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‘Surface Pressure’ from ‘Encanto’ is the Mom Anthem of 2022

Under the surface, mothers are crying internally every time their kids request this poignant tune.



Who are moms if they can't carry it all? (Image: Disney)

“If you could have any special power, what would it be?” asked my eight-year-old daughter.

“Hmmm,” I pondered. “I think I’d want super strength so I could handle anything.”

“Oh, so you want to be Luisa!” she said, as she grabbed the remote to queue up *Encanto*.

I had no idea what or who she was talking about, but I settled back on the couch with her to enjoy the latest Disney film. I am, after all, a Lin-Manuel Miranda mega-fan.

“That’s you, Mom! That’s Luisa! She’s the strong one!” As I took in Luisa’s statuesque, muscular visage, I was flattered beyond measure. My daughter was right. I’d love to be buff, resilient, and can-do like Luisa Madrigal. She held my dream superpower.

Then came Luisa’s eye twitch as the song “Surface Pressure” kicked in, and I saw myself for real. The veneer cracks when the burdens become too much to bear. That’s me.

Hell, that’s every mom.

Throughout the pandemic, systemic inequities that disproportionately affect women have been brought to even greater attention, and article upon article was written about how mothers are bearing the brunt. The “mental load” — the invisible work that mothers tend to handle, like doctor’s forms or calendar scheduling or any other unfinished item that wakes us up in the middle of the night in a sweaty panic — increased exponentially as work, school, and home swirled together like a chaotic tornado. The moms are not OK, friends.

And this mom felt the lump harden in her throat the minute Luisa growled the line, “*I’m pretty sure I’m worthless if I can’t be of service...*” I immediately stopped doing a side-eye scroll through emails on my cell phone and stared without blinking at Luisa as she battled foes. She walked a tightrope. She took on a three-headed dragon. The ground shook and cracked underneath her, and she dove right into the abyss.

I am familiar. I live in service to my kids and their well-being. I do my best to shield them from all that is scary in this wild world, holding a stoic expression as my nerves zip and snap inside. I feel the sway between work and family, yet I stay steady while my happiness hangs in the balance. I have a perpetual worry that something is going to hurt us, but like Luisa, I see if I can hang on a little longer. This pandemic has to end sometime, right?

Pressure like a drip, drip, drip that’ll never stop...

As the bridge of the song kicked in, Luisa floated on clouds, expectations lifted, and the opportunity for joy, rest, and recharging loomed. My heart ached for her...and me.

For weeks, I've been trying to find a time or a place where I could be alone with no responsibilities in place. I love my kids, but I've been bearing their burdens for almost two years. If I was alone, I could read a book. I could finish my coffee before it turns cold. Maybe I could find somewhere to rest in the sun and just relax.

But, I stop short of making an actual plan to chill. Where would I go? COVID adds a layer of complexity and concern to even the most minimal plan. When would I go? There's too much to attend to; my daughter has an appointment with the allergist later this week and my son has a flag football game this weekend. How can I possibly step away?

Cuz all we know is...Pressure like a drip, drip, drip that'll never stop...

By the end of the song, I was in full-blown tears. My sobbing in Disney movies tends to be reserved for the end of the movie. My daughter looked at me in confusion as I wiped my running nose with my sweatshirt sleeve. It was obvious that I was tip-tip-tipping and I just went pop.

“Surface Pressure” represents a wake-up call to moms everywhere. Don't keep it under the surface. You cannot carry it all, nor should you. We all need some dancing donkeys to force us into a hammock. It's time to schedule some rest, or you just might break.

No pressure.