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### **Guilty as Charged, Yet...**

Usually when I feel a pang of guilt, it is after I have done something that I know I should not have done. In the heat of the moment, my impulsive mind will overcome my reasoning skills and it will only be a few seconds before I am kicking myself for my ignorant decisions. The guilt can remain for a few hours, days, weeks, or even months depending on the circumstance, but always becomes a less absorbent emotion as the incident which inflicted this guilt falls behind me with time. In the Fall of 2013, I learned that guilt is not only an emotion which *decreases* exponentially with time, but can in fact build up in your stomach, piling up until you feel like you must vomit every ounce of that feeling out of your body. It does not get better. It only gets worse.

This circumstance is unique because instead of regretting what you have done, you regret what you *will do*. You are not being impulsive; in fact, you are carefully planning out your actions to the point of nausea. This is what going to college feels like for me.

Excited, anxious, apprehensive, nervous: these are all of the words that float around our minds as seniors in high school thinking about college. “Guilty” does not fit in that category of adjectives, but in my mind, it is bolded, italicized, underlined, and capitalized. As each one of my family members moved out of our house, I saw the guilt coming.

Once, at a time I can barely remember, there were five of us. When my Dad left us in 2009, my sisters and I gathered around our mom, encouraging her to get out of bed and go back to work. Then there were four of us. A few years later, when my oldest sister left for college in 2012, we gave her hugs and warm wishes, hoping she would visit soon. And then

there were three. What seemed like a second later, my second sister headed to New England, promising she would keep in touch. Now just two left. And for the past three years, my mom and I have been waiting. Waiting for the day when I leave, and then she will be all alone. Just my mom; no husband, no children, no pets, and no family anywhere near Baltimore.

**GUILTY.**

When my second sister left, my Mom and I did not really discuss the future. We had a long four years of high school together, and we had plenty of time. But when Freshman turned to Sophomore, and Sophomore to Junior, and finally Senior year came, each year brought more guilt. The worst type of guilt is when you are conscious of your decision to hurt someone, but you realize you must do it any way. I have known for many years that I am going to leave my mom all alone. I know that it will kill her inside, yet I know that I am still going to do it. I am going to leave and go to college. But I also know that I am consciously hurting her. **GUILTY.**

In Canto XIII, the pilgrim can hear the cries for help from the second sub-circle of the seventh circle. “Then I struck out my hand a little before me and plucked a small branch from a great thorn bush; and its stem cried out: ‘Why do you split me?’” (XIII, 31-33.) As the pilgrim breaks the thorn of the damned soul, the soul immediately accuses him of inflicting pain and cries out for the pilgrim. Is this how much pain I will inflict on my mother when I leave her? Will I break her and cause her to cry out for me? Will she beg me to tell her why I am leaving her? **GUILTY.**

Although my mom does not verbally cry out for help, her actions do. She tried to hide her watering eyes on my last first day of high school. She tried to delete the emails from the realtor who is trying to find her a smaller house for next year. But I saw everything. I notice

everything she does because I go out of my way to notice. I feel like I am walking through Inferno but cannot reach out to the souls crying for help, but for me, the cries of pain come from my mother. Just like Dante, “So much pity weighs on my heart” (XIII, 82-83). The pilgrim and I are hopelessly doomed to observe misery, but not experience it the way it is experienced before our eyes. I wish I could take some of the uneasiness that my mom is feeling about the future and place it on myself, but I know that is not possible.

When Virgil is asked by among violent souls why he and the pilgrim are on this wretched journey, he replies “Necessity induces us, and not pleasure” (XII, 86-87). I have realized that it is necessary for me to move out of my home next fall and go to college to build my own life. Although it will not be pleasurable for my mother and me to leave each other, it is something we must do. Recently, I began asking my mom what she is going to do after I leave for college. She always dismisses the question and says, “You’re forgetting that you still have many months of high school left”. My mom reminds me of Virgil when she says this. In Canto I, the pilgrim immediately attempts to climb the mountain to purgatory after finding himself lost in a Dark Wood. Virgil reminds the pilgrim that he cannot reach the destination without completing the journey. In my mind, I am skipping the journey of my mother’s and my last year together and jumping to the day I leave, because I am so worried about her. Instead of climbing the mountain to college as fast as possible, I must immerse myself in the joy that my final year with my mother will bring.

In this last year, there are a few things I must accept: first, the feeling of guilt will continue to grow; every day gone by becomes a day closer to me leaving. Second, I will always worry about the sadness my mom will feel when I leave her all alone. But finally, deep down I know that she is going to be all right. My mom will not wallow in self-pity, and

will turn her empty nest into a new page of her life. Maybe she will quit the job that she hates, move to Boston with her siblings, and be happier than she ever was in Baltimore. Maybe that is possible, but for now I am just going to cherish each day we have together, before our family of five becomes a family of one.

### **Works Cited**

Alighieri, Dante, Robert Durling M., and Ronald Martinez L. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Inferno*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.