

CLOUD KEEPER

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SYNOPSIS

This is a story about a mom waking up one day with a cloud hovering above her head. Her cloud would refuse to leave her side. It would change shape and color depending on her mood for that day. Her daughter would notice these changes but would dread the times when it changes into a blackish-grey storm cloud. It never stops pouring during these days. Her mom would lock herself in the room and would refuse to eat. Sometimes, the cloud would change into a menacing dragon with strong claws and a spiked tail. This would mean her mother would try to hurt herself.

They decided to go to a doctor. Her mom has bipolar disorder. She would be fine on certain days because of her medication.

Until one day, a storm was brewing. They saw the warning signs and knew it would be a strong one. The cloud had a deep dark color, the color of night. In the meantime, they were shivering from the cold. Then it rained really hard. Her mother started to scream. Her daughter did her best to shelter her from the storm but the storm was relentless. So, she did what she knew could probably help her mother. She sang their special song. Her mom joined her. The storm slowly passed and they gave each other a high five. They both knew there would be other storms in the future, but now they were prepared for it. They've got this.

CLOUD KEEPER

There are mothers with big feet, thin arms, and long hair. Some tall and short, chubby and thin. There are those who wear eye glasses and braces on their teeth. Others wear long and short skirts, tight and loose pants. Then some with moles on their faces and birthmarks in other places.

My mom? She's one of a kind. She has a cloud above her head.

She woke up one day with a cloud hovering above her head. It looked like a cute and cuddly cotton ball ready to be plucked from the sky!

The cloud refused to leave her side. It followed her wherever she went: to the kitchen, the library, the bedroom, the mall, the grocery, even in the bathroom!

I've noticed it would change shape and color depending on mom's mood for the day.

The cloud would turn into a blushing rose color when her friends visit her and would form into a fish.

When she hugs and kisses me, the cloud turns into a yellow smiley face.

When she says I love you, the cloud changes to a lavender tame cat. I would even hear it purr.

When she eats her favorite food or goes to the mall, the cloud somersaults in the air, turns orange and transforms into a fairy.

But there are days when the cloud turns into a blackish-grey storm cloud. I hate it when that happens. I would hear the booming thunder and fear for the rain to come. It never stops pouring during those days because mom would lock herself in the room and cry. She will refuse to eat, too. I would hear her cry and I could feel my heart aching. My heart would feel like someone was squeezing it too tightly. I could only look and hold her. And see the cloud change into giant

boulders rolling down the steep hill, of snakes chasing after mom, and her image drowning in the sea.

“I’m here, Mom, don’t cry,” I would tell her. “I will not leave you.”

Sometimes, the cloud would turn into a roaring and fearsome lion, a menacing dragon with strong claws and a spiked tail, or a ferocious gnarly beast with sharp teeth and a long flickering tongue. My heart beats even faster when I see these. Because mom would try to hit herself next. She would pinch herself or slap her face. I would then hug her real tight and wait for the cloud to turn into a slimy green big boat. Once it happens, mom’s breathing slows down. The crying would stop. And she would firmly hug me back.

My I love you’s for her are not enough during the rainy days. She would still have the storm cloud above her head. Sometimes it rains, sometimes it’s just a dark hovering cloud. There are times it would rain lightly, a soft drizzle on her head. Or when her mood strikes, a heavy downpour leaving her wet and shivering.

So, we decided to go to a doctor.

Mom was really nervous that day. As I was holding her hand, I felt it shaking against mine. She needed an explanation for what was happening to her. The doctor was a petite young woman. She gave me a lollipop and smiled warmly at me.

I heard her ask mom questions on how she was feeling and what she does on those days. I heard big words like trigger and hyper activity. I heard her answer the doctor truthfully. The doctor was kind to my mom. She patiently answered her questions. Mom even asked the doctor if it was okay to cry sometimes! The doctor said yes. I felt relieved. Mom almost always cries on certain days. The doctor advised us to come back for more tests.

Mom was scared. She told me it felt like she was being graded.

“You’ll do great, Mom,” I said. “Do you need to study for the test?”

I wondered why but she laughed so hard when I said that. She just gave me a kiss and said “No, it will be fine.”

