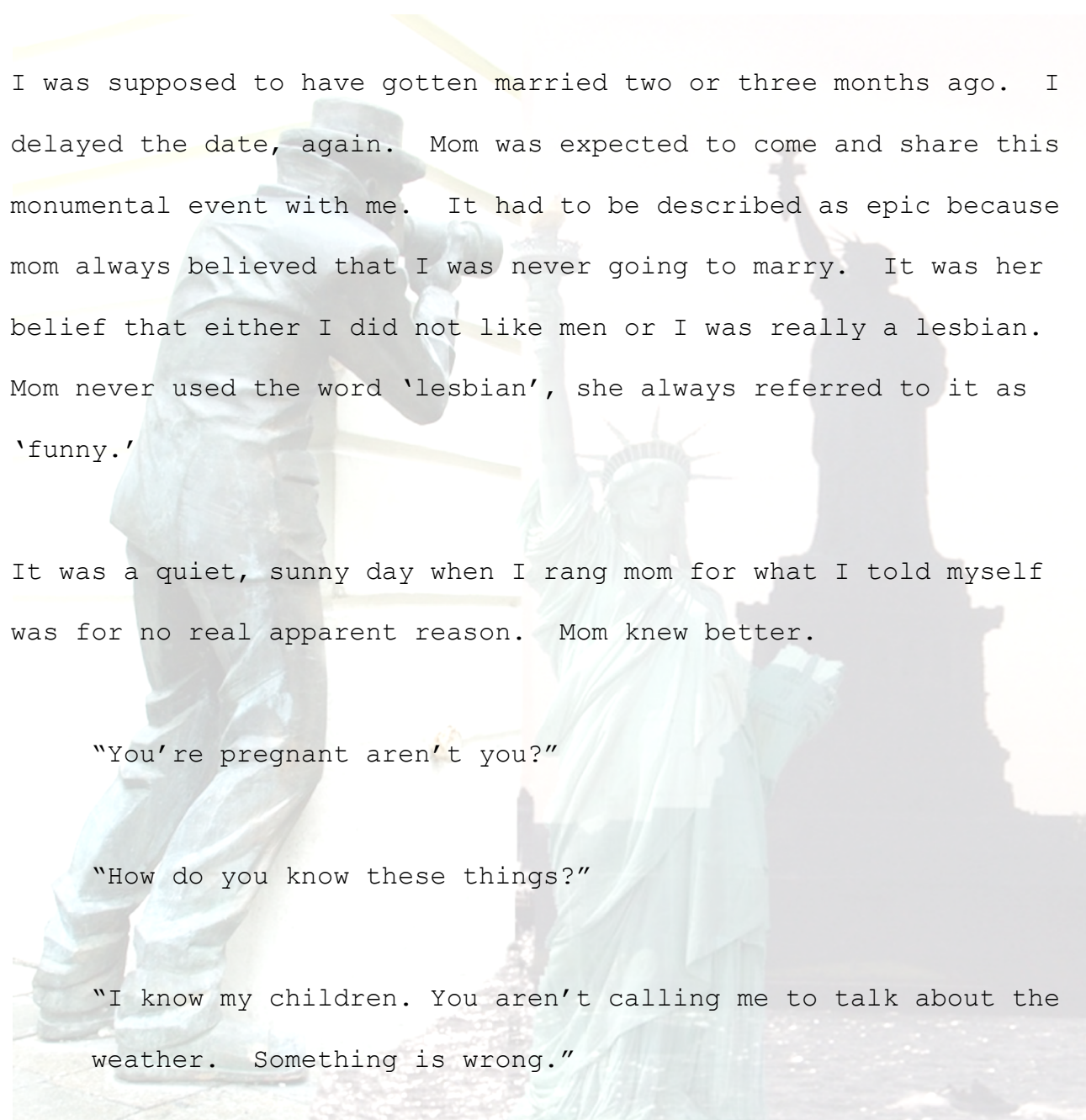


My Mother Is Coming to Visit



I was supposed to have gotten married two or three months ago. I delayed the date, again. Mom was expected to come and share this monumental event with me. It had to be described as epic because mom always believed that I was never going to marry. It was her belief that either I did not like men or I was really a lesbian. Mom never used the word 'lesbian', she always referred to it as 'funny.'

