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## I am my mother's daughter

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# I AM MY MOTHER'S DAUGHTER

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KRISTEN DOYLE

I am my mother's daughter.

✱

Scotch-taped to the mirror in my childhood bedroom is a picture of Mom and me. I don't have many, because she is usually the one behind the camera, capturing all the moments I'm too little to remember. But I do have this one.

She's young — probably 25, married 5 years, recently returned to America. Her dark, permed curls sit in her face as she leans down to stabilize me. She's wearing a denim dress that I think about asking her about every time I look at it. She said she donated it.

I'm not quite 2, blonde and boyish, swaddled in green, and I'm straddled atop one of those spring-loaded horses that teeter back and forth in the woodchips. I'm smiling, but Mom looks worried. Why does Mom look worried?

It's only a picture, only a snapshot of a moment I don't remember, but still, I can feel the crunch of amber leaves, the smell of crisp air, the grainy haze of the faded tones that hangs over autumn moments.

The longer that I stare, the easier it becomes — it is just as easy that I could be wearing that denim dress, in that snapping fall air, pushing that baby, worried about what Mom is worried about.

Me and Mom; Mom and me.

✱

I'm 5 and it's my birthday. I'm wearing my favorite powdery blue pile of taffeta and ribbons and a feather boa; I found Mom's lipstick this morning and there's a crime scene of mauvy pink all over my face.

Mom has spent the past week slaving over the batter-stained binder in the kitchen, the glossy pages faded and pencil-scarred from years of revision. Even though it's January, she's sweating;

her eyes wear bags and her shoulders hold pent-up anxiety like a lumpy sweater.

Dad is telling her how wonderful it is, but she just shakes her head and shrugs her shoulders. "It's ok," she sighs as she sets it on the confetti-covered table. "I could have done better, but I ran out of time."

The truth is that it's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen: my favorite barbie doll standing in a dome of pink sparkly frosting to resemble a ball gown.

Maybe it was a halo from the kitchen lights, or maybe it was the sparkle glinting off the cake and into her exhausted eyes, but I was fully convinced at that moment that I had the best mom in the whole entire world.

✱  
I come from a long line of yellers. I'm used to it by now.

Sometimes I think I could almost understand it, the yelling: the way it bubbles up in the back of your throat in a way that makes it feel unavoidable and all-consuming until you can't think about anything else.

Doyle women are not short of words. I've been one for a long time now and I'm still learning how to be quiet; how to listen before I accuse; how to be wrong before I have to be right.

Sometimes the yelling still sits pent up in the back of my throat.

I'm still learning how to swallow it.

✱  
Mom puts my plants in the sunniest corners of the house, waters them on Fridays (so she doesn't forget how many days it's been), and updates me on their progress (how many leaves they've grown in just the last week: 1 ½. If the propagation is working; yes, works like a charm! And whether or not we'll need to re-pot this one soon, because, if you

look right here, it's getting too overgrown and it's all to do with the plant food she bought at Lowes on Sunday; yes).

She's never been much good at remembering things, she'll be the first to tell you, but she always remembers to water the plants on Fridays.

Maybe it's her mother in her: Grandma had a garden second only to Eden or maybe those ones in Babylon. Green-thumb magic dances through her; others might call those varicose veins, but really it's the magic.

Mom's greatest accomplishment, or so she says, is growing an elephant plant-sprig into the elephant plant-tree that proudly shades the far right corner of the living room.

I hope I have some of that green-thumb magic running through my veins, too.

✱  
Mom always says that she wishes Grandma hadn't let her quit piano lessons. Dad regrets that Gran didn't let him quit.

So I take piano lessons. Of my sisters, I am by far the most successful, which is to say that I can still configure my fingers into chords all these years later.

Mom gets to live vicariously through my fingers, and I don't mind. There's room enough for her fingers to weave into mine as they dance over the keys.

Me and Mom; Mom and me