

## To my Daughter

Magdalen,

I used to look like you, and your sister. I hope you remember. I used to be youthful, and beautiful, when you two were babies. My blonde hair was long, flowing, and soft. My pale skin was not ghoulish but fair, all porcelain and perfect. Soft to the touch. My body wasn't toned, but it was amazing for a woman who had two children. People would turn and look as I walked. I didn't have to think: my hips swayed delicately in tune with my steps. I practiced my hair flip, though. I remember one time when you were little I took you to the ER and the hospital staff mistook me for your sister! I was offended after being flattered, and full of pride. I was the young, cool, beautiful mom that everyone admired. You two, rambunctious, white, light eyed and blonde haired were always admired second: perfect little mini me's that everyone at the stores would fawn over. Workers would crane down from behind counters and coo, always: "are you two twins?" and you two, trained on how to respond, would turn to each other and giggle, and explain, always: "no, we were born 15 months to the day." And everyone would squeal at just how perfect that was. It really was perfect. How does a mother have perfect, blonde, irish twins that were born 15 months to the *day*? I married your sperm donor for a few reasons that still make sense to me today, one of which being superficially. He was from Puerto Rico, with exotic hair and tinted skin. I knew we would have beautiful children. I wanted, at the time, for you and your sister to have brown hair and brown skin and green eyes. I prayed and prayed and prayed for a little boy with brown hair, brown skin, and green eyes. And when you were born after 25 hours of intense, mind bending labor, I knew that wasn't the case. You were a girl, with a head full of blonde, curly hair already, and squinty blue eyes. You had my skin. But how can you be disappointed, holding your newborn baby in your arms? I stared at you, and felt I had already known you. I was everything you are, and you were everything I could be. I prayed for another child who could give me the brownness I so craved, and your sister was born with black hair and fuzzy, patchy skin. She was premature, by a large margin. When she aged, her hair turned blonde and her skin pale. As you two grew up, and me and your sperm donor divorced, I remember feeling thankful that my genes topped his. You two looked like me, and my family. Not his, that

you would never, ever see again. You would not learn about them, or half of your genetic makeup. But, my darling daughter, as you aged, you looked more like him. Your hair would break brushes. You had his nose, and his hazel eyes. I hadn't realized that you looked more like him than I until you had accused me of always picking fights with you because you looked like your dad, and I blew up. I saw red. And I wouldn't tell you, but I do think you look like your dad. And now his picture in my head that I clouded in shadows deep in my subconscious was starting to clear, and my thoughts surrounded him. I searched for him on Facebook. I needed to know. He still looks like he did when we met, when we were 19 and young and stupid. Me? Life has not been kind. My lupus has drained my hair of volume, my skin of life. My eyes are sunken in constantly. I lost so much weight I only wear baggy clothes. I don't think people think I look scary, but I do. I avoid mirrors. No one looks at me in stunned silence anymore. I'm...40, fighting a chronic illness that will win. And you, my horrible, selfish daughter, are not fighting. Your hair is full. Your pale skin draws in crowds. Your body, toned naturally and hourglass figure makes you a showstopper when you walk into a room. You don't even try—I know that you don't—but you walk in a way that makes everyone's eyes cling to you. And yet, you continuously chose to destroy the perfect body I gave you. With dumbass, meaningless tattoos. With horrible dyes, and bleach. Piercings and makeup that makes you look insane. Drugs. Everything you have always done, and will continue to do in life, has been selfish. You don't care about what I sacrificed to give you that life that I had, to give you that body that functions without illness and makes people come to you in flocks. And you choose to destroy it.

Best,

Your mother

Magdalene,

I think college ruined you. My biggest regret is signing those FAFSA papers, and letting you go to that psychotic, basket case ass school of yours so far away. 3 and a half hours. 3 and a half fucking hours. I can't even visit you. I can't drive. Your sister? She went to school in Albany, a smooth 60 minute drive on a bad day. She stayed close. She calls me. She sends me pictures of her day. I get to visit her when I want. She visits me. Even if I wanted to visit you, I couldn't. I guess it's lucky I don't want to visit you. I'm trying not to, but I'm beginning to loathe you.

