

Rafael Linhares

2 Vignettes on Motherhood

**The Bride**

Sometimes my mother can be a bit cold. Like the time I fell down the stairs in our old apartment; all she did was offer me her hand and tell me to stop crying. She would tell me why I bleed; the nerve endings that make me feel pain; she didn't make me feel better when I fell, no, but now, I feel like I control my perception of what pain is.

That's what she does- help even when the child in front of her doesn't know she's helping.

It's a controversial method,  
It can be confusing.

But now,

I'm the master of my reactions,

someone who knows why they feel the way  
they feel and why they do the things they  
do and she'll tell me those reasons right to  
my face to teach me even if I don't like it.

And it's always been like that.

But, today's a special day.

Today, I'm getting married.

However I don't think she's very...

supportive.

Now I don't mean to talk bad about my fiance, but my Mom doesn't like him, and my Mom's a very good judge of people.

Even so, I like him a lot and that's why I'm still with him. But I don't know, maybe I'm rushing things. I'm still young and maybe I'm just getting married not just for love but because of things like

Societal pressure

Feeling like you need to get it over with

A fear of ending up old and unmarried

A fear that I'm not good enough for someone better than  
my fiance now so if I leave him I've lost my only hope.

Maybe I need more confidence.

But shit maybe I'm just stressing.

The wedding's in a couple of hours and for the sake of luck and tradition, I haven't seen my  
fiance yet.

I'm sitting here, in the old, wood-paneled makeup room of our wedding venue

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It's a Victorian-era mansion by the oceanfront whose windows are fed by the  
sun all day and its material is so full of history there's always a comforting, sometimes  
eerie presence that makes you feel like you're never truly alone.

And I hope the spirits here today are good ones- judging from the little specks  
of dust waltzing in the corner as I powder my face, they'd give me a compliment if they  
could.

A compliment would be nice right now.

My face is...

cluttered

Oh stop it, no it isn't

But it is

But it isn't it's beautiful

No it's not

And back

And forth

And back

And forth

I'll go, for what feels like

hours on end.

It's going to be one of the most beautiful days of my life

But as I sit in this room that smells like old books and looks like I've known it my entire life, I feel

Serene

Around me there is nothing but a wave of calm, I feel like  
I'm not nervous or excited  
sad or happy  
the only thing I can really find myself feeling is... grey

Like one of those cold city mornings where you can see your breath in front of you  
And you hold an imaginary cigarette in your hand in pretending to smoke  
And you laugh to yourself because you feel like a kid again, "smoking" before you even knew  
what smoking really was

I feel like one of those striking, rolling titan clouds the color of ash on a chilly afternoon most  
would say has bad weather, those looming giants make the day what it is

Overlooking the city and the shimmering dark blue water that wears an endless amount of  
boats and ferries as jewelry

Those clouds that just see everything for what it is and what it has been  
And do nothing but stare quietly  
Their influence seemingly nonexistent  
But always there because you know they're watching

And on my wedding day I know I shouldn't feel like a cloud but like a bride down on earth

But something just can't stop me from feeling this way

I've nearly ruined my day by zoning out and powdering my face too much- I pay attention to  
the mirror again and my cheeks are obnoxiously plain.

"Oh my, you look beautiful."

### **The Mother**

My daughter's special. I think she deserves everything that comes to her if she works for it, of course,  
because I genuinely believe she's one of a kind.

She's been so excited about this wedding for the past few months, it's been all she talks about.  
We've gone to endless

Venues- Italian wine vineyards with endless miles of grapes and  
pastel skies, old gothic churches with ever-so-pleasant nuns and stained glass works that take  
you back to a different time

Catering events- eating all sorts of amazing food None of it good enough in my  
opinion like sushi so fresh you can tell it was swimming just a day ago, and steak so pink and  
tender you feel like it could've been eating grass just last week poor cow

My daughter and I are very similar but sometimes I have to be someone else in order to inspire  
her because

No one wants to look up to a person who's just like them

But today I can tell something is going through her mind

So I need to talk to her before she finally presses the launch button

Sending a missile of love off into space

"Oh my, you look beautiful", I say- she does.

