assuage my fear. Especially when I saw what looked like two feet.

12:00

I looked around, pushed my laptop shut, and bolted to the library. I do not know if the dorm door slammed behind me. I do not know if I woke my roommate up. I do not know if I woke my RA up. All I knew was the time.

Ignoring the look on the receptionist's face, the bodies surrounding me, however many they were, and the books around me, I flicked eyes with the computer furthest in the back and took my seat. I got in, and waited for it to load.

I'd learned quickly I couldn't do this on my personal devices. The last time I tried, I got a parental block and a screaming match from both my mom and dad. All I got from their mangled, fucked up harmony was that 'those people don't concern us' and 'I didn't need to know about that stuff.'

But I did. Because it was happening to me.

That's why I keyed in the search and scrambled through a series of articles:

The Phenomena: Babies Inside Babies?

Scientists Try to Answer Question Horrifying Mothers

Man Killed after Wearing a Dress and Seducing Straight Man: Claimed Moments before Death

He "Had Just Had a Baby"

I read all of them, and suddenly my feelings made sense. Why I always felt separate from my body. Why I preferred soccer to ballet. Why the moment I got out of my parent's house, I burned all my clothing and used pocket money I'd been saving for years to buy a new wardrobe. From the men's section. Why I never liked the sound of my name or my voice. Why I never understood how people could feel at one with their bodies. Why I never understood that, to everyone else, they weren't just meat sacks that tied you to the Earth and got you through the day.

I wasn't even surprised when I felt something fall through me again. I wasn't even annoyed or in pain when I went to the bathroom and locked myself in.

The women's bathroom.

I sat on the toilet, spread my legs, and looked down as far as I could. The pain was still there when I pushed. It was less intense even though it took more effort than usual. Less blood came out, but that meant I could see more of the thing inside me finally release itself. I almost wished I had the blood,

but really, this was fine. This shape, pulsating out of me, and then in. This tiny, wormish thing that made me tremble and euphoric and want to throw up at the same time. In spite of its size, it was still obviously throbbing and growing as it went on with its motions. No matter how much I said it hurt, the mindless thing kept pumping out of me until it let out a small drop of a clear liquid. As quick as it had come, it was gone.

I looked at the hole it had left behind as I processed all I had just learned about myself.

—

I had built my life around this thing and lessening the pain it brought. I had purchased larger clothing to hide its body. I had skipped carbohydrates and desserts. I had doubled my push-ups and running. I had confined myself in a latex prison of my own making until I had freed myself through my own mutilation. All these things worked.

Then, I had the needle.

I knew what I had to do instinctively when I got the fat, bulging brown bottle with the word ‘testosterone’ written on it. I locked myself in the men’s bathroom. I locked myself in a stall, pulled down my pants, and injected the liquid into my back.

Then, I pushed.

At first, it did nothing but produce a sensation of grinding inside of me. Then I opened up my hips, waited somewhere between a few seconds and days, and just kept pushing, and pushing, and pushing until I felt its wet, slimy body in my hands.

I was going to be the one to kill this thing. Not nature.

Outwardly silent but inwardly thundering, I flushed it down the toilet.

Maybe other people found out what happened that day. The only thing I really care about is those who understand. Those are the people I bonded with, called my friends. I speak to them daily, telling them my story with as much as a speech or as little as a glance. Either way, they know mine, and I know theirs, sometimes even before they do.

I'm still in pain, and I doubt it'll ever fully go away. But it's easier, with these people surrounding me.

With my found family, and found manhood, I finally feel like a whole, singular person.