

Your mother loved you. It reasons, of course: she was your mother, so she must have loved you. If such a love can follow the logic of a Boolean expression, then you can formulate that truth and accept it. Or can you? You want to know that, you want to believe it at the core of your essence. But you question it because...you've got no choice, really. How can you not? It's what you feel and there is evidence that leads to your doubt. After all, she departed rather abruptly, leaving behind a legacy that has troubled you most of your life. And it wasn't simply her abandonment that wounded, but the form of it that haunted. Her love for you is in question, and yours for her is at stake.

You've got a few pictures of her smiling, but no memories of that smile. Your reminiscence equally hinders and assists. Your memories fabricate what you think her voice used to sound like. *Don't do me no favors*, you chastise your own mind. You have information, but your data is dusty and your facts possibly fictitious. Your past with her is a cold case with few clues; it is a hypothesis perforated by age.

You recall what one of your favorite authors once wrote:

"Your memory is a monster; you forget—it doesn't. It simply files things away. It keeps things for you, or hides things from you—and summons them to your recall with a will of its own. You think you have a memory; but it has you!" (John Irving)

And so you recount your memories to yourself as an exercise, like most people daydream of how they would spend their lottery

winnings. You do this to find fresh images that might present themselves, and then to analyze each one for its authenticity. You sift through what is familiar attempting to out what is false; but it is difficult, because you have built a rapport with some memories like you would with a time trusted friend. And when new recollections enter the picture, you are guarded. Should you believe you have unearthed a long lost relic from the landscape of your mind? Or should you attack it, as would a prosecuting attorney interrogating a key defense witness whom he doubts was even at the scene. Because how dangerous is a suspect memory? Without validation, it is a virus; for if it remains among confirmed recollections, believed and yet false, it can corrupt the other memories and infect them fragile.

There is an adage in poker tournaments: the more chips you have makes each chip you have worth less, and the less chips you have makes the ones you don't have worth more. When you have so few memories of a precious person, each memory you don't have is worth more for your lack of having it. So you riffle through them, like the practice of shuffling cards, sorting them and affirming their existence.

You remember when she scolded you in the bathroom, she in the tub naked and you standing there ashamed that you were seeing her so. You don't even remember why you were in trouble, or what she

said, but she was chastising you for it, naked nonetheless. In this memory, her hair is more certainly red than in other memories. You envision the tile an off-yellow pastel of the mid-1970's, but wonder if the pastel-green trim is an embellishment. The shower curtain was there, you're certain, scrunched up against the wall but its color eludes you. And a washcloth, strategically placed, but it made no difference. Her breasts were bare, and somehow you surmise that it is the presence of her breasts that makes you consider the redness of her hair more prominent. And now, you can't even recall if they were the first breasts you'd ever seen. Perhaps a nudie magazine had been your introduction, but that's doubtful. You don't even recall your age then; but, of course, it had to be before you were nine. And you'd viewed skin magazines with your friends down the street, but had that been before or after? Irrelevant really, to this occurrence.

You recall standing on the lawn with her, a helicopter hovering over the neighborhood. You ate your peanut butter and jelly sandwich fascinated by the machine and curious as to its presence. Perhaps that is how the seed of wanting to learn how to fly one of those birds was planted. You haven't yet, but neither have you written off that ambition. Again your memory fails, in that you cannot recall its purpose, or what happened next; only that she was there on the lawn with you as you together endured the loud roar of the rotor blades

quizzically. Perhaps you asked her why it was flying so low over the houses of your street. Perhaps she even answered you.

Your father tells you of a day at the zoo, when you were a little tyke. A brand new blue and red outfit adorned you and it turned out to have rained earlier in the day. You've seen the pictures...and you admit to yourself without arrogance that you were a pretty cute kid. He says he showed you how to stomp in the puddles and splash water, and that you enjoyed this semi-aquatic activity more than you did the animals. He says it made your mother "hysterical with anger." For some reason, the phrase "hysterical with anger" conveys an extreme reaction in your mind that is comical. And though that should paint a picture of her passionately negative response, you and your father laugh well at the story.

But you have no memory of it; and so, you cannot count it among your own. Two steps forward; one step back.

