

I cannot recall when this started, but for as long as I can remember this cycle perpetuates and reflects itself in many relationships I have gotten into. Friendships, romantic interests, and even you. My mother. I was loved by everyone, taken care of by my grandparents and maids. But most of all, I was loved most by you. You were my world as I stuck by you any chance I could get. I learned fast as a three-year-old to never bother you as you did chores around the house. You would yell and become frustrated the whole day, so I would keep to myself. The neighborhood kids were not interested in playing with me at all; they would divert my attention and run away while I was distracted for a moment.

I was happy in my own world, though. Teletubbies played on the TV as I scribbled drawings on the paper you provided me. Taking a peek at you, you looked tired and had an energy of irritation around you. I said nothing and went back to drawing. “Lunch time,” you called for me. I hurriedly followed you to a seat and saw that lunch was not exactly to my liking. But you were not as happy today, so I will keep quiet and eat what you made. It would only make your mood worse and I would be considered a burden. The next day, you were a lot energized, so I did as I pleased within my own boundaries.

One fated day, a man randomly sashayed through the front door, passing me in the living room, and watched him pull you in for a hug. I wondered who this man was, what was he doing in our home, and most importantly—how privileged he is to act too friendly with you right from the start. “This is your Papa!” You told me, but I had no such thing. I only have a Mama. All I need is Mama. We traveled across the sea to live with him in Japan and he was apparently a part of the military, but being so young, I wondered why an American soldier is doing in Japan. I often sulked and glared at this man, who suddenly showed up in our lives and demanded attention and importance. However, I had never seen you cry this much.

I was told to go to sleep in our shared bedroom with the lamp on and the door closed. On the other side, I heard you and him screaming at the top of your lungs so fervently. At some points I heard crashes, banging, and shattering. You started throwing and breaking objects around the place as you two fought as I forced myself to shut my eyes and go to sleep like you told me to, Mama. This situation often happened since we met this man, but I did not expect you to ask me how I felt if you two were to get married. “No! No! I will not allow it! I don’t like him!” I said in desperation. I did not like this man and he looks so weird. You cry and get angry more often than usual around him. I would tread carefully after every fight when I approach you out of fear that I would make you more sad or angry. I hugged you and pet your head with my small, five-year-old hands as you hid your reddened face in your palms and allowed yourself to be held by me.

I was angry when you got married despite my outright rejection, but I could not ever hold my anger to you. I busied myself by glaring at that man who is now bound to us like a fly. “You need a Papa,” you would tell me, but I had always been content in the life I had with just me and you. Years later, I had gotten two siblings. I learnt that biologically, I needed to have a father to be born. My appearance changed so much that I had also started looking like him, too. But I still would not consider him to be important. You often worried about our financial well-being, and having more children only made our conditions worse. You were often missing in the house as you worked hard to provide for us, so I stepped up and became the “second” mother. I watched over my siblings and cared for them as you wanted. But taking on this responsibility gave me more chances to see you look begrudgingly at the bills, frustrated and depressed. In the mornings, you would tell me how we were struggling and that you were trying to look for more opportunities to help us. I wanted to help as much as I could, but sometimes, I would feel bitter.

Rejecting invitations from outings with friends I had just made and seeing other kids my age playing outside and enjoying their summers. I felt like I had missed out on my right to youth as a young child because I was forced into a position to take care of everyone in my family while feeling ostracized from the rest of the vast world. If I failed to fulfill part of my role, you would yell and punish me. I did not choose to be the eldest and to be the second mother in the house because the man I warned you not to marry only sleeps his day away. But this is normal in our culture's households—is what I thought until I learnt that as a child, I should not have been subjected into that environment. Your sadness, sudden withdrawals of affection, and irritability elicited my nature to care for you. Since I was a child, I took on instrumental and emotional caretaking behaviors to make you happy unlike that man, but I overextended my limits. I realized I was not happy and felt there was something wrong within me, but you always dismissed it. My mental and emotional health depleted before I knew it, but you could only continue to hurt me to keep yourself up.