

The Woman That Loves Me

i. phones

My mother says that to be alive is to be lonely.

My mother, who has never lived alone in her entire life, who moved straight from her father's house to her husband's, and had two children right after. The thought makes me feel sick.

I am on the phone with her, and I tell her about everything, tears in my eyes but never falling. I hate being alone, I hate being with people. I want to go home, I want to lie in bed next to my mother and father like I am a child again. I don't want a man or a woman to lie next to me in bed. I pray for something to cut through the foggy pain of *lonely* that radiates inside of me, whether I am with people or not, and in the meantime I call my mom.

ii. fruit

My mother has a lot of theories about life.

For example, about my father's boss. My father's boss is several years older than my father, but looks and acts much younger. Although I've never considered my father to be a mature man, his boss makes him look like one, his face smooth and tanned as he leers at me and nags my sister about getting a boyfriend whenever we see him.

My mother says the difference between my father, whom she has, with great effort and sacrifice molded into an appropriately diligent and productive man in his 50s, and my father's boss is that my father has children, while my father's boss has lived his entire life, not knowing what it is like to have a human life depend on you.

We're sitting at the kitchen table and I'm telling her about, of all things, New Jeans, a popular K-pop girl group. I'm telling her that in a controversial decision, almost all of the members were under-age when the group first began. My mom mentions that my dad's boss enjoys the group and ponders very casually, if the reason why he was capable of enjoying a K-pop group of under-age girls was because he never had children, and was therefore incapable of seeing the girls as what they were—children— and instead saw them as adults.

My mom mentions her theories off-handedly. She doesn't like talking about them much longer, and gets annoyed when I question them, as if they've simply become inalienable facts now that she's spoken them into existence. She's the type of person to live her life first and foremost while her ideas subconsciously form in the back of her mind, fermenting until the day they are ready to pop out in its perfect, complete form. I'm fascinated by this.

After she lays this particular theory down on the kitchen table, she gets up to cut fruit for me. She acts very haphazardly towards her theories, as if it's a given that her ideas are reasonable and a good foundation for a way of living. This interests me even more, this confidence of hers. It makes me wonder if she really doesn't have any regrets about the life she chooses, or if she simply chooses not to think

about it. I conclude that she must be happy, or at the very least not regret her decisions. She seems very content with everything she's worked back breakingly hard for the past 17 years after she moved to the United States. Although, of course, this could also be a cognitive choice of mine to rid myself of any guilt and fear I would feel if she did regret giving up everything she did to become my mother. I need her to be happy, to not regret things, because what would it mean for me if she did?

Anyways, I'm at the kitchen table and I'm thinking this over about it she's right or not. If I don't have children, am I cursed to never grow up, never having never felt the daily burdens of responsibility for multiple lives and the heavier, abstract burden of continuing species while creating and raising a functioning member of society? If I don't have kids, will I, in 30 years time, become my father's boss and see young children as adults and not as children because at the heart of things, I am still a selfish child?

This is what I think over as my mother chops fruit for me, of which she will take the smallest at least tasty piece for herself, and while I do not lift a finger to help.

iii. misinterpretations, monogamy

You're embarrassing me

With a postponed marriage and this stalled out car

Then you leave me in the back

With half a window rolled down like a dog

Like a dog in the summer heat

The song, "The Woman that Loves You," by Japanese Breakfast has always been about my mother.

Of course, that's simply how it seemed to me. My mother's love has been all-encompassing since I was a child, embarrassingly so. When I would so much as stub my toe and cry out in pain, she'd be there in a second, ready to deliver any needed first-aid or comfort— her version of comfort, anyways ["Don't ever scare me like that again! Save your tears for when I die."]. For the majority of my life, I shared the same room as my parents or sister, my little twin bed next to theirs; and while I no longer seek out my father or older sister, I oftentimes wake up in my mother's bed with no remembrance of how I got there, as if my body simply knew where to go for comfort during sleep. Even our arguments are the deep and cutting disputes of those who understand what exactly would cause the most pain to hear.

Oh, we'll stay

Oh, we'll stay together for the weekend

Honey the weekend, babe

Me and you, frosted blue

But we're gazing out for better things

I got into Japanese Breakfast during the pandemic, after I heard the polyvinyl version of one of my now favorite songs, “Posing in Bondage” in high school, when my hormones and emotions threatened to implode inside me, and immediately felt drawn to the yearning prevalent throughout her songs. Her music pulses through with the sound of mother, the embrace of mother, the criticism and scolding and nagging of mother, mother, mom, mommy, 엄마. Underneath this pulse, a darker but more prevalent leaning in her music wails at the troubles of monogamy, the ebbs and flows, the stability and uncertainty, the simultaneous having and yearning that encompasses a long-term relationship.

Don't you think, don't you think

You should try to do as little harm as you can

To the woman that loves you?

iv.

I think the thing that fascinates me about my mother, makes me think about her as an abstract quality really, is her ability to just live. I think and speak too much; my words overflow my brain, and yet I still can't imagine a world in which I'm happy. I can't imagine being able to reconcile happiness with the loneliness and responsibility that inevitably fill life. But my mother can and does. She simply chooses to live.

We sit on a facetime call with each other. The woman that loves me on the other side, living her life while I live mine, keeping each other a little less lonely.