

BRADFORD WRITES!
Fall 2023

It's Okay, I Got This

By Melissa Marin

Two bins of my college essentials are stacked and complete. I walk toward my closet realizing the absurd amount of clothes I have. I tossed all my clothes as I began to spiral. How am I going to bring my whole life with me in one suitcase? I wish you would call me right now, you would know what to say. I could call you but your service is ass and you're probably at church since it's past 7 over there. Maybe you'll call me today, I'll wait. As I'm half way of sorting my 3ft pile of clothes I hear the Whatsapp ringtone. It's you!! "Hi *mami*!! Thank god you called I'm packing my clothes before I leave" I say with excitement as I flip the camera to show you my room. "Hi, *mi nina*! You are not taking all those clothes(laughing), let's take our time and sort it out". I've been sorting it out since you've been gone *mami*.

After a long day during my junior year of high school, eventually you would come home from work. Why was the first thing you did constantly complain and judge that I wasn't doing enough? The house wasn't that dirty. You literally cleaned it yesterday, the day before that, and the day before that. I wasn't gaining weight. Was the nearly 100 lbs I lost not enough? My acne was awful. I got it, but it was hormonal and I couldn't control it. Didn't you think I hated my skin too? Constant judgment was thrown at 16-year-old me that was still figuring myself out yet I wasn't the only woman in the house. Andrea, my younger sister, was right there the whole time as she sat in her room with her two-thousand-dollar PC (purchased by my parents), clear skin, nice body, without ever doing anything wrong. Why didn't you ask her to clean? Why didn't you shame and judge her, why me? I found her and you repulsive for not realizing how misunderstood I was. It

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would have made everything coming so much easier. Maybe she would have understood you the way I do now.

You came into my room with such a light smile on your face. It seemed as if you had a bad gut feeling too. As you reached over for a hug, I leaned over since you're 4 '11 and patted you on the side of your back. "I'll be back soon. I won't be gone for long so take care of the house, I-I love you." How could you say that to me with such a sad look on your face? You said you were gonna be back. You were going to be fine, you would see your family back home and everything would be alright. "Don't worry, I know. I love you too." You turned back and looked at me like a sad little puppy with your light brown eyes. "Go. I got this." Who knew that was going to be the last time I ever saw you close my bedroom door again. I never regretted an interaction more in my life. Why the hell didn't I go drop you off at the airport. How did I let that be the last time I said goodbye to you? How was that the last time I felt your silky cinnamon hair graze upon my shoulder. How was that the last time I got to smell your sweet light aroma of your Victoria's Secret First Love perfume? How dare I pat you on the back. Was I that stubborn? You are my mother! But it was alright. You said you would be back in a month, that's what immigration services had said right? You would be back with your green card and we could finally travel wherever we wanted outside of this awful country. Maybe I could save up. I was working everyday after school at Best Buy, so I could save up and take you to Dubai like you wanted, remember? This was just temporary, you were going to be back in no time *mami*.

"Mom should be coming back in a week from now! But I'm surprised you've kept the house clean (laughs)," Andrea said with a smile on her face. "Shut up. You don't help so what else can I

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do, but I know right finally! I'm tired of watching over you," I told her as we both walked back to our rooms and unpacked from a long day at school. The sun seeped through my curtains making my pink room brighter. Soon, I threw myself onto my comfy queen size bed and turned on my Nintendo Switch. Perfect day to play Animal Crossing. An hour passed by on that bright Wednesday evening. Dad should've been up soon to get ready for work. He worked in New York, about an hour away from Connecticut, without traffic. He was only home Wednesday and the weekends to save gas, so he stayed with my aunt in New York on the other days. It did get lonely now that it was just me and my sister most of the time but that was only gonna be for one more week, so whatever. I heard a light knock on my door. It was my dad. He slowly walked in and immediately I looked at his red eyes. Was he crying? My dad never cried. "*Que paso?*" I questioned him. "I just got a call from your mother. They said that her immigration case has been postponed." He slowly paused to catch himself from crying "meaning your mom isn't coming back next week... we actually don't know when she's coming back," he finally finished. "Huh? What do you mean she's not coming back? They can't be serious right now. Have you told Andrea? She's not going to handle this well". I immediately jumped out of my bed and rushed over to her room.

The door was locked. She never locked the door. "Andrea?" I lightly said to her as I knocked on the door. "Go away!" she yelled at me as I heard her sniffly her nose. I didn't see her all day after that. Who knew such a bright day could come crashing down so quickly all because of your uncertain return.

