**Lost**

Diane Cruze

*Yes Mother.*

*I can see you are flawed.*

*You have not hidden it.*

*That is your greatest gift to me.*

*-Alice Walker*

I think I am lost.

No. Truth is, I know I am lost.

Trying to get my bearings but I am unable to obtain even a semblance of emotional equilibrium. Unsure how I will survive but knowing that I must. For my sanity hangs in the balance.

The hovering dark lady of depression is a familiar foe and I now sense her hiding in the shadows. Waiting for me to let my guard down. Waiting to consume not just my mind, but also my soul.

But I cannot let that happen. I will not. I am all too familiar with the wreckage that mental illness brings. Growing up, I witnessed the darkness slowly take over my mother’s mind and become her constant companion. Her personal madness became a seductress, convincing her that there was no joy to be found in life. Persuading her that melancholy was a comforting place where she could rationalize the reasons for her withdrawal from her family and friends. Taking her deeper and deeper into a void where tranquilizers were her constant companion and her only relief.

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My mother has been dead for over 20 years, but her voice haunts me in my dreams. Taunting me. Begging me to follow her. Telling me to give in to the sadness that now permeates my thoughts. Telling me that she knows that sometimes life is just too hard.

“Don’t talk to me about hard!” I scream at her ghost.

Hard is trying to figure out what the hell to do when your fifteen-year marriage ends and you must start over and learn how to live on your own.

Hard is the heartbreak of your only child refusing to talk to you, much less live with you, after you decide to leave her father.

Hard is being completely cut off from every aspect of your child’s life.

Hard is the cold heartbreaking silence of the child who once loved you unconditionally and ran to you with open arms.

Hard is being totally alone to grieve for all that is gone.

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I search for a roadmap.

A path to inner peace.

 A path away from the darkness.

 A path toward the light.

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Prayerful meditation becomes my life raft. A way to gain insight and strength. Questioning why I have been given this difficult path. I learn to look within to find solace, guidance, and hope.

It is through meditation that I find the clarity I so desperately need. As I meditate, I feel the presence of past generations of mothers in my family and I am reminded of the stories of my elders. Stories of mothers who had experienced long-term emotional and/or physical separations from their children for a variety of reasons. It is the story of my great-great grandmother being forced to leave her children behind when she runs away from an abusive husband and never returns. It is the story of my immigrant grandmother sending her children back to Sweden to live with relatives during the Great Depression because she has no other way to care for them. It is the story of my mother emotionally abandoning her children when mental illness and pills take her away to a very dark place. A place where she is no longer sad and lonely. A place where she no longer has to feel.

My family history is filled with too many mothers being forced to separate from their children. This is the legacy of the mothers in my family that I was somehow destined to follow. And now, I am the next generation to feel the emptiness of having your child disappear from your life. It is an emotional void that haunts me and shames me.

Meditation also brings a realization that, as adults, the children had always forgiven their mothers. They came to understand that their mothers had no other choice. I am also now aware that the mothers that came before me never forgave themselves. Guilt consumed them and they were never able to find a personal peace.

The choices before me become clear.

I can continue to blame myself for the separation from my daughter. But doing so will keep me in a constant state of turmoil that will threaten my mental health daily.

Or I can forgive myself and accept that as a mother I had done the best that I could. I need to be secure in the belief that eventually my daughter will understand the reasons why I had no choice but to leave. I now know that I cannot move forward in my life until I first learn to love and forgive myself.

I choose forgiveness.

As I do, a wave of compassion washes over me, comforts my spirit, and lifts the veil of darkness that threatens my soul.

Finally, for the first time in too many years, I am no longer lost. Instead, I discover the path back to a balanced life with its endless possibilities of both sorrow and joy.

And I learn to accept the bad days by discovering that happiness often hides in the shadows, waiting to be found.