

THE MOST LOVELESS MOTHER IN THE WORLD

BY

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They, the police officers and Mama, were all cold, wet, and sad as they formed a human wall around my tiny coffin. When I could feel things, like human emotions, I was sad, too. I cried all the time. I didn't know what I was supposed to do. Maybe if I did—know what to do, that is—she would have loved me. She, being my mama, she never loved me. She never wanted me. She never needed me the way some mamas need their children, even when those children have had children of their own.

Mama never saw me as an extension of herself as one would view an arm or a leg as a significant part of their body. Nor was I ever seen as some type of mystical essence of Mama's soul that would live on after she had departed from this earth. No, Mama had no need for me in her already troublesome life. My unwelcome arrival was proof, once again, that Mama's life had veered far off that elusive path to happiness.

I never got to meet three of my siblings 'cause Social and Health Services took them away from Mama. She never tried to get them back. I suppose she figured she could always have more, which she did. She was twenty-three years old when I was born. I came into this world on January 1st at 12:02 a.m.

A day later, Mama left the hospital—skipping out on me and the bill. She was eager to hookup with a man she'd struck up a conversation with while smoking underneath The Hammering Man statue a week prior. The man, a saxophonist down on his luck, got Mama drunk and had sex with her while she slept. Later, they squabbled. Finally, he ended the argument by beating and robbing her. An ambulance returned Mama to the hospital. Released the following morning, this time she was forced to take me with her.

The funny thing is, Mama's name was Happy Lovejoy, but Mama was anything but happy. Her life was downhearted from day one. She was a melancholy child who grew up to be an even gloomier adult. No one could figure out why Mama was so unhappy. Grandma thought Mama was just wired *funny*, possibly some chemical imbalance 'cause all her other kids were "happy and well-adjusted"; at least that's what she told the reporter. His newspaper

put Mama's story on the front page. They dubbed her 'The Most Loveless Mother in the World.'

Nobody understood why Mama did what she did, but "she was still family," said Aunt Rose. In order to elicit a little bit of sympathy for Mama before the trial, Aunt Rose told another reporter that Mama was a sad, quirky kid that no one wanted to hang around. She had no friends growing up. Somewhere around the age of ten or eleven, Mama learned to dull her pain with sex, booze, and any drugs she could get her hands on.

Aunt Rose may have had compassion for Mama, but not me. I hated her. In Mama's life there was no room for babies. I don't know why Mama continued to have them. Even before I understood what being afraid meant, I was frightened of Mama. She was always in a rage about something. "I ain't got no rent money," Mama would cry out in frustration. The landlord, Mrs. Fraser, a kindhearted woman, tried to help Mama by allowing her to do odd jobs around the apartment complex like cleaning empty apartments or washing busy tenants' clothes, anything to earn a few dollars or a cut off the rent.

Mrs. Fraser was even nice enough not to raise Mama's rent, even though she had increased all the other tenants' rent. I suppose since Mama was already three months behind, what use would it be to increase the rent? Besides, Mama had made it clear that she was not going to pay any additional amount. "This dump!" yelled Mama. Truthfully, I think Mrs. Fraser didn't bother that much 'cause Social and Health Services was paying eighty percent of the rent.

From the start, I was Mama's burden to bear. This I know to be true, for while I grew in her belly, she would pound and pound her fists upon her stomach cursing the day when she peed on a stick and found out that she was pregnant with me. Sometimes she would beat her fists upon the table, sometimes the walls, but most of the time she would beat upon her protruding stomach.

I am still bewildered as to how such a tiny creature as I could have caused so much anxiety and anger in Mama. I was just one more nail in her coffin, she would often say. Ironic, isn't it, that it is I—not Mama—who now reside in a coffin.

Mamas are supposed to love their babies, and babies are supposed to love their mamas. Lord knows, I did my part...at least at first. I tried to love her, but she was so unlovable. I don't know

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when I started to hate Mama. I still loved her when I was in her womb. Even when she would punch her stomach *thus my head* and she would scream, “That damn Derek ain’t never been no good. I don’t need another baby. What I need is a man to take care of me for a change!”

A punch to her navel sent pain to my left shoulder. Oh, the pain; the only thing that helped to calm it was the liquor Mama drank. She liked her booze strong and hard, like her men—a statement she would proudly shout out at all the wrong times. Whether it was gin, vodka, or whiskey, Mama took big gulps; she never sipped. When she drank, it was like a warm blanket slowly engulfing my body...my thoughts...my soul. It made us both sleep. For Mama, sleep was the only thing that could quiet her woes, even if it was only until she awoke.