At one point during your parents' separation, you are in a car with her. The blue Datsun 280-Z hatchback sports car pulls to an unfamiliar street, seemingly a great distance away from your house, but in reality less than 3 miles away. She gets out and walks to the front door of a duplex and you follow. A dark-haired woman answers the door. You do not know it yet but this is your first glimpse at your future step-mother. Your mother asks for your father by name, and he

comes to the door, wet from the shower and in a towel. You recall him telling you that he was going to stay with a friend from the police department (he was a cop). But the personal math does not add up in your head because you are both confused and fascinated by this interaction.

Your parents argue, and your mother becomes quite angry, turning and storming away with you in tow. Back in the passenger seat that is too large for your young frame, she floors the accelerator and the car speeds down the street. The aggression of the acceleration frightens you, and even you hear the fear in your voice as you say, "Mom!" You know, at this point, you are eight or nine years old. You do not know how much longer she will be in your life, but thinking back, it must be less than a year.

On another occasion, perhaps the same one, when she was upset with your father over their separation and his adultery, she drove you and your sister to Oceanside, California, just north of San Diego. Your aunt and uncle lived there, and you realize it is telling that she took you there because this uncle is your father's older brother. It must be significant to their relationship that your mother chose this place of comfort, over two hours away. You have always been closer with this side of the family, your father's side, but of course, that is as much a result of your mother's actions as your father's.

You approach the house, and it is dark. It is not extremely late at night, so there should be lights and activity, but there is none. At the door, you sense dread and see something move within the dark house. You huddle with your sister, close to your mother as she calls into the house. Eventually, your cousin, R.J., one year older than you, reveals himself from his hiding place, having tried to scare the three of you. He succeeded, but not to his own satisfaction. He then makes it his mission to terrify you for much of your youthful interaction.

He tells you that his parents are out, but will return later. The rest of the evening, and the length of the visit to your cousin's house, remains shrouded in obscurity. Again, your age is in question, but you venture it to be in the same year (possibly the same night) as the terror of the speeding car driven angrily away from a house of adultery.

You are told that "cereal" was your first word, and that your first sentence was "I want cereal." A memory that always provides a smirk, because you did love cereal as a child. And yet, this is another fact that you must trust the word of your patriarch, because, though you were there, who remembers with clarity actually speaking for the first time? Perhaps the Scarecrow in the "Wizard of Oz" ("I don't know I never tried.") but not a child. And yet, you have a correlating memory that supports this information:

You recall a morning where you walked into the living room and asked for cereal, groggy and cranky. She asked you to go outside to fetch the paper, though you cannot recall her exact words...and wish you could. But your response looms in your mind, and often incites the anecdote as an entertaining one under the right circumstances. "Okay, but when I come back in here my cereal better be ready!" And the fuzziness that follows irks you, for surely she called you on the tone of your demand; and this is your primary recollection. But a part of your brain wants the memory to be less harsh: and that with her slight reprimand, you embellish that, perhaps, she smiled. You know some parents appreciate it when their children say something funny or out of character, even if it challenges their authority; and you envision this moment as such. But is it for your sake or hers? Are you satisfying the anecdote, or attempting to soften the mood of her personality that weighs down most of your memories? Are you so desperate to remember her happy, despite her legacy, that you possibly corrupt the truth of what-you-don't-even-know-really-happened? Questions with answers hidden in psychotherapy and Heaven.

Recent discoveries offered the dichotomy to both enhance your insight and threaten your recollections. You recently found the store bought (or most likely gifted) pre-formatted baby journals your mother wrote in when you and your sister were born. You were

amazed to see her handwriting for the first time, reading all about your sister's birth and growth...her first words, her measurements during her early months on earth, short paragraphs about her bouts with illness as an infant. But discouragement set in when you opened the book dedicated to you. It lacked significantly in such sentimental information, a disappointment as the mother lode of recollection assistance you thought it might be, the pun both convenient and empty of cleverness. Its sentimental value diminished by her neglect to keep it updated as she did your older sibling's. So much could have been learned about your youth, perhaps even substantiating some of the memories you have with corroboration in her own script. Again, failure.

And so you return to that question: did she love you? Is the lack of answers and the glaring multitude of blank lines in that baby journal a testament to this? Or was it simply that she tired of writing in it, much like you often do when you tirelessly keep a new organizational device up to date for a few weeks, and then exasperate your focus on it until the chore of it is more than the benefit its upkeep provides. It is difficult, but you can relate, so you forgive her that. You found her wedding photos, her wedding ring and other jewelry. And while these contribute nothing to your memory, their very existence in your keeping pleases you with a warm connection to her in a deep place



within you that you falter to describe. But you know its name is your Soul.

