

Ananya

Sofia Marti

I met your son when I was fifteen years old.

I was wearing an old, tear-stained hoodie with my once-white vans, now grey.

Remember that nice button down shirt you bought him two years ago?

It was draping his chest like the curtains you draw on every single window in your house.

You and I had one encounter. Do you remember?

You didn't see me, but I saw you.

Yes, I saw you through the window of your light blue BMW which frankly I found to be a tacky color for a car but I saw you; outside my school, the second after I had dropped him off. You, of course, never knew that I had been with him only minutes before you came along.

I'll always remember how your eyes reflected the tumeric orange that ripples through the Indian Ocean during sunset, close to where you grew up, where you hoped he would, too. Your sari was a stamp of your tradition, bangles wrapping your wrists like bright gold bows you buy for presents during Christmas time.

The wrinkles on your face embodied the creases of the Himalayas, running back through your country.

Your hair cascaded down your shoulder, tangling in your wrap like the Brahmaputra river entwining through the thickets of villages you came from.

I will be clear, not down both shoulders only one, and this was all imaginative. No, you would have never worn your hair down in public. To do so would be disrespectful.

I'll have you know that I never made the first gesture, he did.

You would have been so proud, the way he asked me out on our first date with a smile spreading wide across his face and a box of my favorite cookies. The way he behaved like a gentleman: every opened door, every chair pulled out, every offer to pay, you would have been so proud. That is, you would have been proud if I was Indian, if I looked just like you.

And you would have been disgusted if you knew:

How we exchanged phone numbers, how we talked over the phone every night, that bright electric screen

lighting up my dark room at exactly 11:30 PM, the time you had gone to bed. How I drove over to the park, yes that park, only 3 minutes away from your house and met with him.

Together, our mouths exchanged frivolous dirty limericks that would have made you very disappointed.

And you, completely oblivious, were only 3 minutes away.

For six months your son was in my life, lying to you and hiding everything in my drawer: the letters we wrote each other, pictures we took of his lips touching mine, dried up flower petals from the bouquet he used to ask me to that school dance which oh by the way, you drove him to.

But we didn't want it to be that way.

No.

No, you should have read our conversations: I longed to go over to your house and be welcomed as a guest. To have you sit me down and explain how to mix spices the way you did every day in his lunch which I always took a bite of. To be able to get to know you as a person instead of the enigmatic woman distorted through a tinted light blue car window. How your hands were able to braid your long, thick, coal hair. I wanted to know it all.

I never wanted it to be a secret, no.

You made us stay out in the dark, you made it harder than it had to be.

If only you had given me a chance, we might have turned out to be happy.

But maybe we were, I don't really know anymore.

Do you remember finally catching him?

Did it please you, to take away his phone, to see him distraught?

Did it satisfy you to make your son unhappy?

Was it appealing to you, the way you were the one to finally tear us apart?

Was it worth it, to take away your son's limited freedom, his trust in you, his obedience, his respect,

I ask you again: was it worth it?

You had been asking questions, he couldn't handle thinking you knew.

But it was simply one of your tricks, you caught us both in your trap until you got what you wanted: me out of the perfect picture you have framed on your bathroom wall. Two sons, one on the track for greatness, the other misguided, at least that's what you thought.

He confessed to something you hadn't guessed yet, because he thought you had.

His guilt cut through him, like a butter knife carving soap.

He had scars, I'm sure they're still there.

It's interesting how life can change instantly, loving someone so much and then having them be taken out of your life within sheer seconds.

You let him have one more call and it was glass.

Those seconds were shreds of glass unstitching my skin little by little like the vines of henna stitched onto yours.

Once you found out about me you gave him his phone, made him call me.

You did an evil thing, making him say You are not worth loving, you are a waste of time, and you are

worthless, as if I didn't already know those things myself.

And you were right there, telling him in a language I do not speak to whisper these distortions to me, hinting no trace of regret while doing so.

Maybe you didn't feel anything but my pain was breaking up through the end of the phone line.

You could hear my tears shredding my cheeks, my voice shadowed by hollow sobs.

You could feel my fingers pressing harder against my phone, trying to wake myself up like this was all just some dream I was having.

But it wasn't a dream.

No, you made sure that I would feel every second of the torture, every sentence hurting more than the last.

You never knew this, you will never know this but that night I tied bows around my wrists, just like your bangles.

Maybe you were in pain, maybe our happiness showed you something you could never have.

Maybe you got jealous.

Maybe you got scared of losing him, just like I was scared of losing him too.

Perhaps we're more alike than I thought.

Because yes you're right, I am not from your country.

And yes you're right, my skin is marble white not like the beautiful milky chocolate you have glazed on.

And yes you're right, I am not suited to be in his life, I only ceased to exist in it.

But we were happy.

For six months I lived with love.

Now, without it, I finally understand what your life must be like.