"Thank you", she whispers, looking down, twirling her hair with her left hand.

"Dear, how are you feeling?", I ask.

"I'm feeling..."

She trails off and stares out the window.

My eyes follow hers.

In the distance, there's a small boat with three fishermen  
casting nets and laughing amongst each other  
under the turquoise sky and blazing sun

"Do you ever feel like you...", she continues, still staring

"Yes?"

I'm intrigued now as to what she's trying to say

“Like you’re too good for many yet not good enough to be able to choose? Like the first good thing that comes along, you just take- you feel like you either don’t deserve more good things, or you’re just flat out not expecting any more to come along.”

The words roll off her tongue, her once cramped thoughts now spilling out

“Is this about him?”

I know it is. But maybe- no, definitely- there’s more to it. My daughter’s too open to not let other people in but smart enough to know whether they’re worth being around

or not Problem is she’s too nice to kick them out

“I don’t know. It’s about everything. I let life walk all over me sometimes. I’m scared of taking charge but I know sooner or later I’ll have to.”

“Sweetie, do you want to marry him?”

“I love him. But deep down, I don’t...”

I don’t know if he’s the right one.”

I like him. She thinks I don’t. But I agree with her- I’m not sure he’s the one.

I’m pretty sure if I acted as if I liked him she’d think about it less

And maybe we wouldn’t be having this conversation

So I have to fake it- it’s just how it is

“Then dammit honey, take charge”

“But if we split up, what happens if he was *truly* the best one for me? And I was wrong? What if this is my only chance and all I’m doing is second-guessing myself?”

“You’re second-guessing yourself now by not trusting your feelings! This is *your* world, honey! This is *your* life we’re talking about!

You don’t make big decisions like this if your gut tells you otherwise- you only get one shot at making things right, and you either do, or you don’t.

The in-between,

indecisiveness is where the cowards hide, watching the smoke rise, until finally the flames of their own actions push them out into the cruel reality they made for themselves.

Don't become a coward.

It's not who you are.

It's not who *we* are.

I look at you and I see who I once was. I see a scared girl, young, facing things like this for the first time, not sure what to do, still scared to take the leap of faith that'll take her where, secretly, she knows she wants to be.

But look at us in the mirror right now.”

“We are *goddamned fighters*.

I point to our faces.

We do *not* back down.

We  
come from a  
line of  
*warriors*, of  
*thinkers*, of  
*artists*, of  
people who  
live and live  
for  
themselves  
and others  
they know are  
for them and  
vice versa-  
not for  
anybody else.

And we trust our gut. If our gut is telling us that something is off, or something is not enough, we listen to it. Because that's how we survived back then. And that's how we'll survive now.”

My daughter had been staring at the marble countertop the entire time, I could see teardrops forming in her eyes.

“Come”, I say to her, and I

extend

my

hand

out to her.

She takes it, and we walk through green velvet corridors full of old paintings and down a spiral staircase that makes you dizzy when you up.

look

We arrive at the bottom of the manor and all of the guests are out and about getting ready and chatting, and I wave them away as we walk outside into the sun. Grabbing a bottle of champagne as we walk past

We tell everyone she’s gotten sick all of a sudden and we need some time alone, and we go out onto the oceanfront, walking down marble steps in our high heels past

exquisitely decorated gardens full of sculpted bushes

and

old high-relief fountains.

And we sit down on a bench on the waterfront and stay there for the rest of the day.

Watching the fishermen laughing.

Laughing at the funny noises the seagulls make. Making seagull noises ourselves

Drinking the champagne that was supposed to be dramatically popped tonight.

Under the titan, rolling clouds.

Over the shimmering, pulsing dark blue sea wearing boats as jewelry.

**The End**