When you came home for the summer, I knew it was going to be bad. I was excited to see you,

and prepared for days, and I don't know why I even tried. You're still horrible, and selfish, and make my skin crawl. You came home to our small apartment and threw your bags of clothes all about the living room. *Tick*. One of the first things you told me is that you realized through living on your own for two years that when your depression gets bad, you neglect cleaning. I said that was fine. *Tick*. It was fine to hear, (*Tick*.) but it was not fine to live with. You're a fucking slob. *Tick*. You refused to touch your boxes and bags that were pushed to one corner of the living room for 7 days. *Tick, tick*. A whole week. I yelled at you about it, and you looked completely thrown off guard. *Tick, tick, tick*. You explained, calmly, at first, that we had already talked about this. You were depressed, and you just didn't have it in you to unpack yet. I said bring it to your room. You smirked. You fucking *smirked*. *TICK*. You asked, "in the 50 square foot room I share with my sister?" I detonated. It was the first thread of your evil disrespect. I don't understand when you became so disrespectful. I yelled that you were a disgusting slob, because you are. I told you you were lazy, despicable, and endlessly discourteous. You've spent the week playing your switch and with your nose in a book. You have done nothing. You yelled back. It took you another week to clean and unpack. Everytime we get in a fight I ask when you're speaking with your therapist. I don't understand why you get so angry when I ask. It's been something for years that I ask, chronologically, with each fight, and yet you always get mad. I thought at this point, at 20, you would stop getting offended by asking. You have been seeing your therapist since the end of your junior year, and you had told me you stopped seeing her. "Why?" I demanded, resisting the urge to grab and throw something. "I don't need it anymore." You don't *need* it anymore? Give me a goddamn break. On top of that, you went off the lexapro you have been on for years. You claim to be doing fine without it, and yet, you still fight with me everyday. You are obviously not fine. You haven't acted like this in years.

Best,

Your mother

Dear Magdalene,

You have ruined Christmas two years in a row. I told you so. You ruined Easter. I did not tell you you ruined it, but I put on a big show of trying to let you know that was the case. I sulked. I

didn't finish cooking dinner. I hid in my room. I neglected you when you asked for things and gave snarky replies. And when you were leaving to go back to school, you hugged me and apologized for ruining another holiday. I smiled and said "no one can ruin Easter." But you did. And I hope you remember that forever, the way you ruined Easter. Ruined it for me. For your sister. For everyone there. The same way you ruined Christmas for two years in a row. I try not to remember the way sobs wrecked your body that first Christmas, that first time you came home for winter break from school, but I must admit hearing you feel so hurt and guilty due to that filled me with fuzzy, warm tingles. I knew you would never dare try to ruin another holiday. It was horrific. You were absolutely fucking disgusting. We rent the small basement apartment from an upper middle class family upstairs. After 3 years of living in the small basement, the families merged to become one large family. Me, you, and your sister, combined with the happily married Tab and Matt and their three, grown up children. Christmas was going to be the first time since you went to college that we would all be together. We're Christians, so of course we drink wine. We celebrate and praise Jesus through closeness associated with the pour of alcohol. You had invited your best friend to spend Christmas with us, because his family didn't celebrate. So there were 6 children, getting wasted into the night. Drinking is one thing, but the 6 of you together lost it. I know in the morning some of the children explained they didn't remember large portions of the night. You, though, claimed to have remembered everything until the very end of the night, where you fell asleep on the couch instead of your twin size bed. I was livid. I always put the presents out late into the night, when you and your sister are sleeping. I have *always* done that. You have *never* passed out drunk on the couch when I was going to do that. You ruined everything. We have so little traditions left after all these years, and you spit in my face on the few we still hold intact. When you woke up, a few hours later, you shook my shoulder in bed and wished me a Merry Christmas. You said it was time to wake up, to put the presents out. I rolled over in my bed and said, with my back to you, that Christmas was canceled. You laughed. But you saw that I was serious, and asked, genuinely, why? *Why?* I exploded. Are you fucking stupid? Because you fell asleep in the living room, offered your bed to your friend to sleep in the same room with your still underage sister, and left a mess. You looked aghast. You had the nerve to look aghast. You said you didn't understand why I was upset, and when I explained, you laughed. "That's it? I'll put the presents out." Why do you insist on mocking me? I yelled at you until you started crying, and didn't stop. You sobbed in front of your best friend, and now you'll