It was a quiet, sunny day when I rang mom for what I told myself was for no real apparent reason. Mom knew better.

"You're pregnant aren't you?"

"How do you know these things?"

"I know my children. You aren't calling me to talk about the weather. Something is wrong."

"Well, at least you should be happy to know that not only am I heterosexual, I am going to be responsible for another

human being. In your words, G-d has gotten me back for making your life a living hedes."

"So, let me guess, the only way he could get you to walk down the aisle was to knock you up and threaten to take you to court if you didn't agree to some kind of wedding ceremony?"

"Mom, you are scaring me. How is it that you know this stuff so well?"

"You are not the marrying kind, you'd rather climb mountains than wear a dress. You never wanted to be tied down, look at all those trips you've had on airplanes, buses, ships and what not."

"I want you to come and witness my imprisonment, I thought it would be your last revenge, a chance to bask in your predictions, hell hath frozen over and I will setting down on it's icy surface, otherwise known as Brooklyn Heights, of all places."

"I am not coming."

"Why not, I am your last daughter, you have to come."

"I will not."

"Why not."

"You're marrying the wrong man for the wrong reason, it won't last, he will leave you broke with two or three children."

"There is only one, mom, not twins or triplets."

"No child should be an only, you need two, G-D forbid something happens the one."

"Forget about allotting me your desired number of children, why won't you come to my wedding, what am I suppose to tell the man I am marrying?"

"Mom, you know I hate when you give me the silent treatment, answer me!"

"Tell him you are coming home to your family and he can visit the child when he wants."

"He will never agree to that mother, what is wrong with you?"

"I don't want to leave here knowing that you will end up alone with two or more children, miserable and broke in that over-priced hellhole called New York. I am your mother. I love you. I am saving you from yourself."

"You don't even know him, you didn't even ask me his name."

"I know who he isn't. He isn't right for you. I don't care what he calls himself."

"Fine, mom, I'll just get married without you and your blessings. But I WILL bring your grandchild to see you, despite how you have disregarded the father. And, not to mention, hurt my feelings."

"I don't mean to hurt you, I meant to save you some pain."

"And yet, I am bleeding profusely from this conversation with you, how ironic. Seems our relationship never really changes. I didn't go to medical school, I didn't marry Bill what's his name and I live in a sweltering pit of torment called New York."

"Come home, I'll take care of your child while you finish law school."

"I have to go now mom, I love you."

"You know if you need me I am here for you. Speaking of Bill, I ran into his mom, seems he is doing very well for himself. He has a successful concession business with the Denver Broncos, such a nice boy, he loved you, you know."

I gently put the phone on the hook, my hands shook, my soul was crushed but my heart knew what my mother said was true. I hated it when she was right. I disliked the fact that she knew more about me than I did about myself. She was stubborn, determined, curt and over-protective to the point of being a black magic woman.

I dreaded facing the man I due to wed with the truth about my mom so I lied and said she was ill. He asked if someone else in my family could attend, anyone to support me. I further fabricated my story by telling him they all were too worried about mom. I had never deceived him before so he could tell this was indeed a really big untruth.

The groom-to-be demanded that I set a date for us to get married. When I could not, he simply put his foot down and threatened a lawsuit, sensing that I really didn't intend to marry him but had

ideas about running off with his unborn child. He was adamant that no child of his would come into this world without its father and mother united together as one. We had a simple ceremony without any family members from either side present.

My daughter was born a few months later. My mom was ecstatic with joy and beaming that I had brought forth onto this earth, such a beautiful child. Of course, I needed to bundle her up and bring her straight to grandma-ma for kissing and spoiling. Besides the baby could use some good country air, the kind that exists south of the Mason Dixon line. No newborn should have to breathe the polluted air in New York, what with all the smog and car fumes.