And with great disappointment, a realization occurs to you like a numb limb that's feeling has returned...that creeping tickle that ventures up your body. You have often "guestimated" that you have twenty memories of her. And yet you realize it is more like five. But how can that be? Honestly? It *must* be more. You curse your brain, the monster of memory, chastising it for hiding under the bed in the dark of your troubled youth. Denial sets in, there must be more...there must be more. You become frantic, now scanning your synapses with a sense of purpose so strong and reckless that you can hardly focus on any thought or image. Until you slowly attempt to calm yourself while simultaneously forfeiting the search. You cannot, after all this time, seriously expect to discover anything new.

You know what you know, and that seems the lot of it.

But there *is* more, though it is not what you were looking for. It is, of course, the definitive memory of that dark early morning, though there was no interaction between you that you recall. It was the night she left on a date you will never forget: August 15, 1978. And that date is set in your mind not because of the moment, but because of a piece of paper you discovered years later: a death certificate. There

are times you wish the cliché applied: I remember it like it was yesterday. But it is not so, despite your repeated attempts.

On this morning, your neighbor from across the street wakes you. Your bedroom is dark and you have no concept of the early hour as he softly shakes you from slumber. In the Now of recollection, you do not recall his name, but his wife's name was Charlotte. Rhouda, you think. Scandinavian? Foreign and Teutonic, you offer yourself as the least you can guess. Or was it she that woke you? Uncertainty lingers as you recess back into the haze of reminiscence. Groggy confusion attacks as you wake, your room still dark, illuminated slightly from a source in the den.

That's what that room was called. The Den. Not the family room, which seems ironic in the recollection of it. The television was in there, along with couches and plenty of space. One sliding glass door led to the backyard, and another to the patio, across from which was the kitchen. The only way to enter the den was through either of these sliding glass doors, or through a door in your room. Sandwiched in between the den and your parent's room, your room had two doors, and from your bed, the one to the right led to the den while the one to the left led to the hallway and the front of the house.

When you thought about it later, you realized that she must have walked through your room to enter the den to complete her final

actions on earth. Did she stop, you've often wondered, and look at your sleeping form? Did she kiss you while you slept? Did she say a final goodbye, even though, in slumber, you did not hear her? The possible resolutions at times have brought you to tears. Parallel to those questions, and those potentially telling answers, you cannot recall if she kissed you good night that night. She must have, you reason...but cannot be certain. And for some reason you think it more important that she did so that night over any other night you had until then. Did she tuck her youngest child into bed with wishes for "sweet dreams?" Or did such an act pain her because of her intended plan, and so perhaps she avoided such contact that night. With what thoughts did she wrestle concerning you, you wonder. And having no way of knowing, you speculate in vain, your few memories are all that's left you.

Getting up from your bed, you query your neighbor's presence for waking you. You recall asking for your mother, but was that too fabricated in later years? Do you recall asking for her because you should have? Do you recall asking for her because of the circumstances of that night? Or did you, actually, ask for her?

Police officers walk through your room into the den, where there is activity not befitting a nine-year-old and this time of night. This hour of morning, a more applicable description, as technically correct as the

play on the homonym. For it is about one thirty in the a.m., truly an hour of mourning, though you do not yet know the specifics of either the time or the occasion. The concept itself is as foreign as police officers walking through your room in the darkness. Granted, your father is a police officer, and you've been to his work, seen the men and women in uniform, joked with them, been shown off as the younger child. Police officers have been to the house before, but not in uniform that you can recall. And not in the middle of the night...morning. Not in such awkward darkness.

You recall your neighbor, Mr. Rhouda, leading the police into the other room, which would therefore mean that Mrs. Rhouda (Charlotte) woke you. But again you fail in sifting the salt from the sand, and cannot verify which vision would dissolve in your mouth and which would grind in your teeth. At least you are aware of the jumble of memory and invention. You recognize the instances when the two intertwine and the plain truth dances outside of your reach.