At my funeral, I watched as Detective Mark Greene quickly brushed away a few runaway tears. I think that my death affected him the most since he has a daughter two months older than I was...before I was killed. I suppose that’s why he named me Magdalene—his daughter’s name. I liked that name, Magdalene. (Mama never got around to naming me. When I left the hospital, I was just referred to as Baby Girl Lovejoy.) I like to imagine that my friends, if I had lived long enough to make friends, would have called me Maggie or Madge. I would have liked that, to have had a nickname. I am sure that my older brother, whom I met only once briefly, would have preferred to call me ‘a little monster,’ forever teasing me. I would have been annoyed, but I would have loved it, too. He would tell me scary tales of the boogeyman or we would get into playful mischief. At least I like to think these things would have happened.

Now that I am dead, my soul is fully awake. Things that I was too young to comprehend are now clear to me. I remember everything. I remember the first time that I saw my brother. He ran into the bedroom, frowning and pointing his finger. My strange appearance, a misshapen head, colorless complexion, and blue lips frightened him. Even more frightening were the screams and shouts as Mama yelled at him to leave the room immediately. “Omar! Get the fuck outta here. Ain’t nobody called you in here. Shit, goddamn it, get the hell out of here before I knock yo’ ass out!”

Omar was three. Named after his father, or at least Mama thought the obnoxious man with the baldhead and snakelike teeth was Omar's daddy. It was unfortunate, but with women like Mama, who sought the favors of so many forgettable men, fatherhood could only be verified via a paternity test.

"What's that, Mama?" asked Omar, crunching his face as if he smelled something bad. He took small, cautious steps toward me.

"Omar, I told you to get the hell out of here!" screamed Mama, as she shoved Omar toward the door.

"What's going on?" he asked. She ignored him. "Mama? Mama? Mama?"

"None of your goddamn business, boy!" shouted Mama, and then she slammed the door in his face.

My "possible" father (a different man from Omar's daddy...no surprise here) pulled me from Mama's arms. He examined me like I was a piece of fruit—a fruit he clearly did not like. His interest in me was short-lived, for he tossed me upon the bed. "Get rid of it," he commanded, and then stomped out of the room. That was the last time I saw my "possible" father and Omar.

The next evening, Child Welfare took Omar away after Mama burned him with her cigarette lighter, again. Mrs. Fraser called and complained. She threatened to take her story to the media if someone from Child Welfare didn't come and do their damn job. Their reasoning for leaving me behind under Mama's care still puzzles me (and Mrs. Fraser) to this day. The best I can understand is that it was thought that if Mama had only one child to care for and went to parenting classes, she could be a good mother. They were wrong; with Omar gone, that left no one to play *the burn game* with but me.

I hated Mama. I hated her for trying to drown me in the bathtub. I survived 'cause she had drunk a bottle of vodka to give her the courage to 'get rid of it' as she'd been told to do. Before she could complete the deed, she passed out. Mrs. Fraser removed me from the tub. A sluggish Mama told Mrs. Fraser that she had been giving me a bath when she fell asleep. What Mama couldn't explain was why my clothes were wet. Once again, Mrs. Fraser called Child Welfare, but Mama took me and we hid out at Aunt Rose's house.

"It's such a small coffin," whispered Officer Joseph Bentley, "I could carry it in one hand." He choked back tears. He hadn't cried

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since he'd lost his first partner. They had been called to a domestic disturbance; neighbors had complained about loud voices and fighting. His partner never had a chance. The on-again, off-again boyfriend of the victim blew a hole through the front door upon hearing the approaching officers.

Yet here was Officer Bentley, crying for me—a stranger whose own mama shed not one tear as she placed me in the garbage bag along with some wet leaves, grass, and a couple of dead birds the cat had dragged into the house. Angry at Mama's inability to complete a task—namely to get rid of me—my “possible” father gave her a final ultimatum: either I go or he would go. She quickly surmised that she needed a man more than a baby. I mean, what could I offer her?

It was a short drive to where she dumped my body. I was still alive, of course, but this small detail mattered little to Mama. For I was now—as she stopped the car, retrieved the garbage bag, and catapulted it as hard as she could toward the trees—the only thing which stood between her and her man...at least her man for the next few weeks. Like all of Mama's men, he too would grow tired of Mama's sadness and leave her.

