

1.

My mother's words are that of a schoolyard bully. My father says that she just has a unique way of showing love, but love is not abuse.

Her words are slimy and greasy, drenched in a form of hatred that is not a mother's love.

*"You are a failure, you understand that! It's as if you don't even try."*

With every passing insult she gives, the rift between us grows. I think it might be clear to her that her vile words have festered animosity between us, but she still questions why I don't call her. I blame it on the time zone difference, it's hard to communicate when you're 12,000km apart. But truly I do not want to speak to her.

As I grow older and observe more freely, I see what my mother could have been. I do not resent what didn't happen, because there is no way to change my life. However, I wished she had gone about it differently.

At nineteen, her words are so repetitive, she might as well have carved them into my skin.

*"Failure."*

*"You never get anything right. You're practically worthless."*

*"You should lose some weight. You're beginning to look fat."*

*"You are the biggest disappointment in my life."*

Sometimes I wish she did so I could finally heal from her words.

My father likes to say, it's because of her upbringing that she is tough on me. It's the only thing we have in common. But if she knew the pain delivered by a mother, why would she bear it on me?

2.

I can still hear the echoes of the screams when I presented her with the acceptance letter and the crinkling of the fire as she threw it in. My last bit of love for her burned with that paper and our relationship was served by the cords. I thought she would have been proud.

Dad said she just doesn't like the thought of me travelling so far from home. But both of us know it's because she can't control me.

She ignored me for days after it, threatening that if I should leave the country she would never speak to me again. I called her bluff, packed a suitcase and left. She didn't contact me for two months.

In those week's I became a new person, not weighed down by the torment of a family member and could choose what I wanted to do without someone ridiculing me. I was like a pet bird who finally got a taste of fresh air and never wanted to go back inside the house.

When I finally received word from her, it wasn't the apology I had been hoping for. My mother had ransacked the hearts of my family members playing out to be the victim. My family members were quick to judge me for leaving my mother and the overwhelming feeling of failure led me to text her first.

I sit and think about all these things as I type a reply to her latest text message, asking me to come home for Christmas. Alila has also asked me to spend Christmas with her. She said it would save me money and I would be able to meet her family.

I wouldn't be going 'home' for christmas, if i stayed with my parents. I find no reason to see them and face judgement for crimes I haven't committed.

"No."

I type but don't press send.

"No, sorry."

"No, sorry. Money is tight right now so I don't think I'll make it home."

"No, sorry. I hate you and wouldn't think about spending Christmas with a person who hates me."

"No, sorry. I have a lot on right now to do with exams and am just going to stay here and study. Merry Christmas!"

I don't send any of the messages.

I open dad's contact instead.

"Hey, Dad. I hope you are doing well. Just letting you know that I have decided to stay here for Christmas as money is a little tight and I have a lot going on. Alila said I could stay with her so I'm travelling down to her parent's house next week. I'm so sorry I couldn't make it to see you! Maybe in the summer. I love you lots."

I know she will not be happy.

My phone rings 10 minutes after the message is sent. The dooming ringtone I set matches the feelings in my stomach.

“Hello?”

*“Why are you not coming home for Christmas? Do you not love me or your family anymore? Would you rather spend it with those Americans than me, your mother?” She demands.*

“Like I told Dad, I have exams coming up and do not have enough money to visit this year.”

*“This is why you should have stayed at home. You could have gone to a good university and studied medicine instead of wasting your time at art school. All those hours I put into you and you throw it away for a mediocre degree. You will go nowhere in life, you will become a failure. What am I supposed to say to my friend’s when they ask what you are doing? You are shaming the entirety of your family by pursuing arts. Your cousin went off and studied medicine, what couldn’t you have too!”*

I pick up a spare pencil near my desk and start to sketch along a canvas in front of me. The lines morph into a face and the telephone bleeds from the canvas. The woman taking shape has weird contorted features making her ugly. I’m lost in the feeling of drawing and imagining a new world in my art piece. A place where my mother's words do not affect me. Or perhaps they do.

The graphite smudges on my fingers and much like my mothers' words, it’s hard to wash off. But somehow I do.

At some point, she hangs up but I don’t find myself caring.

3.

My professor stands in front of the piece and smiles.

“Well your work sure paid off Alessia, this piece is truly stunning.”

I beam at the praise and glance at the finished painting.

Hours and weeks spent hunched over the canvas, drawing, painting, ripping, smudging, all for it to come together into this piece.

We look at the women hunched over the phone yelling into it. The words that fly out from her mouth stain her skin and fade into wrinkles that will affect her for the rest of her life. Blood pours from the telephone dripping onto her hands. Her teeth are yellow and tiny little rocks

indent her skin. She sits on a playground slide, her body is squished against the sides of it. She's clearly too big to be on the thing. She's too busy yelling at the phone to notice what's going on behind her. Bulldozers and machinery are tearing apart the playground she sits on.

Soon the spot she sits in will be torn down too and she will be moved over, to let bigger things take her place.

I look at her and my mother stares back at me.

"This truly is amazing. I'm sure if I sent some photo's out to some of my acquaintances, someone would love to meet with you about your art. It truly is magnificent." Professor Martin gushes, running his fingers carefully over it and then down to the metallic plaque.

*Words have consequences. A painting by Alessia Harworth.*

*A reminded to all that see this work, that words can not be brushed off like graphite on a shirt but instead stain like oil paints*

"Your essay, detailing your process and the symbolism is well written. Professor Phillips said that it was excellent. Overall we are very impressed with your work this semester Alessia."

He hand's over the score sheets with feedback from both him and Professor Philips. I smile at the red A that stands out on the sheet. Clapping me gently on the back, he leaves to look at Georgia's piece and I'm alone with the women again.

I glance at the woman and hold up the piece of paper in front of her.

"Your hatred has brought me three good things now." I say to her, pointing proudly at the big red A.

For the first time in my life, I feel truly free. 128 days are marked on the whiteboard in my dorm room, a reminder of when I blocked my mothers number, severing her from my life. I have had to cut off 4 other family members and it's been 4 months since my father last contacted me asking me to just forgive her. It seems people are taking her side.

I don't mind, not really. I've only got three good things from her hatred. While I have 128 from cutting her off.