You move to follow them into the den, but are impeded by your neighbor, who leads you to the left, down the hallway, through the living room, and out into the late night's starlit street. Your next recollection flashes to lying in the neighbor's large bed, your older sister next to you as you both quietly watch *The Late Late Show with Tom Snyder*. You've no idea who this man is, or who he is

interviewing. The concept that television shows continued into these hours is beyond you, but the show has remained with you all these years. At some point, your sister leaves the room and after what seems like endless minutes, you too climb out of the bed and venture into the unfamiliar territory of the house.

The house is very brown. The paint outside you recall is brown, but the inside is as well. Everything in earth tones, and off yellows; everything seems made of wood, but of course it is not. You don't know how long you are in a room with the neighbors and your father comes in, weeping. He kneels and embraces you and your sister, crushing you with sorrow and love. Perhaps he says he's sorry through his tears, perhaps your memory wants to think he did. But there is nothing specific that he says that you can recall. Just the hug, of that you are certain. And you hug him back because he is your daddy and is obviously in emotional pain, though you're not entirely sure why. You comfort him while he and your sister weep, and you feel the odd one out...you would cry with them but do not know why they are crying.

The group of neighbors moves back across the street to the side that your house is on, and into a corner house painted a hunter green. Some nice older people live here, the woman is especially nice. They have no names that return to you. There is much more activity in this

house. While your father and sister sit in the living room, you walk to the kitchen. A plain clothed detective is on the phone, a green phone connected to the wall, and he is speaking to someone about your house. You recall him giving the address "6330 W. 81st Street" but that could be salt, it could be sand. But what you most certainly, undeniably, hear him say will stick with you forever. He uses THE word.

"Suicide." He uses it in the context of "We've got a suicide here ..." and perhaps he then followed with the address, but you now understand. No heavy emotion overtakes you, no grief comes crashing down. In that moment, you experience understanding as a state of being. You walk back into the room with your father and sister, and say, "I know what happened to Mom." Your father hugs you and weeps some more.

The police officer comes into the room and tells you he is going to ask you questions. He asks if you heard anything. You want to be helpful. But moreso, you do not want to be excluded. You tell him you didn't hear anything, you were sleeping, though in your sleep you may have heard a 'pop.' This is not a fabricated memory, but the memory of a fabrication. You lie that inconsequential tidbit, and shrug, and understand now that the detective is doing your Daddy's job. Your father is a homicide detective and this man is trying to find out what

happened. He is attempting to glean some information from you to verify that your mother, in fact, did commit suicide...that there was no "other man" as you heard someone say earlier in some snatch of conversation. "Other man" as in murderer.

But there was none. Your mother committed suicide, and your memory of that day ends there.

The subsequent days you count among your memories of her as well. Your grandmother (your father's mother) lived in Inglewood in a small house behind a realtor's business on Eucalyptus Street. Directly across the street is a mortuary, where your now deceased mother's viewing will be held. You walk across from your grandmother's to this brown, barn-shaped building where you know recently dead people are laying in their coffins, being visited by their families. Only one viewing is going on this evening, and it is for your mother.

The small room is filled with yellow light and flowers, the most prominent being the lilies. And those flowers will forever smell repugnant to you. Those flowers will everlastingly reek of death to you because that is their function: to mask the smell of death. Later in life, you walk into a hotel lobby for a dear friend's wedding and cannot abide the scent, because it smells of a funeral. A girlfriend's parents will send her a vase of mixed flowers, with two lilies dominating the

bouquet. You feel uncomfortable in that apartment as long as those flowers remain.

But the flowers are strictly a consequence of the occasion. She lies at one end of the room in a casket (brown?), her hair a muted reddish brown. In your life since, you have seen many people in a prepared state of death, seen many lay in their caskets at wakes and funerals, noting how the makeup was applied, how rigid they seemed, how truly unreal they looked. Yet in your memory, your mother looks alive.

Of course, she was dead. She had taken one of your father's guns and had shot herself in the head. Yet here, in this casket, representing the first dead person you've ever seen, she looks like she is sleeping. It's a cliché that later in life, at other funerals, you would hear some people say of their deceased loved ones; and you would think, "No, they look dead." No other dead person you've seen since has looked like they were in gentle slumber. Yet, in your memory, your mother does not look lifeless, and that is the cause of much trepidation for you. You look at her eyes, and your peripheral vision imagines her lips moving. You glance at her lips, and that same imagination expects her eyes to open. A terrible game your young and active mind plays on you, and it is fascinatingly morbid and frighteningly real.



