

Mothering Your Hope

"I think Daddy's trying to make it up to me," says my darling daughter. Hope spills out in her whisper that hangs in the space of eight years of letdown after letdown, of phone calls he hasn't made, of questions he hasn't asked, in the years of my insistence that yes, Daddy loves you, he's just busy.

I contemplate in the quiet because a good mother thinks before she speaks, because a good mother stifles the bile of bitter words rising in her throat, a good mother fights against the churn of hurt in her belly because a good mother wants you to be right.

Your innocence offers forgiveness with ease and your hand reaches for mine, heart lines pressing together as promises of love weave together our intertwined fingers.

Now eleven, you want to see the best in your father, but the facade of the unspoken is starting to crack. I've given you half-truths all of your life, wanting more for you than I ever had with my own father. I hold my tongue, my anger in, for you, for us, for the children of selfish men who are fathers in name and name alone.

In the months since that night, you've grown contemplative. I find myself holding space at unexpected times when a thought about your father crosses your lips.

He's been back in your life for less than a year now and each visit adds to your picture of him. You do not hold back the way that I have held back, noting your observations plainly. I offer him no grace as you speak because I will not teach you to doubt your own experiences as a young girl.

Despite him, you have been raised in love, a treasured child of your grandparents. Your Nana lies on the couch, feet crossed at the ankles, and you energetically bound toward her with the full confidence that she will place her book aside to open her arms. You snuggle, fully pressed into her body, head tucked into her chest. Our dog, not wanting to be left out, more often than not, trots over to investigate and lick your face. Even he recognizes that this everyday moment is still special; he doesn't want to miss out and you giggle in response to puppy kisses, the tongue that laps at your nose and cheeks.

It is a shame that even he can see what your father cannot.

I see your hope fading as you grow, learning to accept his presence for what it is, and it is bittersweet to witness your nonchalance. You rarely yearn for your father, but you have

come to a truth: His fatherly failures are not reflective of you, my darling daughter.