

## The Storm

**Author :** Mike Lewis

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The room was 8 ft by 8 ft with an 8 ft ceiling. Each surface of the walls, the ceiling and floor was covered with dingy gray canvas mats. A single lightbulb, set in the ceiling and protected by a steel grill, spilled harsh light into the cell 24 hours a day, ensuring that attendants could easily observe any activity of its occupant when looking through the protective glass window of the door, the only access to the room.

A thin, naked woman sat huddled in the far corner, her head between her drawn-up knees, her arms clinched tightly around her legs, swaying almost imperceptibly to a rhythm only she could hear. Her long black hair, once full and shiny, lay in limp, dirty strings across her hunched shoulders, her sides and thighs a pasty white with visible bones under the skin. Despair and fear seeped into the corridor, the only emissions from the sound-proofed room. The woman was broken, without hope, and she was my mother.

I ran from the hospital, barely able to contain my tears of fear and rage. At fourteen, I thought I could handle anything. I had helped my father in his home construction projects since I was eight, added a morning and evening newspaper route for the *Wichita Falls Record News* at ten, and began working full time in the summers as a busboy in a popular restaurant at twelve. My earnings paid for clothes and entertainment, and my car, which I had purchased shortly after my birthday in January that year. I was 6 ft and weighed 170 pounds; I had survived street battles with older boys as much as five years older, and I had some experience with drinking and sex. But I was not prepared to see my mother that day in those circumstances. I sat sobbing in my car, slamming my fists into the steering wheel, screaming curses at God, ashamed for myself and her, blaming the hospital for putting her misery and nudity on display, my Dad for not rescuing her, and myself for my failures as a son.

[The Storm](#) is a short biographical piece about the consequences of growing up with a mentally ill parent. At the same time, it is a tale of love, forgiveness, and learning that people do the best that can with what life has given them. There is no love as deep as a parent for a child and no hurt as sharp as rejection by a parent of a child. "The Storm" is available through [Amazon](#).

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