As my daughter grew into a toddler, I did not get a chance to see mom much. Life just got in the way. However, each time I looked into my daughter's eyes, I saw a reflection of my mom's spirit. Staring back at me were those eyes of wisdom, of kindness, of compassion, self-assuredness and a stubborn nature that could only have been dripped down through the blood of the woman I called mom.

Then, one day, I heard myself utter the phrase I always swore I would never repeat: "You are such a recalcitrant child, it is exhausting." The very same statement mom said to me more times than I could count. "But", I continued, "this part of your

character is what makes you individually unique and I shall just have to figure out a way to work with you and it." Mom was in my head, coaxing each word.

Later, after my daughter started preschool, she came home and proudly told me she wanted to be called Ally, not Alexandra. Also, she announced that she refused to correct her project as the teacher told her "because sometimes adults can be wrong." Ah, I thought, Ally must have been sitting next to mom in class, or, was it I who repeated this to her? Of course, the school demanded that I come for a parent-teacher talk regarding Ally's refusal to cooperate. As she sat there drawing all the faces of the adults gathered around her small desk, Ally would not respond to the teacher and the school's headmistress.

"Sweetie, can you please answer the teacher and Ms. Smith?"

"I only talk to little people, adults can be too mean."

Ally got up and went off to the playground to converse with her classmates. The teacher was stunned and Ms. Smith had a look on her face that reflected the deep regret of having agreed that my daughter was a perfect candidate for her prestigious preschool, which had a two-year waiting list. I looked up at the ceiling and

remembered nearly the same scene when my mother took me aside and stated with a calm stare: "You were never good with adults."

When my daughter started first grade, my mom became very ill and we went to visit her for what would be the last time. I watched Ally push mom on the swing in a park on some lonely, near deserted country road, three generations of strong, independent females stood together, separated only by a road running south or north, depending on where you stood but held strongly together by a bond created inside a woman I called mom.

After mom died and long after the divorce was final, I sat on my step staring out my window holding a handful of bills, not knowing which one I should or could not pay that month. I had bought the ex out. I didn't rightly know how I managed to come up with the large settlement funds to give his lawyer, but I knew why. I had to keep a roof over my children's head and food on their table. It was only then that I realized what a great woman my mom was and how tough she must have had it. She too had been divorced - with four children. She also made sure she kept land under everyone's feet and food in their bellies. I had become mom in a sense because she had instilled in me that great ability to be resilient and to love my children with every fiber of my being.

Late one evening after the children had gone off to bed, I sat in my den staring out into the abyss, nearly deciding to give the custody of the children and head off to Europe to earn some money and start all over again. As I started to ascend the stairs, I was startled by an image of my mom sitting at my dining room table. It was a frightening experience. It was so eerie and so real that I was afraid to go into the den for a number of days afterwards.

About a week later, a large automobile ran a stop sign and plowed into my car, I had to be cut out by the fire department whose firemen kept scratching their heads trying to figure out just how it was possible that I was alive.

The accident left me with two smashed up knees and a very damaged spine. But it made me realize that I had to stop feeling sorry for myself. I had to be thankful for what I had and become whatever it was I was supposed to have achieved. That was what mom always preached whenever I would wallow in self-pity. Then it hit me, that was why she came to visit me that night at my dining room table. She came to warn me of danger but to assure me everything was going to be all right.

I took my crutches and hopped into my daughter's room to shut her light. I noticed that on her computer she had been reading an e-

mail from one of her English teachers. It seems the teacher was congratulating her on a winning essay she had written about the day she last saw her grandma-ma. The closing paragraph of Ally's moving essay ended with: "I saw grandma-ma for the last time, actually, not really because I see grandma-ma in mommy and I see mommy in me. Grandma-ma was mommy's hero even though it is tough for her to admit. Mommy is my hero. But grandma-ma is the greatest hero of us all because she has always been in our house even though she never was."

I pushed a curl back from my daughter's head and kissed her forehead, the forehead that was shaped just like mom's. I whispered: "Don't worry sweetheart, mom is here; she really, actually came for a visit even though she never did."

