

My Mother's Daughter

I'm seven years old, crawling under the covers of my parents bed as I drift off to sleep to the sound of *Kipper the Dog* mixing with my mom's breathing. I blink and I'm nine, unable to contain my laughter as my mom and I sneak to cut lilacs from the neighbor's bush. I'm eleven. We're in the car, Metro Station blaring as we sing off-key along with the lyrics.

I'm thirteen, and my dad has broken my heart for the thousandth time. I see my mom, frantically gathering the pieces of my heart and gluing them back together with bits of her heart, a beautiful mosaic of all that is good in my world. I blink again. Seventeen this time. My grandmother is gone. I want to hold my mom like she did me every time my heart was shattered as a child. Hug her and tell her everything will be okay. Because it will be. Because she's my mom.

Because of her, I am me. Because of her, I am strong. Because of her, I can stand up to my shell of a dad. Because of her, I don't take no for an answer. Because of her, I drive a little slower and I laugh a little louder. I like tomatoes because my mom likes them. I tell Taylor to stop yelling when I pull in the driveway because my mom plays her radio too loud too.

I love my cats because she loves cats. I cry chest-aching tears in private because she did before she left my dad, and I carry the tumultuous storm that is my father within me because she withstood the weather for years, with only a thin metaphorical poncho when what she needed was a canopy.

I'm twenty-one now. Yearning for the warmth and safety I felt at seven in my parents bed. Wishing I could laugh like I did at nine with stolen lilacs clutched in my hands. Still singing to Metro Station as bad as I did at eleven. Hoping I don't feel the gut-wrenching pain of being let down by my dad again like I did at 13 but knowing it will happen again. And when it does, I know I'll have my mom.

We'll throw the shards of my broken heart in the tires of my dad's newest unaffordable car. We'll go home and stay up all night gossiping about everything and everyone. I'll say something entirely ludicrous, and her mother will come tumbling out of her mouth as she reprimands me. Because just like I am my mother, she is hers. Both of us versions of all the women who come before us. And when it's my turn to celebrate half a century of this beautiful life I was gifted, I hope to be half the person my mom is.