Here she lies, in the repose of death, and all you can think about is how they made her look so existent. You look at her head and cannot help but wonder what damage had been done to it by the bullet. Your imagination shames you as it explores gruesome concepts, but you cannot stop your mind from envisioning what the den must have looked like, what she went through to end up here in front of you in a casket. What those who worked in the mortuary must have seen, that you did not, to prepare her for this viewing. It shames you to think such things, because she was your mother. And it fascinates you, because it was she whose example led you to first experience this.

Your grandmother leans down and gently kisses her nose, which repulses you. She may have been your mother, but now she is a dead body. You fear to touch her folded hands, knowing they are cold and nevertheless are terrified to validate that knowledge. You don't know where you learned not to touch dead people, you don't recall why you feel that conviction, and yet it overwhelms you. It seems so impossible that she is dead and so real that she lies here in front of you, proof of the absurdity. You long for her to live, to touch her and receive a final hug. But you refuse to lay a hand on her in this state.

Making room for others in your family who wish to visit this body that used to house your mother, you move away. Your cousin, the one who enjoys terrifying you, beckons you into the darkened hallway of

the funeral home. He has always been mischievous, and you sneak down the hall together, him whispering that there are other dead people in other rooms. He points you into one room, deeply darkened, yet the faint pale figure of an old bald man in a casket is discernable.

Your cousin whispers your name in a throaty, hissing gargle, a tactic he has always used to invoke horror. The hairs on your neck raise, you tell him to stop, and perhaps push him away. He laughs and the two of you become lost in your own world of laughing and chasing each other up and down the dimly lighted hallway of the funeral home. Eventually, you are caught by an adult and chastised for disrespecting this place, this event, your own mother. You return to the room, sullen and out of place, ashamed to have been enjoying yourself in this morbid place during this emotional event. But the emotions others carry are not within you. Your mother is dead, you know this. She is never coming back, you understand. And yet, the impact of that loss escaped you, and you hardly notice its lacking. You are, after all, only nine.

But then it comes. The day of the funeral. She is inside the casket, no longer seen, and you wonder if she is truly in there. A priest is speaking, but you hardly hear his words. It is a beautiful day in Inglewood and the cemetery looks like an enormous park, save for the few headstones that rise above the ground reminding you that the

acres surrounding you accommodate the dead. Most of the grave markers are flat headstones, and you can practically forget the reason for these vast green knolls. You've been here before, your grandfather is buried here, only a few hundred yards from where your mother is being eulogized.

In the great distance, perhaps half a mile the other way, where the headstones become much more prominent, a large lake sits with a spraying fountain in the middle. Often, on days when your father would bring you and your sister and grandmother to visit the grave of your grandfather, you would stop and play at the lake, feeding the geese and ducks. Perhaps your mother came with you some of those times, but you have no recollection of her presence there. And despite the surrounding headstones, you seemed oblivious that this was a cemetery. Surely you knew that, but you too much enjoyed playing with the ducks of the lake to be concerned with what you should otherwise feel being encircled by tombstones.

At some point while the priest eulogizes her, it dawns on you that *your mother* is in that casket, *she* is going to be buried in this place, mere feet from where you sit on a folded chair. Family members around you weep, and the emotion of the moment overtakes you. You begin to cry. At first, because everyone else is. It is truly a sad moment and you fall prey to the conformity of the social norm, though

you have no awareness of the concept, just its results. So you cry. These are not crocodile tears, you are sincerely feeling emotion, but it is certainly an empathetic reaction.

But then, as the priest finishes his comments, the ultimate realization of her loss seeps into you, and the terrible and negative aspects of that realization begin to impact with the cadence of your breathing. You will never see her again. You knew this days ago when she took her own life, but it now seems so absolute, and nothing in your short life to date has ever felt so final. She is gone, and the agony of that new deficiency in your life feels suddenly tangible in your heart. You sob because your mommy is no more. You bawl because she chose to leave you and the result is that you sit here and experience this horrendous moment of growth, though you hardly consider it an evolution of self. You're not that aware. All you know is that life will never be the same because she left you. And she didn't simply leave...she chose to die.

The ache of that finality opens within you like an adjustment of air pressure in your ear, and yet it is not the release of a burden that you experience, but the strain of accepting one. A sense of dread is born from this moment, an egg of fear is spawned, and the doom of a legacy is planted in your heart. From that new darkness in your heart

you mourn her, and you begin to truly weep for her for the first time; and without the comprehension of what pity is, you weep for yourself.

