

# Title: Echos

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In the calm of the night, whilst deep in his sleep, Joseph was abruptly awakened out of his slumber. His eyes opened wide and stared into the abyss of darkness ahead, as he gasped for air. He sat upon his bed and looked around to see what was going on. In his head, he kept hearing his mother's voice, like a ghost who would silently haunt his existence; her voice was always there with him. Ever since she had died and moved on, Joseph was under the impression that she was still there, not in reality, but in some sort of supernatural way like one would see in the movies. During the eerie hours of the night, a breeze blew in from the window, and Joseph began to shiver on the spot. Gazing out of the window, the rustling of decaying leaves coupled with the snapping of twigs riddled the air with an almost horror-movie like vibe. He slid out of bed, locked the window shut, and waddled over to the kitchen to get a glass of water. It was still the early days of autumn, so little remnants of the summer still showed up here and there and were sometimes accompanied by a peculiar rise in temperature.

Joseph stood in the kitchen, glass in hand, sinking into a trance of thought before snapping out of it and returning back to his bed. He cranked up the AC and pulled the covers over his head. Underneath the sheets, he wept as he began to miss his mother, as she had passed away three years before, after struggling with diabetes for much of her adult life. The condition had riddled her with pain, and doctors' visits started to become more frequent as her end drew near. Joseph always stood by his mother's side to make sure she was as comfortable as possible. He did everything that he thought and believed would be enough to support her, but in his head, he always wondered if he had done enough. Did she get what she was entitled to; did she leave anything out when caring for her? These questions were always swarming around his head, and he wondered if they were true. A direct result of this wondering was that she now always lived in his head, not like some sort of disease, but as a part of who he was. It is for this reason that he always felt as if she was right there with him, even if it was just in spirit.

The next day, Joseph decided to dress better than usual for work. He pulled out a powder blue shirt, dark blue dress pants, and a dark blue blazer. He added to this a red tie and silver cufflinks, he felt he looked like a man ready to make a difference. He did not always dress this way and would often barely dress appropriately for the occasion. However, the nature of his work forced him to dress in a way that he wasn't comfortable with, but because his job brought in the money, he had no choice. He walked out of the door, locking it behind him. He walked to the bus stop and waited for his daily commute. Standing next to him was a mother and her baby in his cart. While Joseph was scrolling through his emails, he felt as if someone was looking at him,

he looked around, and everyone seemed to be minding their own business. When he looked down, the little baby was staring at him with his eyes and mouth wide open. Glistening against the morning sun, the baby's eyes stared at him lovingly, which made Joseph smile from ear to ear.

*"What a lovely little baby you have,"* he said to the mother.

*"Oh, this little guy? He's alright,"* his mother replied with a chuckle.

In the distance, the bus horn blared, and everyone got ready to board their bus. It screeched to a halt in front of the stop, and people began boarding. While Joseph waited for his turn, his phone rang. He pulled it out of his pocket and sighed when he saw who it was, the person on the other end was his friend Dardel. He and Joseph went way back, having met in their teenage years and developing a friendship ever since, serving to build an established and enduring bond. There had been some ups and downs over the years within the friendship, but nevertheless, they had persevered. Recently, Joseph had been avoiding Dardel because he owed him some money. Joseph was going through some tough times and had asked Dardel for some financial help since he was doing fairly well for himself. He loaned the money without hesitation and paid the people that he owed, but still owed Dardel. Times were tough, and he wasn't able to get it back as fast as he would have liked to, but Dardel didn't care. He knew what his friend was going through and had never even asked for the money. Out of guilt, Joseph was avoiding Dardel in order to save face, which seemingly wasn't necessary. Joseph answered the phone whilst shaking:

*"How are you, Dardel? I've missed you."* inquired Joseph.

*"I'm doing very well thanks, How about you? It's been a while,"* replied Dardel.

*"It just works bro, there's always so much of it."* Joseph sheepishly responded.