

“Alberto” is a short story about a smothered son of a smothering mother. In this excerpt, Alberto confronts his mother about the reasons for her hatred toward him.

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When Barbara came home, a few hours later, Alberto was sitting on the couch in the living room, in the dark. Turning the lights on made her wince.

“God, Alberto, what are you doing here? I thought you were somewhere with Beatrice.”

He was so tired that he didn’t even have the energy to hate her. He just wanted answers.

“Mom, do you hate me?” he asked, straight to the point.

“What’s this nonsense? You are my son, how could I hate you?”

“Be sincere. It’s just you and me.”

She scanned his face for an answer.

“Are you drunk?”

“No.”

“On drugs?”

“No.”

Barbara frowned.

“Then I don’t understand how you could ask me such a thing.”

“None of your business. Give me an answer.”

“No, I don’t hate you, Alberto. Happy now? May I go to sleep?”

“If you truly don’t, why do you treat me like dirt?”

“Because I think you are.” she answered without hesitation.

Only a few hours before, that answer would have made him crazy.

“Have you ever wanted to be my mother?”

“Until I realized what a failure you were, yes.”

“You’re lying again.”

Barbara snorted, annoyed.

“Alberto, I don’t owe you any explanation.”

“I think you owe me a lot of explanations.”

“Since when do you reply to your mother like that?”

“Since I stopped considering you my mother.”

Those words seemed to strike a chord with Barbara, but she quickly regained her composure. Her usual disdainful expression resurfaced almost immediately.

Alberto continued.

“Do you hate being *my* mother or being *a* mother?”

“All right, let’s get through with this bullshit. The first one. I wanted a different son. Someone who could carry the family name with strength and dignity.”

“So I am the problem then. If I were different, would you have treated me with respect?”

“Maybe...”

“Different how?”

“Let me think...you’re weak, insecure, too sensitive, utterly obtuse, and completely unreliable. Should I continue?”

Barbara rattled off her answer. There was no trace of remorse in her voice, only impatience.

“Have you ever thought, even for a moment, that this might be your fault?” asked Alberto.

The rabid eel in Alberto’s chest snapped awake. He didn’t want to give in to it. It would only make his mother even more abrasive.

"I did nothing but try to make up for your shortcomings. Don't blame me for your failure, Alberto."

"Unbelievable. Do you know who just told me these same words? Beatrice. You brainwashed her good, didn't you? She bought all that crap about being my fault if I'm not able to live a normal life."

Barbara smiled, satisfied.

"I did a great job with Beatrice. She was like you, when I met her: insecure, anxious, paranoid. Look at her now! She blossomed into a wonderful steel flower. Her only mistake was falling in love with you. But if I've planted my seeds in the right places, soon it won't be a problem anymore."

Alberto bolted up from the couch. He was filled with so much urge to put as much distance as possible from that woman that it made him nauseous. The eel in his chest stopped roughly around his throat, ready to rear its ugly head at the first misstep of his self-control, now on its last legs. His palms were itching, so he rubbed them on his legs. He couldn't understand why.

"Are we done with this ridiculous conversation?" asked Barbara, huffing "I would like to go to bed, if you don't mind."

Barbara couldn't tell by looking at Alberto, but something in his son's chest had ripped. Something that was pulled, yanked, scratched to the point of being unmendable: his dignity. Through the rips, glimpses of something darker and scarier wormed their way through to pollute Alberto's mind.

He turned to his mother, fists clenched, breathing heavily, palms still itchy. He gazed at Barbara with fire in his eyes. The desire to hit her, hurt her, watch her suffer and beg was filling the distance between the two like an eerie guest.

Even after figuring out what was going through his son's mind, Barbara didn't seem scared in the slightest.

"Quit it, Alberto. We both know you won't hurt me. Let me tell you how it'll go: I'll have a good night's sleep, and tomorrow everything will be back to normal. You'll wake up the useless worm you've always been, I'll still wake up as your mother. None of these things you have the power to change."

Barbara's words flew through the room like knives and sank into Alberto's chest. He collapsed to the ground. Sighs as huge as rocks filled his mouth.

"There, behaving exactly as I predicted. You're pathetic." spouted Barbara before turning the light off and marching upstairs.

Alone and desperate, Alberto cried, in the darkness of the living room, still on his knees. In the end, she won. With cruel irony, she did it by handing him exactly what he asked for: the truth. He was now sure to be the cause of his own suffering. The universe had arranged its pawns to send him to that house, with that woman, to be punished for being born.