

The Words We Never Exchanged

Arianna Vann-Cook

Sometimes, I like to think the cigarettes you smoked when I was in the womb gave me radioactive superpowers. Or the music that was etched into my brain as a child were the stepping stones for what I am today, and where I will go. But I know neither of those things are true. I'm here because I didn't give up on myself, as you did. I'm here because I choose to be present.

In the book of my life, you were chapters ago. The few memories I do have are blurry, and most of them are not worth remembering. New ones will not be made. There are so many questions that you will never answer, so many words we will never exchange. This letter will never even reach you!

Truth be told, I am perfectly fine without you. I have a stable life, a family that loves me, happiness, and a great deal of opportunity. But that doesn't mean I don't play out the scenarios of how different life would have been for both of us if you would have held on a little longer. If you would have pushed yourself a little harder, and made it work. Not for you, but for your child who tries not to dwell on the thought of her mother, but can't help it.

At the age of 10, I was no longer legally yours, but it had been quite some time since I was 'yours' in other ways as well. When you signed over your rights, it verified that the ever so slight hope of "us" in my head had disappeared. I don't think about you often, but when I do it feels like I'm being pulled down by the unknown, and the could-have-beens. I'm writing you this letter because it feels therapeutic to pull all the bitter thoughts out of my brain and let go of a grudge that is not worth holding onto. I'm bigger than that. I can't hold in resentment any longer, or act like you aren't a part of me. Every time I look in the mirror it is hard not to be reminded of you. From my piano fingers to the way I walk, your reflection looks back at me. And so I pretend you're sober and functional, and the only reason I haven't seen you in years is you're a spy, or that you're on some prestigious business trip that seems to never end.

I've always wondered what you do on holidays. On my birthday, and Mother's Day- do you bury yourself in drugs in an attempt to forget, or do you set out to pick up the pieces of yourself that have chipped away? Most of all, I wonder how you do it. How you live with yourself every day knowing you have two daughters out in the world who are calling other women 'Mommy'. Women who are witnessing their legacies firsthand.

It has been revealed to me that addiction is an uphill battle, and to face it you must have resilience. That the reward at the top of the hill is so much greater once you see what you've accomplished from a different view. It's clear that you never finished climbing, and I doubt the hill of potential even crosses your mind anymore. To drop the harness and rope, and pick up the pills, syringes, and bottles shows me you truly hit rock bottom. But I don't think about this often. No, not often at all. Because the journey ahead of me is beautiful, this is something I am sure of.