

When I think of my mother I think of needing gloves. Her hands were always cold. They weren't hands created for touching, they were not made for affection. It's almost as if the temperature dropped when my mother walked into a room. Because the second she would, the comfortable, calm, warm feeling that may have occupied the space moments before seems to depart. Her hair was artificially blonde and very thin, it never had much volume to it. I can't remember if I've ever touched it but I've always imagined it as fluffy and light, like a fresh snow. Cold.

The moment I pull into her driveway, my whole body tenses. The pit of my stomach becomes both heavy and weak. I sit for a minute, almost forgetting why I'm here. There are one hundred thoughts racing through my head that I can't seem to slow. Either that or there's none. Her car is parked next to mine. It gives the illusion that somebody is home. I wonder how long it will stay there. I wonder how long until this house becomes somebody else's home. It was never mine. Or it was never truly a home at all. I glance into the driver's side window, I see paperwork scattered throughout the passenger and back seats. When I think of my mother I think of *scattered*.

She was always working. She always had a patient who needed her, forms to fill out or a phone call to make. There was always someone more important waiting for her at work. Being a mother was never her priority, her first job; the way other mother's talked about it. Either that or it was only her job. She always mentioned wanting to quit. Wanting to run away. So I made it easier for her. You can't quit a job you've been fired from. Her last job was booze. She'd been sober for as many years as I'd been alive. There are no coincidences.

As I walk to the front door, I think of my sisters. I hate how broken they are. I hate how I wish I felt their ache. I find the spare key under the mat; Cliché. I've never had a key to this

house. I can already imagine how it looks inside. There will be a pile of mail on the kitchen table, clean laundry unfolded in baskets, a trail of dog food throughout the halls. I can still hear her screaming, “Damon!” at one of her many dogs. She was always yelling at somebody. It seems as if her vocal chords were perfectly constructed to give her a voice that's meant to always sound like it's delivering bad news. If there was a happy sounding pitch available to her somewhere, she never wanted to try it out. Maybe she was never given the opportunity to try a happy voice, as she seldom said happy things. Even her words were cold. When I think of my mother I think of *screaming*.

I don't know why I wore black today. It wasn't intentional. How do you mourn the loss of a person you never had? She used to always remind me that she was my mother. It was as if I kept forgetting. But that wasn't true. You forget *mediocre*, you forget *normal* or *typical*. You cannot forget a mother who forgot you. People keep telling me how sorry they are for my loss. How they can't imagine what I am feeling right now. Only half of that is true. I haven't actually lost anything. I feel guilty for saying, “thank you.” I don't know how else to respond. There's cat hair all over my pants. I don't know why I wore black today.

The house looks just as I expected it to but feels entirely different. There are at least 4 pictures of each of my sisters on the fridge and more on the walls. I'm not sure whether or not I feel angry. I scan the room. There's a few dirty dishes left out on the table and five chairs sloppily pushed in. I imagine a family dinner: my mother, her husband and my three younger sisters. I imagine lukewarm mac 'n' cheese and uncomfortable dinner conversation. I imagine there were very little dinners that ended with all five at the table. Without someone storming away in a huff. I can't imagine a sixth chair. There are dead flowers on the counter top next to the table. I wonder how long they've been there.

The phone rings. I don't know who would be calling. I called last week. Talking to my mother was like nails on a chalk board, math problems, an interrupted sleep. I felt my body tense up with each word she spoke, each excuse she contrived, every sentiment she forced. So much of my energy went into holding back, biting my tongue, barely tolerating. When you finished a conversation with my mother you'd sigh. But you'd never feel relief. You'd exhale all of the words you held in, hoping the one's she didn't would follow suit. But they'd stay with you. They stay with me. They've built a home in me. When I think of my mother, I never think of *home*.

I was right about the pile of unopened mail in the middle of table. I sift through it, remembering why I'm here. I find the letter addressed to me that I was supposed to pick up from her last week. I wonder what would have happened if I had. I don't allow myself to wonder for too long. As I'm about to leave the kitchen and the house for the last time, I notice a small corner of a photograph peeking out behind an envelope. I move the envelope and see myself. It's a picture of me at my senior prom, 6 years ago. It has to be the only picture she had of me as a teenager. It looks worn. There's a small circle in the top left corner, a magnet imprint. I stare at the picture. Every now and then, I'll see her face in mine. A freckle underneath my right eye that usually goes unnoticed will suddenly stand out. It's as if it was removed from my mother's face just for a moment and placed on to mine. And I'll feel angry and cold. And sometimes sad. When I think of my mother I think of *angry and cold*. When I think of my mother I think of *sad*. And sometimes, when I think of my mother I think of *me*.