

1.

There are many beautiful things about my mother. One of them is her voice. Her beautiful singing voice, with which she once sang a full love song into my cellphone's inbox on a chilly winter night. It was my Sophomore year Harvard, just over two years ago today.

I remember I walking through the yard, and checking my messages on my way to rehearsal and hearing her voice and feeling my heart swell, and then sitting on one of the fountain rocks to listen to her singing... and I remember the quiet around me making itself quieter, you know, as if to listen in on my mother's message.

Tonight, I want to sing a specific line from this song back to her, but it will take my entire five minutes to get there; First, I must explain that her voice is in fact *not* the most beautiful thing about her. It is her hands.

My ma's hands, they can do what no other hands ever did. They're magical.

So beautiful are my mother's hands, that writing a speech for tonight was not enough. They needed something else. Something sort of like an ode, in that it glorifies what it talks about... but not quite like an ode... in that I can't make so many rhymes.

In any case, whatever it is, I wrote it to my mother's hands, in three movements. And it goes like this:

2.

I carry love hidden in the inner side pocket of the wallet my mother gave to me for my 20th birthday. Of the many shapes and forms of love that I've known, this is the one that is most beautiful of all.

It's flat and crisp and folded over four times. And it has a funky shape when I unfold it because this love, when it's opened, you can't flatten its lines. It's creased, torn and worn, but there's a very good cause: It's from the number of times I've opened it just to remind myself that it's there, then to fold it again to put carefully back in its place.

This love was handmade. It was signed and delivered 3000 miles across the country, and it was unlike any other love my mother had ever written to me before...

That's because on this one, at the very bottom of the page was a small drawing, and in this drawing my mother showed me what has kept me together ever since before I even *knew* that one could possibly fall apart.

It's made up of six little stick people. Little figures with nothing more than their heads, legs and arms. They are all the same size and have no hair and no eyes. They are not even smiling. What's special about these figures is that they are all holding hands, and that the first five are

close together, and that the fifth one has an incredibly long left arm, holding on to the sixth one's incredibly long right arm.

I must confess that when I saw the six figures, connected the way they were, knowing that the sixth one was me, knowing that the other five were my family, I still didn't understand what it meant.

I must also confess that when I saw it I cried a lil bit (just a lil). Because even though I didn't understand, I felt. It was the beginning of the way out of a long, terrible for me. Or maybe, it was actually my way back into myself.

3.

It had been a tough three years and a few months when I got that letter. I can't be sure how long. I was tired. Emotionally. Physically. I was lost. I was lost because I couldn't explain myself to myself. I was lost because I didn't think that I needed to explain anything but I also couldn't point to a self that I could offer an explanation to. My decisions were not me. My mind went everywhere – I never learned to reign it in. I had no structure. No sense of priority. Everything is important. But then nothing is. No essence. How to choose? If there even *is* a self.

Always changing. Open your mind turned into doubt everything. Turn inside out. Inside and outside blur, bled into each other. Person diminished. No universal truth. No truth. Only questions, unanswered. Ambiguity, gray areas. No truth, just perceptions.

There was an unquenchable, numb, frustrated desire for the teenager inside of me, the one that knew who she was and where she was going. The one that could respond emotionally o music. The one that could hear a song and be inspired...I missed the feeling of the times when I wrote and I could feel as my ink spilled bits of truth on the paper and the voice inside my head came out attached to the deep breath I took... and laid itself on the page. But then I try to calm myself and exhale but no air comes out and i am overcome with the despair of trying to capture this truth and keep it there. Writing loses its elegance and words become superfluous and i become confused and the voice that isn't mine becomes omnipotent and I am only secondary in importance within this chaos. And my words disoriented and my pen reckless as it shuffles together sentences that don't belong to me. That don't belong to me. This, for three full years.

I lost myself. There was *not a thing* which I did not doubt. My origins, my friends, my merits, my faith. Me. I doubted everything. How to justify myself, my home, my name, if I could not even explain myself? what is the jumping-off place to express what I am? What organization to apply to my chaos? And even if I could, how would I dare to do such a fabricated act of self? I I

had no voice, no boundaries. I was unbearably lost, to the point that When I put out my hands to stop myself from hitting the ground I just went straight through it.

What I needed was acknowledgment. Validation of a struggle that I was not entitled to. I needed someone to bear witness to my chaos. Some way of connecting my self to me. To transcend my chaos.

#### 4.

Mama,

You offered that to me. You opened up your hands to catch all my struggles and laments and instead you caught *me* as I fell. Your hands gave me connection through time and space to what I had always needed. Ma, I owe it to you.

When I was little you talked about you children's hands as if they did not belong to the little bodies they were attached to. You would hold my brother's hands in yours and observe them closely, front and back, and finally say "*these*, are your grandfather's hands."

And I would look at them and look at mine and then I would cut in and - "My turn, my turn! Whose are my hands?"

Mama, I don't think you had a clear answer to that. You'd say it was between one person and another's hands, it was ambiguous and I was jealous. I was jealous that my brother got to have such recognizable, familiar, important hands and that I didn't know who had my hands and whose hands I had and anyway, over the years I learned only that they were particularly big and thick and soft and good for wiping away tears, for steadying cameras, for shaking hands earnestly, for coloring inside the lines. But mostly they were big. It wasn't too long before your wedding band no longer fit my thick fingers when I'd try it on, like I always did when I was little. When we compared hands, mine was... slightly bigger than yours.

But Mama, I never knew that, my hands were always yours. That even though mine are thick and big and yours are delicate and slender.... I've learned that my hands are only mine in that they connect me to you. In that I can write this speech with my hands and dedicate it to you. In that I can look at them and know that they'd be nothing were it not for your hands.

Mama, I make your hands, the stage on which I exist.

**Tomo sus manos, como escenario, para existir**