Mom did a series of tests. She kept giving me the thumbs up sign while she was answering the tests given by the doctor. The doctor also asked her questions. I felt so proud of her. I just knew she’d ace it.

One day, the doctor called my mom. She had gotten the test results already.

At the clinic, I saw mom and the doctor talk in hushed tones. I could not hear exactly what they were saying but I saw mom crying. I stood up from where I was sitting and stood beside her. I hugged her real tight. I was worried and confused. What did the kind doctor tell my mom?

“Why is my mom crying?” I asked.

“ She’s just overwhelmed by the news. Your mom has bipolar disorder,” said the doctor. “Her brain works differently and she has a hard time handling her emotions. There will be days she can be very happy, and some days she will feel really sad. There will also be days she would have low mood and days with high mood.”

I began to worry. My heart began to beat faster.

“Doctor,” I asked. “I sometimes feel happy and sad. Do I have it, too?”

“No, your mom’s illness is not contagious. It is not like the flu. It’s normal to experience different feelings. It’s okay to feel happy, sad, and angry. Or whatever emotion you may be feeling at the moment. Your mom just has a different way of handling her emotions. Sometimes, she will do scary things or happy things. She can’t control her feelings. That’s why I am here to help her and you, too,” said the doctor.

The doctor gave my mom medicines to calm her down and help with her moods. At home, after taking the pill, I noticed the cloud to be unusually calm and quiet. It would lazily drift, flit, and float. It would transform to a cute Chow Chow dog or into a Siamese cat waiting to be petted. Mom would be her usual self. She would play ball with me or help arrange my dolls by height and hair color. We would eat ice cream and tell each other jokes. Meanwhile, the Chow Chow cloud would frolic around and bark happily. Mom would then pet the cloud and laugh heartily.

Until one day, a strong storm was brewing. My mom saw the warning signs. The cloud had a deep dark color, the color of night. It was getting thicker and heavy with the rain waiting to escape. The air was cold enough for us to shiver.

Mom started to pray. I joined her in prayer. We both prayed that God would calm the storm and let her be okay. I saw mom's eyes fill with tears. It made me want to cry, too. We both knew that this storm was going to be a tough one. Mom took her medicine and waited for it to do its job.

In the meantime, we could already hear the soft rumbling of thunder. I even saw lightning strike the cloud. I was fearful for my mom. It started to rain really hard.

Suddenly, mom screamed. "Stop it!" she screamed again and again. I sheltered her from the storm by hugging her real tight. I was afraid to let go. I kept saying "I'm here, Mom." I rubbed her arms and cried with her. She was having a hard time calming herself.

I didn't know what else to do. All I could think of was to fight back.

"Go away! Go away! Leave my mom alone!" I shouted. Still, the cloud never parted, never left my mom's side. The thunder was starting to scare me. It was a heavy downpour. I started to cry. I felt so helpless.

"Stop! Ayoko na!" I would hear mom scream.

I felt weak, defeated. I needed to calm her down. I began to think back on the days when she would comfort me. And then I remembered our special song. Mom would sing this to me whenever I was hurt or sad. It was my turn to sing it back to her. My mom needed me.

So, I started to sing. I sang to her our special song. Mom became quiet. She was shocked I could tell. I heard her sniffle. She was listening intently to my song. She stopped crying. Then she shyly joined me. She sang softly at first while drying her eyes. Then it got louder. We were already on the second chorus when the rain stopped pouring. We were left with the soft pitter patter of rain. The cloud slowly changed back to a white fluffy cloud and changed into an eagle flying in the sky.

Mom started to giggle softly, then burst into laughter. I joined in. We gave each other a high five.

“Will it always be like this, Mom?” I asked her. I had to know. I was worried for her.

“Yes, but you need not worry, Anak,” Mom said. “There will be good days and bad days. There will even be better days. There will be dark and light clouds. But with you beside me, I have nothing to fear. I can handle it whether or not the cloud leaves me. I will be okay.”

“I love you, Mom,” I said while hugging her.

“I love you, too, Anak.”

The storm was over for now. But now, we knew how to prepare for it. We could do this together. We had this. My mom is strong.

My mom has a cloud hovering above her head. And I’m proud of her.