

# Grieving Your Absence While You're Still Here

Angelina Nha Quan Tran

I've missed you before you'd even left. Jumping from house to house, you told me to look for you in the dark night sky, because the moon will shine above all. You aren't gone yet, but I'm beginning to count the days I have left with you.

Tick, tick, Tick, tick,

is all I hear in the dead silence of the night.

Budump, budump, Budump, budump,

I hear the echoes of my heart syncing to the sounds of the clock and RINGGGGG.

It's midnight, so your alarm goes off. You go to pray to the ancestors, to Buddha while I lay here and listen, until I feel weak from fighting against the knight of drowsiness. I sometimes feel lost on those nights, but you said to look at the moon for guidance. You took me in at two months and by age three I've only ever known you as mom. You've watched me grow older as I've watched you grow older. You watched me, watched my parents go to war with one another and ended their love so soon.

Buddha created a path for Enlightenment and Peace. All you and I ever wanted is peace in our lives, but somehow we can't seem to take a break. You healed those scars left by my parents, and showed me what unconditional love feels like when I thought love had terms and agreements I must follow in order to earn it... like my parents divorce papers. A type of love that contains giggles of laughter, smiles that reach from one ear to the other, and comfort like the thousand of stitches between a blanket and stuffed with goose feather.

In these four walls, you used to watch me fall asleep, so I'd stop having nightmares. Funny how the dark became my best friend, for I fear something worse: not seeing you in the morning. I'm still struggling to accept the fact that you will be gone one day, but I'd rather not think about it right now. I like staying between these walls. Time feels... slower.

You've held my hand for every step I took, while I now grip your hands harder making sure you carefully take every step. You gave me strength to fight against the world, but along the way you've lost strength in your small wrinkling hands that are too smooth to help you grip, your neck that no longer holds your head up, your spine that curves down to the floor, and your legs that limp and ache in each step. I wish for more time but the clock is ticking like a time bomb and I sit here looking at the moon in the comfort of these four walls.

Nothing is better than mom's cooking since it's always filled with love. I wholeheartedly dive into its flavor because my heart knows what home tastes like.

Home is where the heart is and you're the heart of this family. I remember the days when you'd taken me to visit your son in jail. Money is all he asks, but you sit there with delicious homemade food, packed in a pink silk cloth. He never gave a care in the world even when he came out. I hoped he had changed and realized his mother had given her entire life for him, but he still comes out asking for more money and disappears. Selfish prick he is, but you continue with your selflessness and I continue to get more angry.

You are too selfless.

You gave up your own happiness, but at what cost?

Having liars as "family?"

No, that never stopped you from showing unconditional love to them. They never once gave you your peace, but here you are burning each incense praying for their health, when you should be taking care of yours. Over time, when I heard your name in the gossip that your sisters devoured and entertained, I got more angry and eventually I exploded. I let my mouth go and started the next world war. I'd never felt greater, but I didn't realize what I've done to you. By bringing up the past, painful memories flowed through these walls and reliving such trauma was never my intention. I'm sorry for not bringing peace and for not being forgiving, especially when you taught me better. Seeing you cry fueled my anger, because my unconditional love for you was like enlarged flames in a forest fire. Only after dealing with that drama and mess, I learned the value of peace over anything. I've come to understand why you turned a blind eye and dealt with the anger and pain silently. To learn acceptance.

I'd never known what to do when I saw you cry, so I watched speechlessly. We both bottle up the pain until it feels like our hearts are tearing apart and we can no longer breathe and every emotion fills these walls with water and.... \*Very Long Sigh\*

Accepting what's happened allows growth, but do I have to just accept everything as is? Why do I have to take all those punches? Do I look like a punching bag?!? Where do I draw the line?

I'm spiraling once again, but no moon tonight, so I stare at the ceiling.

So many small cracks and bumps up there.

No matter how much you paint over it or sand it down, cracks and bumps still form.

The only way to fix that is to tear the ceiling down and start from scratch. You gave up the only life you knew in Vietnam to start a new life here in America. You took scraps of knowledge that others threw away to make something, not for yourself, but for your family. Selflessness is your greatest trait but also your weakest.

I wish you were more selfish, especially with time.

You deserve the world, but even after seventy-six years, you still don't think so. Ironic how you've come to acceptance with everything except your worth. I've

watched you deal with great pain both physical and emotional, as you watched me deal with the same. Although these walls are still intertwined with generational and cultural trauma, you showed me the path to accept my past and grow from it. You drilled Buddha's words into me, but somehow the only thing I can't seem to grasp is the acceptance of your inevitable future. You are more than a role model, super hero, and guardian to me. You are part of my world, so I can't imagine a world without you.

I guess I'll have to try accepting my reality, for the moon will be my guidance when you are gone.