I hit the tree hard and naturally cried out. The bag ripped open as it tumbled down the bark of the tree. My tiny head poked out. Mama's eyes bulged. She was scared, but she quickly calmed herself. Leaning against the car, she lit a cigarette and stared at me, waiting for me to die from my injuries. When it started to rain, a downpour, she got in her car. She continued to smoke and stare angrily at my body. I suppose she thought that I might get up and run...an impossible task at the time, especially since I was only three weeks old. Mama was a bit dimwitted.

There are so many possibilities available to one when there is no body to house the soul. For I know so many things now, in death, that I did not know in life. For example, I know that Mama killed me on January 22nd at 3:06 a.m. and left my body near a bunch of trees in Volunteer Park. Two lovers having sex nearby later found me. My “possible” father was the one who called the hotline to report Mama and to collect the thousand-dollar reward that was offered. He took the money, but refused to collect my remains, thus leaving me in the hands of strangers, mostly detectives, to see to the disposal of my corpse.

Although I am no longer in human form, I observe the world from some place neither near nor far. Inside the coffin, I, or at least my body, was clothed in a pink and white laced dress with a matching bonnet. Det. Greene purchased the outfit for me. Officer Bentley made sure that a small, gray, stuffed bunny rabbit with big pink eyes and a silly grin was placed inside my coffin. A fund was created in my memory to raise money for my burial. Strangers who loved me, who wept for me, now surrounded my coffin.

My funeral was short, like my life. I watched them bury me next to other unwanted babies. A boy named Nicholas and two girls named Stacy and Regina. Their mamas didn't love them either, so they too, in death, had to rely on the compassion of strangers.

Mama's court-appointed lawyer thought it would be a good idea for her to attend my funeral. I watched her, still handcuffed, with an officer on each side. Her face was worn, tired, and empty of life. Her clothes were ill-fitting, just as she was ill-fitted for her life. Her body crumbled. I watched her head bob with hysterical tears. I would have liked to think that she was weeping for me, but I knew better.

When I was alive, I hated her. I had every right to. But in death things that were so important in life matter no more. I do not want to care, but I now feel compelled to care, for like it or not, she was my mama. A sad, broken life form, she will never be happy.

Mama had over two dozen years, yet she still couldn't manage to accept love or give love, not even to love herself. I, on the other hand, felt love. Love from the strangers who buried me today. I felt their love—a love without judgment, without conditions, without expectations, without burdens. I experienced a love, which needed no explanation. This made me luckier than Mama, for I got to experience pure love...even if it came after my life had ended in this world.

As the officers escorted Mama to the awaiting squad car, she seemed so small, even smaller than me when I was alive. Once she lost her step, tumbled to her knees, and wept. Her face was contorted and hopeless.

As I watched Mama's unlovable self continue to cry, I suddenly felt a warmth engulf my spirit. I was on fire. I began to glow...not physically of course. That's when this knowing entered me; it was as if somebody was talking me—soul to soul. Although I was given a

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choice, I knew before the question was completed what I would do and why.

You see, hating Mama served no purpose. Mama already had enough self-hatred to fill the Grand Canyon. No, Mama needed something else from me. It would be up to me to be the light for Mama. I would take it upon myself to do what Mama could never do. I would love her. I would love her regardless of her apparent lack of love for me, Omar, my other siblings, or anyone else she came in contact with.

As the officer stuffed Mama in the back of the police car, I placed a kiss upon her cheek. How this was possible, I don't know, nor do I care. Mama looked startled, as if she could see me, but I knew she couldn't. She lowered her head and cried out, "Why...why is everybody makin' a big deal...'bout this? It was just a baby. Shit, I can have another one anytime I want to."

The officer, having little compassion for Mama, told her to shut up. "Lady, what you did was appalling. You're going to prison for a long time," he said to her. Mama wept—something she would do a lot of in the years to come.

Mama may have been sad, but not me; I was happy. I was loved. For on this day when my body was laid to rest, I had received the most precious gift a person could give: love. And with my new-found love I would do the impossible...*love Mama*. I would love her, not because she was my mama, but because if anyone needed to be loved, it was Happy Lovejoy, the most loveless mother in the world.

The End

Think About This...

Deep:

- Is there anyone else responsible for this child's death...besides the mother?
- Could you forgive this abusive mother?
- Does the mother deserve a second chance? Can she be helped?

Deeper:

- For the sake of keeping the family together, should children ever be left in the care of an abusive parent(s)?
- Should unfit (abusive) parent(s) be punished, sterilized?
- What if this mother was pregnant again, should she be allowed to keep her baby?

Truly Deep (To Thine Own Self Be True):

- If you witness a child being abused, would you step in?
- Have you every abused a child?

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