never forget. Remember the shame you had painted all over yourself that your tears that pooled and dripped down your face only exposed the deep, dark lines of pain. Your sister convinced me to put the presents out. I did after you cried for half an hour. 30 minutes exactly. I watched the clock. I wanted to make sure you really knew how badly you fucked up. Your sister and I put the presents under the tree with minimal conversation, and the three of us and your best friend sat under it. And then, you had the nerve to not smile as we unwrapped. You stared at me, as tears still streamed down your face, and held up your presents for my pictures. I'll keep them forever. Your friend left not too long after that. He didn't even say goodbye to me. And when you confronted me after, still unable to control yourself, I slapped you. It wasn't hard, practically a tap. And yet you couldn't stop crying. You always cry.

Best,

Your mother

Magdalene,

When you were in highschool, we didn't have a home. But we were not homeless. No, we were not homeless. And yet you insist on lying on my name. Lying about your experiences. I didn't quite realize the lengths you'd go to lie until we were driving back from Walmart, with my best friend driving, and you in the back with her 5 year old. My best friend had been laughing about something horrible she said to her mother in her youth, and I was reminded of a conversation I had with Tab the night before over coffee. I was crying to her about how you have been insisting recently that your adolescence had been traumatic. I tried so hard for it to not be, and yet you still say you feel the ripple effect in your body. Everything you do is a tense reaction in response to something you never actually experienced. Tab threw her head back and laughed. "My daughter said the same thing to me the other day." Aha! So it's a daughter thing; ungrateful, dramatic, and endlessly unfair. I turned to my best friend behind the driver's seat and said "Apparently Tab's daughter was just saying how traumatic her childhood was to her." "Her too?" My best friend asked, giggling. "Yes! Must be a trend." In the backseat, you hissed "her daughter wasn't *homeless* for 2 years." You, daughter, were never, ever homeless. When we had no home, we slept on friend's couches. We slept on covered benches. We went to pantries. You were never, ever homeless. You always had a roof over your head. I can't even fathom why you keep saying

the experiences traumatized you. I poured so much money and patience into ensuring you would never feel that way. After a year of couch hopping, sleeping in gazebos, and pleading with churches, we found a one bedroom. When I say a one bedroom, I mean that in the most literal sense: we were renting one room. One room, for me, you, your sister, Shane (who is another story, entirely), and our three animals. We lived in that one room, the 4 of us, for 2 years. I suffered, *rotted*, felt myself dying for years there, sleeping on the floor on an air mattress while you and your sister had beds, to instill that you would *not* be traumatized by your experiences. And yet, you claim you are. You have never had anything happen to you that could result in trauma. You fill your head with lies and misconceptions and turn and feed them to your therapist. All you do is lie. You lie like you need it to live. I think you want people to feel bad for you, and gather sympathy points from every corner. Anything you can sink your teeth into and twist to seem more poor, more queer, more mentally ill, you crush and bend open. I think that damn school you have gone to made you retreat more to your roots: the poverty, the heritage, the identity. It told you trauma sells, huh? It does—people love a sob story. I know the whole school made you more liberal. It's insane the amount of fights we have gotten into about politics, my fucking God. And I thought I was left.

Best,  
Your Mother

Magdalene,

I long for when you were at school, and I could block your number when I no longer wanted to listen to your bullshit. Here, you just get louder. I walk away, and you follow, screaming. I don't understand your point, and so you yell louder. You get under my skin. I yell back, loudest. I think the real problem is that you're a Sagittarius, and I'm an Aries. We never really got along, even when you were a kid. I guess we weren't supposed to. Two aggressors, unable to submit. I don't remember what most of the fights this summer were about. Do you? A lot was about politics. I didn't realize that you studying environmental policy meant you wouldn't stop reading essays and articles and listening to court hearings. God, everyday. You're like a sponge, constantly consuming the negativity of the world into your body. Why? It's so foreign to me. We fought a lot about the new abortion ruling, I remember. I told you that abortion should only be allowed in

