

MY MOTHER'S DAUGHTER

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Master of Arts

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By

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Accepted by the faculty of the Caudill College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science,  
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## MY MOTHER'S DAUGHTER

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Morehead State University, 2017

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*My Mother's Daughter* is a collection of free-verse poems which highlights two themes that feed into each other. The poems explore ideals and body image in relation to growing up as a Hispanic American woman and entering into motherhood. The poems explore the emotional turmoil women face when they do not meet their own and others' expectations. The first set of poems illustrates the struggle of straddling two cultures and how the author has coped with the double standard of being a good Hispanic woman: the woman who is subordinate to her husband and places God and the Catholic Church above all else, while living within feminist ideals of modern America. The poems shed light as to how Hispanic heritage has shaped and continues to shape the author as a woman. Furthermore, in the Hispanic culture, beauty is held in high regard, and girls grow up understanding that achieving a certain level of beauty equates to success. Girls grow up checking their waistlines and are taught to never go out in public without looking their best. The poems about culture reflect on fitting into two cultures and not representing the ideal

woman for either. This objectification continues into adulthood. The second theme, womanhood, illustrates topics, such as motherhood and its effects on romantic relationships and body image. This part explores the love and guilt many women face after having children. The poems about motherhood explore the disillusioned feelings many women internalize after having a baby, despite loving their child. These poems discuss the shattered idealization of creating life because nobody prepares women for the guilt or the loss of self they undergo when becoming mothers. *MyMother's Daughter* discusses the loss of self-esteem many mothers experience when looking at the excess fat or stretch marks from pregnancy. This collection also discusses breastfeeding in public, the guilt many women endure when wishing for aspects from their lives before motherhood to return, the loss of passion between couples during and after pregnancy, and the self-blame women inflict on themselves when they never return to their pre-pregnancy physique. This collection shines light on how culture and society objectifies women and the effects these standards play on women's emotions.

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Inti

Mother spun my sister from the Sun's hair,  
Praying to her Incan gods, while clasping her crucifix.  
She was gold, silver, and bronze. A babe with yellow coils  
that whipped and snapped when pulled;  
her eyes clear like water, reflecting a life, not her own,  
mirroring the light and dulling me as I grip my silver  
crucifix between my teeth, taste blood.

The Knife

Two tattooed brows taut  
over eyes, pink from age.  
One arches higher as she roams  
aimlessly with a knife  
jabbing and drawing fat.  
You will be beautiful like her,  
as you stuff yourself in a  
faja that leaves you molded  
Not pretty. No  
for that you need to be hard  
and stretched. For that  
you need a knife.

Cash Strapped

We were a cash strapped family always chasing the next million. Building sand steps to raise our race. We remodeled kitchens to move two months later to a perfect home in a perfect district and still it wasn't enough. We wanted to wipe ourselves clean with money, scraping away the brown hue from our genes. It wasn't enough. We moved again to the image of the perfect home in a not so perfect district to chase another million, and instead faced the barrel of a gun because it was God's plan, but it wasn't enough. We moved "home," which meant anything below Okeechobee to a perfect rental to work on pools under the sun; a suitable job for our race, no? And it wasn't enough. We moved to the West, neighboring Mexico with nothing between but the gulf to raise a business to make millions, and sold it instead to work for the white man, and it wasn't enough. We sold our home to live the simple life to be closer to God to find what we already knew: we are not simple and it will never be enough.

The Answer to the Universe

Mother's anger is tangible.

Drowns the air with discomfort.

A face, a look.

worn all day for our amusement.

We dance busily around the house

until we crack.

Why are you here?

Why don't you scream?

Silence.

Silence is so loud.

It allows us to think.

We realize we are human.

We are here to disappoint.

Mother's anger is tangible.

Fills the air with concrete.

It does not take much

We repent with sputters and speech,

letting whatever language drizzle

until contact is made.

Why are you here?

Why don't you speak?

Silencio.

In a home so loud,

silence devastates.

We become alone.

We become individuals.

Mother's anger is tangible.

Smothers the air with a swallow.

We stifle and swing

until blue in the face and

with our last breath

Scream.

Snuffed with disgrace.

Why are you here?

Why do you scream?

To be heard.

Papa con Aji

If your taste buds have gone bland and you need a remedy,  
My grandmamma will surely prescribe some papa con aji.  
She always told me to cook good food if I was lacking love.  
So we cooked all night heartbreak mending papa con aji.  
When I lost my zest for life and everything was dull,  
My grandmamma took me to her kitchen and fed me papa con aji.  
Spicy, tangy residue on papa starchy soft  
comfort warmth and family  
is papa con aji.  
When I was scared shitless to be married at age nineteen  
Grandmamma stroked my tongue with papa con aji.  
The first dish I ever cooked my married man and me, was  
Fiery, sensual, dance in mouth, papa con aji  
Now as a mother with one of my own  
I cure all her follies, with  
loving, caressing, back scratching good papa con aji.  
Looking back upon my life it seems such a shame to see  
  
That my own mother could not cook  
Not even papa con aji.

