



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY MOLLY MELITA

[point of view]



baby come back

BY | SUSIE BEDSOW HORGAN

MOTHER NATURE, AS THE NAME IMPLIES, IS UNPREDICTABLE. She gives you an amazing miracle in the form of the sweetest baby the world has ever seen. In the first instant of that little life, your heart opens wide and your child crawls inside and takes up residence there. Minutes, hours, years go by. He/she thrums away in your heart, coloring your every move, every decision and every emotion. You get used to that thrumming; it becomes part of you. You watch all your child's firsts with love and pride-filled eyes. You don't react with the terror that grips you when they take their first tumble; instead, you smile, suppress the urge to lunge for them, and encourage them to get up and go on their way. And because they didn't see the fear in your heart, they do just that; get up and go on their way. That's only one of the many times you do that for them, but it pales in comparison to what is required when they go away to college.

As long as they are in the house, underfoot, you feel their place in your heart is still fully occupied. You don't think twice as you enthusiastically jump into the car and drive hundreds of miles to walk campus after campus to help your child find the right school. You hold your thoughts inside, size him/her up out of the corner of your eye and hope that on the long drive home, they give you some inkling of their thoughts. All the while, they are still with you. They still need you to buy milk, help them sort out a problem with a teacher, and sometimes they might even want to watch a movie with you.

Then, the colleges are chosen, the applications are mailed off, and the acceptance letters come in. Before you know it, you're writing out the check that assures your child's admittance into the college of their choice. You shop for clothes. You buy special linens to fit the dorm-room bed, and you >



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You spend their
entire existence
holding on to
them for dear life
and now you're
supposed to let
them go?

imagine the proud day when you'll
drive them to school to get settled
into their new life.

And this is when Mother Nature
plays her dirty trick.

Being the brave mother you are,
you wave goodbye, and not looking
back, drive home to a place you don't
recognize. Everything is where it
was but there's a quiet you've never
experienced before. You and the
family dog stand and stare at the now
clean room that until a few days ago
was a smelly sty so dense with teenage
detritus you couldn't even enter. And
you remember your child sitting in
the midst, happily ensconced in the
cacophony of video game monsters
being killed, rock music, and IM
dings from the computer.

This new quiet is positively
deafening.

Dear old Mother Nature doesn't
prepare you for the cold, harsh empti-
ness of the empty nest. Your child is
still thrumming away in your heart
but there's nothing for you to do.
You try and turn your mind away,
but thoughts of them keep creeping
back in. Will they remember to brush
their teeth, do their laundry, or even
at least once, change those specially
bought sheets? Mother Nature gives
them to you and then, just like that,
takes them away. You spend their
entire existence holding on to them
for dear life and now you're supposed
to let them go? It's impossible. Yet,
as you stand disoriented in the middle
of your new old home, it finally hits
you; letting them go is probably the
biggest gesture of love you'll ever
make. Now you just have to figure
out how to quiet the thrumming in
your heart. ■

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