rape, and maybe incest. You said you can't cherry pick abortion. I said the women who murder their babies should be tried. I didn't even consider abortion, when I got pregnant young. You asked how I felt about that 10 year old girl from Ohio. I said I didn't know about her, and you demanded to know how I can have such radical beliefs without educating myself. I snapped. Of course I'm educated! I went to college. I watch documentaries. Jesus, I watch them with *you*. You have a radical stance on everything. I tell you, constantly, that caring so much is going to destroy you. You challenged how I can be so selfish, just not care about other people whose struggles don't affect me. I said, I don't care about what doesn't affect me. Not at all. You walked away, laughing to yourself. When you were a child, I would laugh at you. Your silly complaints, or your arguments. I'd always laugh, because what you were saying is meaningless. Now, you laugh at me. All the time. And when you laugh, I yell until you cry. It's really easy to make you cry. And when you cry, I know that I've won and I can go to bed comfortably. Now that I'm thinking about it, another fight we got into is trans rights. What it means, how to respect it. I get transsexuals, the idea of transitioning from one thing to another, but agender people are lost on me. Ever since you were a freshman in high school you've tried to explain, but it goes one ear out the other. I don't want to understand. Oh, and your friend Raven...well, you know, Raven deserves her own letter.

Best,

Your mother

Magdalene,

Raven. God, you've had some really piece of shit friends, daughter, but Raven is a whole nother level. I can't believe all your friends that have come and gone, Raven has stuck. I despise that child. Every single cell in her miserable body is stitched together into a mosh posh of a vile, demonic individual. I always hated her, ever since you became friends and started coming to our house after school. It wasn't until early your senior year that I decided they were actually the scum of the fucking earth. God makes people to test us, and my God, Raven is mine. Early in your senior year, you, your sister, and Raven along with a few other boys, slinked home from the Green one late night. There had been a show, some performance you both wanted to go to, and

you came home, drunk. You acted sober. I pretended not to notice. I was smoking a cigarette on our steps when your sister and you came home. You hugged Raven, hugged the rest of your friends, then hugged Raven again, and went inside. Raven and the boys started walking away, and Raven was too drunk to realize she was yelling as your friends pulled them down the street. “She’s the biggest piece of shit I have ever met!” She slurred, screaming into the sky, barely 20 feet from where I was sitting. “She *kicked* Brandi out and she had to live with me! And have you heard the shit she says about her? It’s goddamn disgusting!” The yelling got quieter as she got pulled down the street. I sat there, seething. I realized at that moment that you, daughter, are a liar. We both know exactly what Raven is referring to. You picked a fight with me the night before your SATs. We were living in the one bedroom, at this point for a little over a year, and Shane, me, and you were at each other’s throats for weeks. This was the magnum opus of our fights. It will be something we never address, equal and silently agree to never talk about it again. You yelled, about something I don’t remember, but it made me furious. Absolutely fucking infuriated. You jumped on your bed, craned and pushed to the far left side of the room, and I grabbed you by the shoulder and pushed you off. You yelled. Shane yelled at you to shut the fuck up, start respecting the hands that provide for you. You yelled more. I yelled. Shane yelled. Your sister jumped in, on your side. She isn’t normally on your side, and this made me unreasonably furious. That I can admit. Seeing her pick you over me made something ungodly and strong and metal twist in my abdomen. I yelled at you, daughter, to pack and leave. Your expression became hard. You grabbed your backpack, shoved your laptop and a notebook in it, and walked out of the room. Your sister was yelling on your behalf, and I told her to leave, too. The difference? She didn’t. She refused. And you? You didn’t come home for a week. Telling. All your timing is telling. Your sister told me that you called Raven, because you knew she was the person who would home you for as long as possible. And she did. Raven did home you. And I can not respect a teenager who refuses to let other kids live out their punishment. I don’t understand. But I know that you picked that fight with me that night before your SATs so when you failed, you could blame me. You got an 1100 and I laughed at you, because I knew you were going to try and turn around and blame me for your horrific score. It’s irrational, the lengths you will go to to blame other people for your failings.