Saffron

In my blood there is Saffron,  
flowing through me  
out my fingers  
playing music on my food,  
like a dance,  
rhythmically cutting, mincing, slicing,  
pouring my soul into a pot  
with no measurements or directions,  
Cooking flows like steps on the floor,  
following pinches and dashes  
with beats  
of Saffron

Eyes water, nose drips  
from spices in the air.  
My dish makes love.  
Each bite  
a thrust of flavor  
that leaves you  
craving more.  
Until your belly bloats,  
your stamina's gone,

and you are  
satisfied with the remembrance  
of Saffron.

Pelo en la Lengua

Mama says I have no hair on my tongue.

It is bald and pink,

and when the signs of whiskers

thread through,

I shave the shadow with sharp words

It's genetic, I'm afraid:

the inability to tolerate delusions

that coat the tongue one thick

strand at time.

“You are too fat for that dress,

pareses un tamal,” Mama says,

I watch the strands fall from her mouth.

I am a plump dish of cornmeal

boiled in wrapped husks with the silks

cut off.

So, I change into my paper

bag because she is right.

She speaks truths.

Tomorrow, I will shave.

Tomorrow, I will tell her what I think of her.

The Living

I remember sunny days and constant play  
pretend. Her musical voice would always say  
the right thing to make me smile.

I remember Mom.

I remember floating on a waterbed. At age three  
getting tickled and feeling carefree.

Blue eyes kind and true.

I remember Papap.

I remember a kitten so sweet it should have barked.

Named him Homer instead of Bart.

Amongst rows of cages he was a king amongst cats.

I remember my first pet.

I remember a woman of trials  
and sticky morning Kool-Aide smiles.

A parent whose technique was freedom.

I remember Tia Virginia.

I remember too much gold  
On the neck of a woman whose loud voice told

Exactly what she felt

I remember my grandmother Detica.

I remember a woman so old;

solid like she was made of stone.

We always said she would outlive the young.

I remember Abuela.

I remember eating hidden sweets

Smelling menthol, watching novelas on TV

At the edge of her bed.

I remember Mamita.

We are all made of dust and water.

Our memories keep us alive.

Wallpaper

In an old house,  
in a small room,  
sticks pink wallpaper that  
spirals and loops  
bowing in a paisley pattern,  
buckling at a brown bubbling  
puddle;

not from dirt or grime  
but time, as the wall  
breaks free from tradition.

The home is modern,  
still, the wallpaper sticks to the  
home like skin to flesh.

Hands reach. Nails dig,  
pulling until the paper rips,  
stripping away guilt and dresses

Rosaries and homilies

And mother's warning about  
my disastrous marriage.

until the walls lay bare.

Imperfect but bare.

Tears

Our home held my mother's ghost and father's tears  
that dripped from the ceiling like rain, drenching us.

Until a pretty brown woman moved in and  
wrapped us in a foreign flag, claiming us  
with a language that we couldn't speak but  
understood through rough expressions and  
movements of her hands, which cradled and filled us  
until we claimed her and named her

Madre.

Flooded

We live in a flooded home.

Soaked with Her emotions.

They seep through the walls producing black spores

that spread into the air

infecting our lungs until we cough in retaliation

Feelings spread everywhere.

Our clothes and hair;

Our skin and moods.

Until we look in the mirror to

find we are covered in disappointment

We mop the smell away

and pretend we are content.

One day, we will bathe in bleach

and realize that the

Disappointment is ours.

Four Lumps

Twenty four,

and four Lumps.

Between the panes

Of the Collar Bone

and Breast.

Unforeseen by the

human Eyes.

Lymphoma.

I'm told by

the Woman

more sister than friend

with gold Skin

and long thick strands

Of hair

framing her

Face

drawn by

charcoal

Her Hair

shines like the spark in her

brown Eyes

But that too will fade.

And I?

I will fulfill

my vicarious obligation

to empathize

and drift into paranoia.

she lives,

she is scarred.

Speckled Beards

Discrimination hides behind white speckled beards  
and sharply curved words, spoken in  
soft syllables to avoid their crunch.

He victimizes, using words like family instead of breast  
With a concerned look and a smile under his hair.

The creases around his eyes from smiling  
snake around my neck then  
squeeze, leaving my face a pretty shade of purple  
(the feminine color of youth),  
until I am left breathless and testy.

Glitter

There is never enough glitter.

It falls everywhere from her shirt

Beautifying everything it touches

The floor, our couch,

The seats in my car,

floating and grinding into

all of our memories as

we swipe at each glimmering speck,

exasperated, until each one is gone

with her childhood.

Childbearing Bodies

The body is a flaw.

Too many limbs

Too many chances

To become fat.

We are never happy.

Too many models

Too many messages

Subliminally and otherwise

Telling us we are wrong.

How dare we eat!

My body is a flaw.

Too much life

Too much growth

Has stretched it

To its limits.

Too many

Mark me.

All for the sake of miracles

Too much loss  
Of self-esteem.

The Crime of Public Indecency

Nature can be so indecent.