Family members pass by you as you sit and offer touches, hugs, tears, flowers, words, sympathy, and other gestures of empathy that seem useless to you in the moment. Many funerals are followed by a wake, a gathering of family and friends where food and memories are shared. Perhaps one was held for your mother, but if so, you have no memory of it. If you had a recollection of such an event, you wonder if those memories would lead to reminiscences about your mother, and if those shared experiences might lead to more of her for you to contemplate. Alas, no. All you have is what you've shared thus far, and the legacy that she bequeathed you.

You must attempt to comprehend what pain she was in, what depression overwhelmed her, what other demons darkened the light that kept the pupils of her eyes open to life. It will take years for you to understand it. It will take your own personal journey of betrayal and agony and the near taking of your own life to fully comprehend the enormity of what she must have felt. And yet, you still cannot know, because you also learn it simply does not work that way.

No note (that you know of) was left behind. No explanation was given. And yet, you want, suddenly, to call your father and ask that

question that you realize you never asked. But what would the answer produce? What purpose would that actually serve, after all this time?

Yet you desire that communication, any communication with her, even though you know it would not assist you in loving her any more or less. But perhaps she wrote something about you in it? Would it provide an answer to your ultimate question: would it prove that she loved you, despite her deadly deed? You can only wonder. Suicide notes merely serve as a penultimate, vain act of self-importance and a hollow, concluding communication to the living. And yet they are rendered meaningless by the act that follows their writing. And the living can only find more want in them.

Suicide is a pure act, a statement that requires no paper explanation. The very action itself trumps elucidation. It need not be explained, because only those of us left behind feel a need to ask "Why?" and grieve within our continuing existence. While you do feel the ache to understand, the answers simply remain empty. So rarely do those who are provided answers ever understand. Comfort is so seldom achieved by knowing the reasons for the act because seldom does one ever accept that the reasons are valid enough.

Our minds are not designed to comprehend motives that allow for the suicide of a healthy person to be perceived as a logical choice. Our very minds reject the premise, controlling our bodies with

involuntary survival instincts. So suicide is an unnatural act as well. We are not meant for suicide because we cannot will our heart to stop until death takes over. We cannot suffocate ourselves by holding our breath...at some point we fall unconscious and then begin to breathe normally because our heart and lungs are involuntary muscles. And they are involuntary for that reason. Humans have a natural reaction to survive, despite those who choose martyrdom in the split second they react to leap in front of a bullet to save a loved one. If no loved one is present, they duck and care for themselves. We, nearly without conscious thought, leap from the danger of an onrushing vehicle or grasp frantically for a handhold when we fall. We are designed, at our core, to live; and choosing to override that programming takes willpower, courage, and an outside source of damage. For our being will not abide self-inflicted harm without the power that is humanity's greatest strength and oldest curse: free-will.

Courage? You've heard it said that suicides are cowards, and you know that is nonsense. You thought that once, when you despised her for leaving. You devoured any negative notion that would nourish your anger and sate your hate. 'Coward' was an easy label to pin on her. She was afraid to deal with life's troubles. She was too weak to stick around and endure like the rest of us. Yet you know that it takes an equal amount of courage to live as it does to die. You know, from

personal experience, that anyone who says differently has never had a gun in their mouth. They have never felt the willpower of making the decision to die, despite the specific hesitation that kept you alive. Those who believe suicide an act of cowardice have never tasted the raw despair of life as vividly as you tasted the metal of the barrel of that revolver years ago. You know there can be a feeling of overwhelming awe at the utter terror of life in such despair. Yet that fear is not synonymous with cowardice, because it takes a strength of self found only in one's wholly desolate weakness to supersede the fundamental, inherent value one has to live.

So the pure act itself explains what is vital—the only thing that is indispensable—to communicate: 'I choose to no longer live.' The act is its own pure form of communication. And the need for the living to satisfy their grief with understanding still leaves them thirsting for what only time can quench. Only in perfect empathy can you truly know what brought about this pure act, and that itself is impossible.

"Closure"—that utterly empty cliché that people use to mark the moments when they arrive at a fork in the road of healing, and choose a path—is a fallacy that cannot be reached through a suicide note.