Best,

Your mother



Magdalene,

I tried to ease up to Raven this summer. I did. I really tried. You told me you didn't want Raven around me, because the way I talk about her is nauseating. They. Sorry, I meant they. Frankly, I think that Raven is demon possessed—using pronouns that refer to multiple different people. My pastor recently told me that people with Dissociative Identity Disorder, otherwise known as DID, otherwise known as demon possession, need prayers and care. You told me Raven is just Raven, and left it at that. I said I would be willing to host a sleepover with Raven, your best friend that someone outlasted all your other friendships. We planned a sleepover for the following weekend. When they came, they smiled and said “thank you for letting me into your house.” I laughed hollowly, resisting the urge to take the knife in my hand and stab the chicken I was preparing. They smelled. Raven always smells. Like some oils, or incense. Maybe weed. Body odor. I can't quite put my finger on how they smell. But it's bad. Their smell shoves itself into my nostrils and sticks like tar. I went upstairs to laugh with Matt about it, and we snickered at how they dressed, and how they smelled. But, hey, I'm getting their pronouns right. I'm trying to. After they left the next night I told you calmly that Raven could not come back. You said that you agree, it would be better for everyone if they weren't coming back to the house.

Best,

Your mother

Magdalene,

We got into another fight today. It started because you started with the spiel again: you're bad with money because you grew up poor. Everytime you make money, you spend it erratically because you're scared it's going to be gone before you can enjoy it. I got angry. You got angry. It escalated. Why can't you just grow up? Act like a person? You asked why I was even seeing a therapist, if I was just going to get provoked everytime you say something that is true. I said “parents have therapists so they don't go and kill their children like they want to.” You exploded. You stormed upstairs to ask Matt and Tab if it was appropriate to tell your children you wanted to kill them. I heard, because the door going upstairs was left open. I heard Matt chuckle, and say

“well, it depends on the context.” You walked back downstairs and closed your door. I think if Matt knew the context, he would think what I said was wrong. I think it was wrong, but it was true, and you deserve to know the truth. I went upstairs and shared a laugh with them upstairs, before going downstairs. You didn’t talk to me for a few days. Not long, you can’t keep silent for long. You have too much to say. But a few days, certainly. When we spoke next, it was a fight. God, it’s always a fight. I feel like I’m praying and worshipping with each move I make in regards to our relationship. I told you if you came home for just Christmas and Easter, and talked to me a few times a year, it would be fine by me. You shrieked that I can’t decide something like that, and if I feel that way, then you won’t come home for Christmas or Easter. I said that’s fine. I thought you had only said that to hear me say sorry, or take back my words. I thought you wanted me to beg on my hands and knees and say that I wanted you to come home. So I didn’t. I kept all my feelings in regards to the situation under tight wraps, even when you asked. You weren’t going to get the reaction you so desperately craved.

Best,  
Your Mother

Dear Magdalene,

You texted me today. It was the first time I heard from you since you left. You told me I did something unforgivable, spiteful and petty. Before this, the last time we talked was the night before you went back to start your junior year of college. I was sitting up in bed, reading a book off of my phone. You were crying. Actual, ugly crying. Between sobs, you managed that you didn’t like that you don’t like your mother, and you wanted to fix it before you never spoke to me again. You really, really wanted to fix it. I straightened my back, and said, calmly: “I don’t care if you never speak to me again, because I made and pushed you to be something bigger. You were valedictorian in high school because I pushed you, and I know you will succeed without me and when I see you succeed on a tv somewhere, someday, I will have that. I don’t need a relationship.” You sniffled, and walked to your room. Through our shared wall, I could hear your broken sobs. I only remember that I said that because when you texted me, you wrote it out. You said that I said that to you, and have thought about me saying that, so calmly, so deadset, every day. You saw the way my eyes slit, the way I twisted my mouth. I guess as much as I know your

mannerisms, and what they all indicate, you also know mine. You know I said that to be mean. I did. I wanted to hurt you. I wanted you to live with the consequences of your actions. But I'm seeing now that I have lost you because of that. You don't have to say a word, my love. I know how you feel. Mothers and daughters exist as wretched mirrors of the other. If I've hurt you, please forgive me. Love makes you do funny things.

Best,  
Your Mother