

April 19th

Unknown street
A US town, one of the states
Postcode not given

Dear mom,

I started this letter with the idea that I was going to tell you everything that pains me about your existence. Revenge achieved by stabbing you with every shard of heartache you inflicted upon me. Every role you didn't play. All the times I felt abandoned. The grief I felt because you denied me of having the mother you didn't. But I am so like you. To blame you would be to blame a reflection of myself.

In the voids you left I built a forge for resilience. Everything I could criticize you for is things that in the end made me stronger. Gave me the strength to leave, to protect myself, and the right to power over my existence.

When I talked to you on the phone last night, you were just as I always remembered you. Blurring the lines between parent and child we danced through roles we were never fully allowed to inhabit. I listen to you as you try and piece together the puzzle of your memory. I stared at the bricks of my apartment wall. My eyes numb, silencing the child screaming inside. Tracing the lines between bricks as you slowly remember everything that happened. Mom, you are a newborn discovering the world for the first time. I am an adult who already knows the pain you will discover. I clash with a primal urge to protect you from a truth that threatens to consume us both. Me telling you about all the times your husband screamed in my 12-year-old face because he could see I knew that your so-called love for him was fading. At that moment I am your daughter begging, pleading, desperately praying that you will listen. The hope I cling to that you will comfort me is smashed by your broken sobs. I switch back to being a mother.

How many times will I listen to your fleeting declarations of independence? How many times will you tell me, "It's over, I'm going to leave" and then a week later we're right back where we started? How many times will you tell me everything I've known about him but deny it the next day? One day,

"I deserve better. He's an asshole I'm leaving"

A 10-year-old version of myself comforting you on a day supposed to celebrate your birth,

"I know Mom, I know. You can let go", I whispered a mantra from a voice of innocence forced to carry years of wisdom too soon.

The next day,

"It's amazing. He has been so nice recently"

A 20-year-old version of myself on the sidewalk outside of my apartment the morning after breaking up a 2-year relationship. I am a child who needs a mother as I struggle to write the first lines of my own independence. But I tell that child to shut up and ask,

"Yes but how long will that last?". Knowing all too well this fall from determination to submission.

You pause before replying. An echo of uncertainty that reverberates within the chasm of our shared history,

"I don't know".

April 20th

Unknown street
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Dear mom,

I wrestle with the definition of that title.

"Mom."

Was a mother something I had but lost? Or is it something I was never given? Is it a maternal presence that is promised to be in your life but comes in and out like tides upon the shore? Except for the moments between high and low tide, presence and absence; stretched between years rather than mere hours? Picking up right where you left off as if you've always existed alongside me. An invisible spectator just outside the borders of my consciousness.

The phone rings. Your voice is carried through the cord from an unknown location. My grandmother turns to me and matter-of-factly states,

"That was your mom. She wanted to know how you are and she's in California".

There you are. A fleeting picture of a mother. A faceless figure in a painting of California colored by muted tones. That was my mom on the other end of the phone. I grasp at your voice but it slips through my fingers like sand. I blink and respond with a hollow,

"Great". But what is great? I do not know.

Another piece of mom. Flashing in bright yellow. You sit on the couch, weaving tales of a universe in which we have a shared story. A tale of fantasy, not reality. An hour and a half, high tide promises to stay but recedes into the ocean, merging with currents of time that defy quantification.

Is a mother like the flight of a bird? You nurture me in your womb, carry me around, and resist the toxins that flow through the roots of our family tree. But upon my arrival, you took off. Left me on a journey of existential questioning. What did you see in me that caused you to take flight?

Is to be a mother to say "fuck you". Forever migrating on a path that cannot be traced? Reminding me of what your voice sounds like as it promises to call again but hangs up and stays silent for so long. Any memories left behind are painted over by time.

When you called yesterday, you started as always with an apology. A testament to the absence that defines your existence. I give a simple greeting,

"Fuck you".

Two words encapsulate the complexity of what I have come to know as "mother". I hang up on you. Silence lingers in the air of my college dorm.

