

Closure

Jess Lancial

Dearest Mom,

Because you are nearing the end, I'm told that now is the time to make sure everything I want to say, gets said. You are an arm distance away from my chair, snoring in a drug induced sleep. Your eyelashes twitch and I know you are deep in REM. I wonder how far away you really are, where your thoughts have left you, if my voice can even seep through the layers that separate us.

I've been told that expressing myself should be easier because I am a woman. I take that to heart as I ransack my brain to find the right words. I know they are in there somewhere, hidden in a mosaic of letters. I search backwards and sideways, diagonally and across, and can only circle words like, *sorry, was, don't, mother, daughter, am, and miss*; they sputter and mix, and will not congeal. Why aren't there more Hallmark cards for times like these? With touching words in couplets, finessed with the glittered pearly gates cover and cursive font, followed by *with love...*

Do you remember when Hallmark was our only translator in a language which we were both undeniably fluent? It became an abundance of scriptures we implied meaning to. Simple enough wasn't it- sending meaning without requiring thought. And even with this, you settled for the generic and cheap; a pack of cards for ninety-nine cents, with a bucktooth horse wearing a birthday hat "*Thinking of you... Happy Birthday*" in thick black letters across the cover. Inside you slipped a tattered wrinkled twenty that looked like it had been pulled through a key hole to find its way to the centered crease of my card. In seconds your thoughtfulness became an awkward crunch of balled cardboard hurling towards my corner trash can. The twenty-just another green wad in my sock drawer.

Then it was your birthday and I could think of nothing to get you. So I sent you a package of socks and gloves because you think of me as the sensible mothering type and it is not like you to buy such simple things. *Keep your feet dry and stay warm*. Wasn't that a way of showing I cared? If there was a card it would say "*I Love*

You Please Don't Get Pneumonia!" But no such card existed, and there I was again at a lost for words, so I bought you a card I didn't spend much time to find, it was between "Humor" and "Just Thinking Of You." I gave back your same twenty and drew a party hat over Jackson's head doubting you would even notice. Come Christmas I see your handwriting addressed to me jammed into my mailbox, not surprisingly was yet just another card, "Happy Holidays!" What were you trying to say, really? That you missed me, wished I was there, hoped things were going well? That time Jackson had returned sporting a new mustache. *At least you noticed.*

A few day's later you actually called and asked if I was coming home for Christmas, I tell you I can't make it because there are better, more important things; *a hundred dollar plane ticket to Mexico I couldn't pass up. A six dollar bottle of Tequila washed down with tainted Daiquiris. Eighteen dollar hotels, and hours spent covered, entangled, dissolving, between a mattress and sheet, shared with my lover you never knew existed.* No, instead of coming to visit I sent you a burro wearing a Santa hat, wedged between the folds is Jackson with a new set of bifocals. "Feliz Navidad!" Funny what we regret when we look back at things.

I never told you this, but I nearly died that Christmas. This may be hard for you to understand, considering you never ventured far from the green of your yard, but when you look across the ocean towards the horizon, the distance can be deceitful. I wish I could show you that, I wish I could take you there now. It seems like it is only a mile away, the point where two separate worlds, sky and ocean converge together side by side, like no space exists between them. I thought maybe if I paddled far enough I would be able to place one hand on water and rest the other on a cloud. As I treaded further, I hoped we could be like that. I thought maybe if we were both little braver, if for once we just stepped off the dry land and paddled a little further, we would be able to reach out and somehow find ourselves coming together through the distance. And then, because I was no longer paddling, because I was floating idle and had given up, I'm capsized by the trough of the wave and pulled down through the undertow.

Maybe you know this feeling of drowning. I wonder if you are drowning now. Do you feel suspended in a world that won't let you surface? As if something is pulling you in every direction while you try to find something to hold on to, reaching for a reason to want to breathe? I was there sinking and whirling, and as I began to choke my panic seized and I let myself be tossed around like plankton. Then there was nothing, my thoughts were slowly eradicating, and I asked myself, so is this how it ends? I pictured my drowning on the news, and then there was this moment-

seconds really, I thought maybe I should have sent you more, something, anything that were thoughts of my own. What card could have possibly given us closure for this? “*Sorry I Skipped Christmas and Drowned. Guess It Won’t Be A Happy Holiday After All.*” And then I had something to reach for, you.

I cut my trip short and found myself sitting across the table from you, staring out the window to a cornfield laced with snow. We sat and sipped at our ciders. Steam escaped from our mugs and swirled into the air, and I made long drawn out slurping noises to coat the silence. Do you remember that day? Your hands were so shaky you dripped cider all over the table cloth, and left the scent of apple and cinnamon for days. You told me that you were “Just not as sturdy as I used to be,” and I said I vaguely recalled you ever being sturdy. If only I had known then that there was more unsteadiness to come. I wish now I would have fully taken advantage of that moment. You asked about, and pointed to the stitches above my brow. I wanted to tell you about horizons and drowning, shards that cluttered the ocean floor. About those fleeting moments where we could realize that life has the ability to suddenly make-shift and falter, leaving two people wishing they could find something more to share between them than air. I wished there was an endearing poem I could have read from that expressed such thoughts. I told you it was nothing, just a minor accident, and you dropped it there. Later when I left, there was a tiny envelope between my utility and phone bill. In blue slanted cursive letters I recognized your handwriting, inside a small card with a yellow rose on the cover “*Hope You Get Well Soon!*”

I have never understood us, not once for a second. We are both women, shouldn’t we be better at expressing ourselves than this? Isn’t that something that is written in our genes? The same ones, believe it or not-we share. What did you first say when I had been born? Did you hold me to your breast and kiss my forehead, pull out a momentum from the gift shop and recite it into my tiny ear “*Congratulations It’s A Girl!*”?

Today while I rummaged through your purse to find a dollar, I found our twenty tucked away in your address book, marking the pages of my name. I laughed, with his long green wig, blue eyeliner and flush red lips, Jackson is now an eyelash short of being a drag queen. He has never looked cheaper. I want you to know I believe that there is more value to him than I had originally thought. That he will never be just another green wad in my drawer. Kind of like your cards, it was the thought behind the, whether you had written them or not. I’m coming to understand that.

I'm sitting here listening to the irregular wisps of your breath, and find myself back in the undertow-thoughts drowning within me. Do you know how hard it is to write the years of the unspoken? Express all the emotions I have kept bottled and pooling? Communicate sorrow and regret in but a few pages, in dwindling time and breaths? But still I am trying, with no cards to read from, no gifts, or implied meanings. Even if I'm still ransacking my brain and coming up short, I'm writing now because it's time to step away from the security of common slogans and clichés. Because there's something I feel the need to express that nothing else can. I need to speak through a voice and have thoughts that are truly only mine. Because we have found a way to share lives through mere bridges of the written word. Or for no other reason than because I'm your daughter, and I should have done this a long time ago.

With Love,
