

Mother's Day

Margot Luyt

Moedersdag

Liewe Ma

Moedersdag het gekom en gegaan met die groot verlanse wat gewoonlik daarmee saamgaan. Die hartseer is altyd daar, maar dit is tog party dae seerder as ander.

Nou vyf jaar ná Ma se dood het ek Ma nog so dikwels nodig. Al is dit maar net om Ma te bel as ek klein voel. Ma te bel net om na Ma se stem te luister. Te soek na warmte daarin. Nou skryf ek maar. Dalk help dit om die verterende pyn en hartseer te temper.

Dear Mom,

Mother's Day is now something of the past and, as always, I really missed you a lot. The sadness is always there, but on certain days it's more acute.

It's been five years since your passing, but I still often need you. Even if it's just to call you when I feel small and lost. To phone you just to hear your voice. To seek some warmth in your voice. So, I've decided to write to you instead. Perhaps it will help to ease the unbearable pain.

But, Mom, to be honest, it's more than just the sadness and the longing. It still is the inability to understand ... and then to forgive. Not you, Ma, but to forgive him.

I want to shout it out loud! How I hate him. Even now, after his death. How I hate him.

After all these years I am still livid, no, fuming, and at times indescribably nauseous and mortified. I am so ashamed, Mom. Ashamed, ashamed as I was all those years while it was happening to me.

Perhaps the most difficult part is that I, an intelligent, successful woman, who really wants to believe that she is an adult, after fifty years still *want* to understand. Still struggle with it. How much more time then do I need to heal?

I often still feel like that little ten-year-old girl who couldn't talk to anybody, couldn't complain to anybody and who couldn't cry on anybody's lap. At night my pillows were drenched with my tears, Mom, but I was all on my own. How was that possible? How did it happen? Why did it happen? Why didn't anybody help me? Why didn't anybody stop it? Why didn't anybody protect me?

Fifty years later I'm still battling to understand it, and it still makes me choke. Fifty years later sharp cries still rip through my soul, and I often still sob loudly and violently when I'm alone.

Why, Mom? Why did you allow it? Why did you leave me in his power?

Sometimes I feel like the character in the foreground in that Edvard Munch painting. I also want to cover my ears with my hands and scream. But I can't, because the implications for other people are too cruel. Mine therefore has to remain a silent scream.

I can't remember ever being angry with you, Mom, not once in my fifty years. I was angry with them, with him in particular, but you were always the unreachable, the unattainable. Why, Mom? Was it because all those years you knew, but just didn't understand?

Is it possible that you could think a little girl of nine or eleven would *want* something like that – even look for it? I didn't want it, Mom. I really didn't want it!

I can't even remember when it all started, as a matter of fact I can hardly remember anything ... only emotions ... and smells and tastes. I experience those as if everything is happening now, not years ago.

It wasn't my fault, Mom, honestly it wasn't. You could never imagine how degrading and repulsive and painful it was ... still is. He always used to cover my mouth with his hand so that you wouldn't hear my shrieks of pain.

Is it even remotely possible that you could not know? I can't believe that you, at night when you were asleep (or pretended to be), didn't notice him sneaking out to my room. What did you think? Why didn't you get up? Stop him? Come to help me? Why didn't you throw him out? It was our house, not his. Why didn't you kill him with the .22? Why, Mom?

Was it because you hated me? Because you thought I was to blame? Is that why you were so fond of the boys? You admired them, but I just wasn't good enough. I was overweight, I was the ugly one, the rude one, I just wanted to spend the days in my room with a book, I was nasty to him, I was ...

I hated him, Mom, and I still hate him in his grave. Him and his old smutty brother. Sometimes that old, dusty smell of sweat still crawls up my nostrils, and then I want to puke. I want to vomit him right out of my body, Mom. Could you really think that's what I wanted? Did you think I allowed him to cheat on you? Did you want to punish me?

Or did you really not know?

The Bible says: Honour your father and mother. Dadda carried on with his life after your divorce and never looked back. I so often prayed in vain that he would come to my rescue, but he couldn't. I therefore never had a father to honour – surely you couldn't expect me to think of that monster as a father – but I did honour my mother. I desperately wanted a spot in your heart, Mom. I tried my utmost to secure such a spot. I thought if I excelled, you would be proud of me. I simply had to come first in class, I had to win gold at eisteddfods, I tried to make sure that people noticed me. I hoped that then you would be proud of me, accept me, forgive me ... and love me? But I was often too eager and clumsily overdid things, and that brought back the disapproval in your brown gleaming eyes.

I remember it so clearly. Your penetrating eyes and that detachment. I can't remember you ever touching me. Except in church when I used to swing my legs and you would bury your sharp finger nails in my fat knee. But never any affectionate touch as far as I can remember.

You were always busy with something that excluded me. I never felt part of anything. I was so miserably alone, Mom. And I still regularly experience that loneliness – sadly even when I am surrounded by my people.

After your passing we, your children, hardly ever see one another. And when I do see them, I always wonder whether they are also carrying around painful secrets. But I

daren't ask, because in our family the really important things in life are never discussed.

One would think that at my age I should be able to manage these issues, but they are continually eating away at my innermost being. I desperately want to put this behind me, but when I tell myself to stop thinking and pondering on the past, and to concentrate and build on the positive, I fail to remember anything that's vaguely positive. He and his obscene old brother had raped my entire youth.

And now, years later, I still lament when I'm alone. According to everything I've read on the issue, one should talk and try to resolve things before it's too late, but it was impossible to discuss unfinished business with you. I tried every so often, but how does one ask one's mother: Did you know that your husband molested me as a little girl? Night after night and day after day?

I'm desperate, Mom. That's why I'm writing this letter. I can no longer bear the lonely pain that I can't share with anybody. Hopefully this letter will bring some relief, perhaps even some healing. And yet, when I got into bed last night and looked at the photograph on my bedside cabinet of you as a beautiful young woman, your eyes were so reproachful that I immediately switched off the light – I just couldn't look at those eyes.

Before you took ill and became weak, I was too scared to discuss it with you. I felt like that little girl that had to confess to you – and I just couldn't. When finally you lay in bed, completely defenseless, I often sat at your bedside, considering whether I should talk to you, but then it would seem heartless and selfish. I didn't want to talk about my albatross while you were experiencing something much worse.

Even when your body eventually gave in and speech was impossible, and against all odds you refused to let go, I considered talking to you about it. I actually wondered whether it might be your wish to resolve this unsettled business before you breathed your last frail breath – or whether it was actually that which prevented you from letting go. But I couldn't utter a word.

Now I'm still wondering ... perhaps you wanted me to talk then. Sometimes when I was sitting with you, a mere bundle of bones, I wondered whether you were seeking my forgiveness when you looked at me with those desperate eyes. Was it my imagination or were those eyes pleading? Did you want us to settle matters?

And when your body won the battle with your spirit, you left ... taking the secret with you.

Did you know, Mom? Did you?

Why didn't you stop him? It was so disgustingly revolting ... and I was so young and lonely and scared ...

Mom, please forgive me if you find this letter disturbing, but I hope it will help me in the healing process because, you see, after fifty years I still need healing and I hope ... So you see, Mom at least there is some hope.

Good-bye, Mom.

With my unconditional and everlasting love

Your little girl.

(translated from Afrikaans)