You also know suicide is a selfish act. That is hardly in dispute, but the connotation can vary, and has in your experience of it. While she could hardly be faulted for acting selfishly in the face of a failing



marriage with an unfaithful husband, she was certainly selfish to abandon her two children to a life of pain and wonder, and a legacy of despair.

And though it seems right and easy to conclude her act selfish, and condemn the act of all suicides to be so, here is the rub: when you're that far down, it is tough to remember that any level of up even exists. The depths to which a suicidal person sinks is nearly unfathomable to the mind of one who has not swam back from that dark, cold, lonely, and drowning desolation. Some often refer to the expression "bottom of the barrel" as fitting to describe the feeling. But it is as inaccurate as it is insufficient. Lift up the barrel and look under it; and there, among the mold and creepy insects craving that damp darkness, you will find the mind of the suicidal.

So you are left without a note, without any explanation that may very well have proven just as useless over the course of your life as ignorance. And it was only from the years-later finding of her death certificate that you even began to mark the date of her death, a day which sets in motion the reminders of the mortuary and the funeral, and perhaps that you have not recently enough visited her grave. Reminded of the day after which you never saw her again, you cannot recall when was the final time you saw her alive. And that, as

everything else, is a splinter in your soul that no therapy can tweeze out.

Her legacy still haunts you, but less as a weighty sense of doom now than as the whisper of wind through an open window caresses into motion a thin curtain, and makes you want to believe in benevolent (or passive) ghosts. And you wonder, rather like the clichéd chicken-or-the-egg: is your creative thought process so often dark because of her actions? Or is it rather a genetic trait, a mental mood passed down because sadness breeds? And you cannot help but again recall a favorite author's words:

"It's a no-win argument—that business of what were born with and what our environment does to us. And it's a boring argument, because it simplifies the mysteries that attend to both our birth and our growth." -John Irving, *A Prayer For Owen Meany*

And mystery continues to be an appropriate word, a phenomenon full of empty answers and speculation by your overactive synapses.

You visit her grave and you wonder who you would have been with her in your life instead of without her. Yet you know that you would not be this current You, but some disparate ulterior you; and you've no idea how drastic a difference it would be. And once in your life you wished to make that trade, to exchange this life for that other where she would live on and raise you and you speculate who you

might have been instead. But you know that cannot be and you actually would not have that. You are you, and who you are is as much because of your DNA as it is because of your experiences...and your lack of them.

Though you have no memories of the smile in the few pictures you have of her, you must trust that the smile was genuine at the time. And in one of those pictures of her smiling, you sit in her lap. And that trust must extend to her love for you. Despite her choosing to leave this life and you behind, knowing as best you can how she must have suffered, you must also believe she loved you. Because after all your memories and speculations and imaginings are compiled, the fact remains she was your mother. She should have loved you, and most likely did, and that is all you truly have.

And now free from the burden of doom that led you to once believe you too would end your own life some day, you find what little comfort you can in the prospect that you embrace life in a way she could not. Your continued existence transcends her legacy, if not absolutely refutes it; and it is a triumph, though one you do not celebrate with excessive enthusiasm. A triumph over life or over her, you're not sure and do not care to discriminate—you do not laud the victory of your own existence while disparaging hers as a failure. There is enough joy in living for you that she could not hesitate to discover;

and that touch of sadness you feel is only a reminder of all the thoughts and feelings you've considered and all the steps you've traveled to reach this destination of being.

So you forgive her; partially because you don't know what else to do or how otherwise to soothe some of the darker aches in your soul. And to some extent because it yields a compelling sensation that approaches—but arrives slightly short of—peace. You want something more, certainly; you want something as tangible as her wedding ring you found, or the recipes in her handwriting your aunt recently gave you. You want something as lively as the blood that flows through your heart. But lacking that, you will accept that forgiveness sets you both free; and that is as near to that clichéd word “closure” that you can rest.

You believe she loved you. And ultimately, you love her. Because, after all, she's your mother...and you'd rather love her than not.

And living in warmth of it, that is not as disappointing a realization as you thought it might be. Because true comfort will elude you until your final days when enlightenment will reveal what you've been lacking. Until then, preference provides more than just a simple love that suffices. Like a box containing an infinite number of smaller boxes, preference yields a key to acceptance. And there is a salvation

in that acceptance. Within salvation there exists the most perfect and genuine love. And within *that* love survives more than the essence of just you and her, but the whole of everything.