

Pearls

i.

Complicated.

Her wide array of feelings over the past month condensed into a single world.

Complicated.

It was all, always so very complicated.

She was in charge now. That's what they said, hidden among the jokes about having ice cream for breakfast and abolishing bed time. It was clear, she now had a new role.

Despite what everyone told her, she wasn't grown up. She was just the opposite. She was still discovering the world and her place in it.

Was.

Perhaps the universe had had enough of her musing and decided it would simply give her a place so she might stop asking. She wished she never learned to speak.

She was cleaning, because she now had to, when she came across the journal. She tried to tell herself that she shouldn't look in it, that her mother, even now, deserved privacy. But her curiosity got the best of her, as always. How many times had she been scolded for it? She looked anyway.

There was a picture tucked in the front cover. She traced the outline of her own, young face that grinned a gap-tooth smile back up at her. It had been taken before the boys were born, when it was just her.

Short notes, thoughts, and plans littered the pages. A small scribble dated 15 years ago informed her that her first word had been 'mama.'

She continued to flick through it, pausing to look at the pictures scattered throughout, ones she'd never seen before despite being the subject of them all. She stopped on one from when she was four. She was standing in her room, smiling at herself in the mirror as she twirled in her brand-new dress. It was the first time she picked her own clothes, and she'd been so happy.

There was a note on the page next to it:

*She told me she wanted to be just like me when she grows up.
What a horrible fate for a little girl.*

ii.

She blinked once, twice, three times. It wasn't long after that, only a year or two, that she remembered refusing to put on a dress.

People told her that she was growing up. She hated it.

And it wasn't just dresses. It was princesses and jewelry and pink and glitter. It was girlhood.

If it wasn't for the corner of the picture sticking out of the pages, she would've just put it down and walked away. It was her first day of second grade. She bore a noticeably smaller smile.

That wasn't her favorite year. She couldn't tell you why, though. All she remembered was being angry.

Grief. That was the year she had learned that word. What was she mourning? What had she lost?

It wasn't long after that picture had been taken that her mother had gotten pregnant again. That she could remember clearly. It was weird to her, from a biological standpoint. She didn't understand how there could be something living inside of her mom. She also didn't understand why it had made her mother so incredibly sad, all the time.

She remembered wondering if she had made her mother sad, too. Did she look at the ground with tired eyes and wander the house in silence then too? She wanted her mother to be happy, it was all she'd ever wanted.

There was a sort of ice that settled over her mother's gaze whenever they locked eyes. It had slowly crept in as she'd grown up, and it scared her. But she didn't know how to thaw it.

Neat handwriting accompanied this picture as well:

She's beginning to hate herself. I can see it starting. At first it was the dresses, but I can tell that it's the whole thing. She's starting to dislike being her. A woman. Is it some kind of generation curse? Did I pass it on to her like a genetic disease?

This pregnancy is draining. It's hard to get up in the morning, harder than it was when I had her.

It's hard to look at her. All I can see is me. I want her to be so much more. She deserves it. She deserves to live the life I wanted. She deserves to break the cycle. I can't believe it's taken me this long to understand, but I don't even know why I hated my mother in the first place. This is exhausting, watching her fall into the same traps I did. My poor little girl. The worst part is, I can feel myself treating her just like I was treated. God, I don't know how to stop it. I just hope she can forgive me someday.

iii.

It was getting harder to breathe. She tried to stifle the tears, to hold them back. She failed.

There was never a single part of her that truly hated her mother. There never had been. There was, however, a wall of resentment that had built itself higher and higher as she grew up. An air of disappointment hung in every interaction. She had no idea why, and at first she was too afraid to ask, but it turned into resignation. She was just so tired of trying to figure it out.

Tears dripped down her face as she watched herself grow up through her mother's eyes.

It was horrible, reading her mother's thoughts. Seeing how she believed she'd let her daughter down, how her daughter hated her, how her daughter was just like her.

She was getting older now, and she couldn't believe that was how she truly looked, with forced smiles and tight shoulders. Was that why her mother believed she hated her? Was that really how she looked at her favorite person?

She's so strong. I wish she didn't have to be.

I can't let this thought sit in my head anymore, but I can only hope anyone who possibly reads this won't hold it against me.

I've felt, for many years now, like I was hiding something from her. This sense of guilt would accompany any time I told her that I loved her. I do love her, I love her so much. But she is me and I cannot say that to myself because it would be a lie. It's just so hard to accept the fact that maybe I'm not deserving of the self-hatred I've subjected myself to for so long because when I look at her, I see an intelligent and beautiful and strong young woman that is capable and has so much potential.

I have to treat her better. Because she deserves it. Because I deserved it. Because I owe it to her, and to myself, to let her become that person that I always wanted to be.

I told her I loved her after I had this revelation, and it felt like a weight was lifted off of my chest. I only hope she believed me.

vi.

She closed the journal.

Wiping her eyes, she began to walk towards her room. She needed her keys and her wallet.

She would wear her mother's pearls and a skirt to the funeral.