April 23rd

Unknown street
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Dear mom,

How can I be a mother if I was never given the script that would tell me how to play that role? Is it a fleeting moment where addictions pause; refraining from picking up the bottle until the tiny life growing inside of me is no longer tethered to me by a cord? A flicker of nine months passed, only to pick it all back up again. Drown in self-absorption and forget the extension of my own being. Is the severing of the umbilical cord the moment when you are released from any maternal responsibility?

Can we ever fully detach from our mothers or are they like an insidious drug we can never fully deprive ourselves of? As you endured your own story of trauma while I was in your womb, I absorbed every tear, every punch, and every agony. Your tears soaked into my cells forever. They are woven into my genetic code. A predetermined set of traits that poisoned your life will be my burden to carry. Your legacy is one of chronic pain. A pain that will continue to write the stories of my children and grandchildren yet to be born.

Our existence, only separated by the borders of time and space, echoes in harmony throughout generations. The sound of my body slamming against a wall echoed by my granddaughter pinned to cold dark asphalt. I clutch my stomach where I carry my son resisting against the claws digging into my back. The same claws that fifty years later will grip his daughter's mouth as she struggles to scream. I can see that girl struggling to unleash the terror that haunts the existence of our maternal line. She is desperate to be the one who breaks the cycle.

Was the first mother a syringe of heroin, coursing through the veins of our family tree? Addicted to the man-made safety staying quiet is rewarded with. Satan whispering in our ears to eat from the forbidden tree so that we can play God. Creating a legacy of horror we refuse to acknowledge or even try to repair. We forsake the children we create, our existence only preserved in a holy book that starts to mean nothing the more it is read.

But I can't blame you for passing down a maternal story of horror to me. Feeling both rage and empathic longing for the happy ending you didn't or maybe couldn't write. Because when I birthed my son, I too ate from the tree. Disappeared from his existence and left him to pick up the shattered pieces. Letting fate decide whether he will be the one to fix our broken legacy.

April 22nd

Unknown street
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Dear mom,

You exist in my memory but not as a physical presence full of light and color. A muted shadow that walks the hallways of my childhood home like a ghost or perhaps a better simile is a demon. You exist in the house but I can't talk to you. I can't get you to stay.

I despised you but at the same time needed to know you were okay. Perhaps it's just natural biology for a child to worry about their mother. Or maybe part of me, rather all of me, was terrified that one day you would leave and never come back.

The summers we spent 2,000 miles apart and days spent watching you jump from 10,000 feet above. Will you come back or not, will you land or not land, do you want to be my mother or are you done?

I struggle to acknowledge the abandonment I felt, because if you were still physically with me in flickering moments, is that being abandoned?

April 25th 2024

Unknown street
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Dear mom,

Mother
Verb

1. To raise a child with care and affection

If it means care and affection, then why does that word feel like a dagger to my heart?

Some nights when I blur my world with alcohol, I scroll through all of the texts between you and me that I have screenshotted. Moments captured digitally serve as evidence of when you're a better mom for your students than you ever were for me. You call them "your girls". I never felt like yours.

What is it to be a mom? Is it to choose when you're ready to play that role decades after your children are born? To condemn your daughter to a life of abandonment until she doesn't need a mother anymore. Force her to watch you endure the sins of her father and not running when she's just 10 years old and saying,

"Mom we need to go."

Waiting to listen until that 10-year-old is a decade older, living in a city hundreds of miles away, disconnected from you emotionally and physically. Leaving now won't make up for the two decades she spent being a mother but never learning how to play the role of child. In her urban safety, she's asked by new figures, "Where did you spend your childhood?"

She can't answer, not because of the memory gaps that formed to shield her from the painful truth, but because the definition of childhood is not in her vocabulary. But if the question was,

"Where did you spend your motherhood?"

That she could answer.

An image of a house in the middle of open land, where love was scarce but abandonment was as plentiful as the surrounding endless fields of corn.