

Vedha Krishnan

Tattered sepia pages, wrinkled with wear and tear and little old stickers and discarded pieces of tape adorning each corner, all folded and nipped and tucked across each other, until it formed a mismatched gallery of picturesque nostalgia. That was the only way to describe the little family album that had been housed in the dusty little corner of their dusty little house for what seemed like forever.

Ever so often, the album would be taken out of the tiny wooden bookshelf, the layer of chalky dust on the cover would be brushed off, and for just one evening, the whole family would all squish together on the couch and stick in little photos whilst one of those really terrible movies that only mum enjoyed played in the background. Emma would rummage through her massive box of art supplies so that she could add yet another doodle, and I would insist every time that there had to be pink glitter on at least one page. Dad would spend ages making a million terrible jokes about complete nonsense. Everytime any stupid argument happened between me and Emma about what sticker to use on what page, mum would break into laughter and it felt like any issue was forgotten. Mum always laughed like that; like she would never laugh again and her eyes always lit up, in the way a whole city lights up in a million different colours at night and just comes alive. When she laughed, you couldn't help but laugh with her.

It felt like forever ago now.

My fingers traced outlines of each photo in the album, remembering the distinct feeling of ice-cream with my grandpa, park picnics with Emma, running away from the ducks after we ran out of bread, and pictures of my mother and me in poofy dresses that twirled and twirled until a haze of soft yellow tulle enveloped us both in our own world, and we could just smile.

Suddenly, a voice interrupted my hazy memories. "That looks like a lovely book, my dear, is it an album?". A wrinkled face smiled at me, glazed eyes barely opened, as if she was only half-comprehending my presence. My face forced itself into some slightly warped version of a smile, "ye-". My voice shattered, breaking into a million pieces again, just like it did every time I tried to figure out how to say something to her.

To my mother.

My mother had forgotten every smile. Every terrible movie. Every one of dad's nonsensical jokes. Every twirling piece of tulle. But what really hurt were the small things that felt like small, sharp needles piercing my heart, pushing deeper and deeper in. The way she never called me by my name or the way she never laughed the way she used to.

In that moment, it all built up inside of me. The crinkled pages, and dad's terrible jokes, and Emma, and tulle and twirls and mum, it all pushed and pulled and clawed inside me until I was going to break and shatter and nothing would ever be normal again and-  
"Sadie?"

And just for a second, I think I saw her eyes light up, just like the city.

She remembered. For an infinitesimal second she remembered.

And that was enough.