Mothers,

we sit publicly in pews,

cradling our bundles,

feeding

Shamelessly.

The bundles

whimper and squirm

and pull off,

squirting society with indecent

images of natural bodies.

The world looks

Shamelessly

down its nose in disgust

with eyes that say,

How dare you?

We are just following our

bundles' cues.

Meanwhile, young women

Shamelessly

strut cleavage and side-boob

and are hypocritically applauded

for their perky perfection.

The nipple offends,

but the nipple gives life.

The media

Shamelessly

complains that one in five

bundles

don't know from where

their next meal will come.

Well, my bundle does,

And I feed her

Shamelessly.

The Clock

Control is lost for the mothers.

She cries, I jump.

Wallowing in my neglect

to pre-diagnose her every

whimper.

Tick tock,

the day is gone.

Control is lost.

Opportunist I am

to have the luxuries

to eat,

to sleep,

to bathe.

I place third in everyway.

Everyday,

I reminiscence

on the days galore

when selfishness was not a flaw.

I grasp for authority.

I strive for perfection,

or at least a good hair day.

But tick tock,

the day is gone.

Control is lost.

Masks

The body is a guise

For one's inner most tremors.

He hides behind the mask

Of ancestry,

But loses his origins in the process.

The feral soul

Controlled by instinctual need.

I am what I am.

Body don't identify me!

The body is the mother.

All scars,

Youth lost.

The soul is my child.

Self forgot.

The Birth Mark

One stray curl escapes.

Another flaw like me.

Get it together. Get it together.

Perfect you must be.

Cover me up and apply mascara,  
and again you're on your way. But,  
get it together. Get it together.  
Be perfect every day.

You cook and clean  
and care for the family  
All their needs are met. But,  
get it together. Get it together.  
I think I see a crack.

Today you didn't cover me,  
accepted that you are flawed. But,  
get it together. Get it together.  
And perhaps you will not snap.

Rags

I am a rundown rag.

Dirty and colorless

that he uses to wipe his sins

clean to feel better

feel better

I touch all

the counters, toilets,

His body

if passion warrants

I am all and nothing,

touching each part

of home

I am a rundown rag

With holes and stretched parts

she wears

while strutting and smiling

as she smugly says,

“This old thing

Lo he tenido por años.”

I am all and nothing.

Forming to a body

she secretly hates

I am a rundown rag.

Dirty and colorless.

I clean the child's nose.

Wipe the dirt from

deep creases of skin.

Comfort as she sleeps.

I am all and nothing

a passing nurturer

put away, then forgotten

I am a rundown rag.

A tool used, but never wanted

I am all and nothing.

All but nothing.

Craving

There is always a bite  
on places unseen.

Intimate parts  
that spread  
into feelings  
then leave  
but the craving remains.

He will stay by your side  
if you don't bite back

Aggression is a man's sport  
Dominance, theirs,  
until the rest of you leaves,  
but the cravings remain

Sleeping

He stands sleeping,  
eyes wide open, staring  
at a blank screen.

Mouth agape except  
for the occasional chuckle

His marriage forgotten,  
like a trash baby.

Vulnerable. Forgotten,

She stands on the side lines  
(Always on the sidelines)

poking soft spots of fat  
and  
wondering if that is why  
he prefers the  
damned screen

Author's Note

As with any creative piece of writing, the poems for *My Mother's Daughter* are linked to personal experiences and interactions in my life. When I was four years old, my mother passed away from a heart attack. I was, of course, distraught and confused. My father had to learn to take care of his two daughters alone; my sister was not yet a year old. I think this event has shaped my perception of life. I understand how short life can be, as my mother was only twenty-three when she passed. I also sometimes have trouble understanding myself. After my mother passed, we did not maintain contact with her family, and I still feel at times like part of my identity was taken from me. My father remarried, and the woman he married took on the role as our mother (mami), and she has never treated us any differently than her biological children. I love my mami, and I feel blessed to have someone come into my life to play that maternal role. However, I am also very conscientious that her family, morals, and Hispanic flare came and replaced the piece of my identity that I had lost. The puzzle piece does not always fit right, but I am a more complete person than I would have been had she not come into our lives. Although my father is Cuban, my mami brings true Hispanic heritage into our lives. Because of her, I am a well-rounded person: I have a defined religion, I am bilingual, and I have a higher level of expectation for myself. I also have experienced negative byproducts of these virtues, as I experience Catholic guilt, and I feel anxious when my plans do not pan out. My poetry derives from personal moments, experiences, and feelings. I am a new mom, trying to find my balance between who I was before my baby and who I am becoming. Everything in my life has changed, including my relationship with my husband, my priorities, and my self-image. When I originally began writing poetry for this project, I knew it would be a personal account of my experiences and what I saw take place around me. I never imagined the degree of emotion that would be placed in

each of my poems. Each poem is an exaggeration of some moment I experienced or witnessed put down into words and fleshed out through emotion. I originally planned to write about growing up as a Hispanic American and motherhood. However, as I searched my innermost self, what I produced were reflections that all women feel.