My grades began slipping soon after the announcement of your non-return. I had work almost everyday and I wouldn't come home until 10 p.m. sometimes. I wouldn't be in bed until midnight. How the hell would I have time to do an AP calculus take home quiz when I had to wake

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up in 5 hours for school? I barely even understood what the hell my teacher was even talking about in class. There just wasn't enough time in the day. As soon as I got home, there was just so much cleaning and cooking that had to be done every single freaking day. Dishes were stacked in the sink everyday. Were we this lazy? Cereal and crumbs on the counter and sticky floor. Were we this much of a slob? New bugs coming out of cabinets and under the fridge. No, this couldn't be happening. Is this why you were upset every time you came home from work? Is this why you were so hard on me everyday? Alright you win. I'll do it. I'll play mother until you're gone. It couldn't be that hard. If you were able to do it everyday, I could too.... Boy was I wrong.

The burgundy and orange leaves fell on us as me and my sister walked home from the bus stop. She was now a freshman and attended my high school. Black pants, black hoodie, black shoes, black eyeliner and her black headphones that were always glued to her ears. I wondered what she was listening to. We walked upstairs to our floor as her face was glued to her phone. "Are you hungry?" I said to her before she entered her dark room. "No, leave me alone" she answered without looking up at me. The door closed as I heard her lock it behind her. She never locked the door. She didn't speak to me as much anymore. I walked over to our kitchen and noticed the oven light was off, strange. I opened the fridge to see what I could cook, but its light was off as well. Okay this was weird. I went to flip the light switch, and nothing turned on. "Mel! My PC isn't turning on!" My sister came out of her room panicking. I looked over at our kitchen table and noticed a stack of closed mail. I went to pick one up and it was from our light company. Multiple of them along with our gas company. "Final Notice. Your statement is overdue by \$1,543, if not paid by ___ your electricity will be turned off". That was last week.

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“Did *papi* not pay the light bill,” my sister asked with a worried look in her eyes. I was worried too. I immediately called my father. “---please leave a message after the beep.” He couldn't have been serious right now. After four tries, he finally answered. “Did you not pay the electricity bill? Why does it say overdue? *Pa*, what's going on?” with my stern voice. “I dont have the money right now, can you pay for some of it so that they can turn on the light for you guys”? My father, the “man” of the house, who always bought me and my sister whatever we wanted, who never asked for help, just asked me, his teenage daughter, to pay for his bill. It was the first but not the last time I did so. My father began slipping financially and me, along with multiple of my family members, were there to pick up the pieces. When he was finally home on the weekends, he also began to lock himself in his room. Never checked up on me and my depressed sister, never asked if we were hungry, never asked how our day was. He never came out. I was hungry, tired, stressed, broke, but mainly alone.

With the absence of love and human connection I felt in the house, I turned to my boyfriend. Yes, I know what you're thinking *ma*, how cliché of me, but he gave me everything I wanted. Company, physical affection, attention, food but mainly love. I began to sneak out just to see him, anything that would keep me away from that depressing home, with those depressing people. But because of my choice I was shamed. I was called disgusting, stupid, and apparently ruining my life. I wasn't ruining my life, I just wasn't paying attention to theirs. Have they ever considered my feelings? I was always there for them but where were they when I needed them? Where were they when I needed help cleaning the house? Where were they when I needed help with school? Where were they when I wanted to relax and lock myself in the room? Where were they when I wanted a shoulder to cry on? Where were they when I wanted someone to vent all these problems to? All this responsibility that only I had to endure because what, I'm the eldest

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woman in the house? That's unfair. I didn't deserve that. They needed to grow up. Because of you, they've adapted this mentality that everything would get done for them, they'll have help no matter what. Where was my help? Your absence broke my family and I couldn't repair them. I had accepted that no matter how hard I tried, they were too stubborn to realize their behavior is not what you would've wanted. You forced me to grow up without any help in a depressing household. When you come back, we will not be the same and I hope you understand that. As they mature, the deep wound of your absence will slowly start to heal. But only your presence can fully close it for them. You have to understand I can't stay here any longer. I can't play that mother figure anymore. I'll use college as a sugar coated escape from them. I need space where I only have one responsibility which would be my education. It wasn't your fault that you left. It happened for a reason. For us to realize how much we took you for granted, especially me. I'm sorry I didn't cooperate with you before. I'm sorry you had to handle all of us on your own. You were strong *ma*. But you made me stronger. Thank you for believing in my maturity and ability to take on such a difficult task.