

Mac & Cheese and Greens

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Jame

I rushed down the stairs in excitement to tell my mom about my AP Calc grade. It was a test that I spent the whole night studying for. It was just a random spark of “I need to get my life together,” that made me do something as unthinkable as studying. This was my highest grade this term, also one I am super proud of because I didn’t even cheat this time! My grade was a 94, the highest in the class! When I reached the bottom of the stairs, almost tripping, I smelt the dinner mom was making. Ironically, she had made the meal I dread the most, spaghetti.

Switching my mindset from my grade to spaghetti I said, “Ma, we had spaghetti last week though.”

“And. We’re going to have it this week too,” she replied, reaching for the oregano, “You don’t have to eat.”

I sighed in compliance, “Ok, Ma.”

Forgetting to bring up my grade, I thought to just announce it at dinner. I go to sit on the couch. I try to take the remote from Aleighna but before I even make contact with it, she blocks me with her hand. When I move my hand, she moves hers.

Rayu

In a typical afternoon, I would be blasting music in my \$3 headphones where only one of the earpieces work but today I was planning for senior prom. I was in the middle of budgeting for whether or not we were able to afford a dj, (if not they would just be graced with the best prom playlist ever created) when I heard a thump from downstairs.

It was the kind of thump that would send someone to a hospital. It was the kind of thump that caused life altering changes. The thump that gave brain damage. I pulled myself out of my chair, flew open the door and ran down the stairs. I almost tripped on the last step that could never be avoided. That step has been causing accidents since we first moved here when I was 5. I remember the first time I fell on the step and I bawled my eyes out. Mom was pregnant and we needed more space for the baby. She kneeled down groaning a bit, she kissed my knee and placed a band-aid on it. Then she picked me up and set me on her hip and soothed me until I stopped crying. It was one of my earliest memories.

I looked around for whatever could be the source of the intrusive sound and I saw Aleighna on the floor with Jame unfazed, turning the channel on the tv from *Chopped* to *Friends*.

Aleighna

She sent me flying across the hardwood floor over a remote. She violated and assaulted me over a television show. Mom stopped being bothered by it a long time ago. She had learned to let us just pull each other's hair out was better than her being involved. It was a solid strategy, eventually we would always tire each other out. But occasionally I decide to be peaceful. I

gracefully picked myself off the floor then walked over to the aroma of spaghetti sauce and italian sausage.

“Ma please help me,” I desperately pleaded.

“Can’t you ask one of your sisters? Why do you need my help?” Mom oh so lovingly replied.

“It’s for a campaign at school. I’m running for sophomore president,” I said.

I knew she would understand because she is always scrambling trying to do everything that would help her campaign for being the Mayor. Mom has always wanted to run for our town’s Mayor since we’ve moved here. Before I was even nine, I can remember how she would complain about everything in or around the town. She doesn’t care about how we’re closer to the beach, to grandma, to dad. She just wants to control everything. I was thinking of just letting her take over my campaign because I know it would be a guaranteed win. She’s already ahead in the polls and we think Bill Ben-Williams might just withdraw. She says not to jinx it and still tries her hardest in every campaign. I could never try that hard for anything. What’s the point of trying when everything is temporary anyway.

Mom is the only one I really talk to. I know it might seem peculiar that a fifteen year old girl’s only friend is her mother but I have no other options. I go to a private school and I only have four other classmates. They are all nerds. Even my sisters always exclude me. They threw a party without me knowing. IN MY OWN HOUSE. I don’t understand why they would ever do that to anyone. I’m not ever intentionally rude. It’s not like we don’t spend time together. Mom always forces us to go on trips together so we can have family time. Even then they don’t want to talk to me.

Jame

Lately mom has only been getting to cook once a week because of the election. Since she feels like she has been missing out on very important moments of our lives, dinner is the time where everyone shares their week. This would be the perfect time to announce my good news. Mom always starts off with Aleighna's week. And as always she blabs on and on and sucking up to mom. She talks about running for freshman president when we all know that she's only doing it to get in good with mom. Now finally it is my turn for mom to be proud of me. After her *precious baby's* turn I had everyone's attention.

"Mom, on my AP Calc quiz I got a 94! The literal highest grade in the class!"

"Oh. Okay. Tomorrow we're going to your aunt's house because it's her birthday."

Wow. I know mom but I was expecting at least a little more reaction than that. Maybe a 'wow congratulations,' I don't know. I am tired of mom pretending I don't exist.

Aleighna

I hate family gatherings. I feel so out of place in my family it doesn't feel much like one. I don't know anyone in this family. When I was eight, I stopped trying to hang out with my cousins. They are all awful. The car ride there was awful. The whole thing was awful. The unnerving silence of the car ride made my arm hairs stand up. The only sound of the trip was the engine starting. Jame is next to me with her airpods in and her whole body positioned towards the window. She just hopped out of bed because I can tell she has her pajamas on. She's snickering to herself in the corner so she's probably talking about me to Sayu. Jame was always

bad at hiding things. Sayu is also on her phone but she is more discreet. When we round the last corner I can hear the old people music blasting and kids screaming.

Mom dropped us off to park the car and everyone split into their own ways. Then my feet picked up and started running off to the nearest bathroom. I could smell the sweet potatoes and greens follow me all the way to the bathroom. My eyes didn't work anymore because all I saw were blurs of light and outlines of people. Rayu and Jame must have followed me though.

Rayu

“What do you want to eat little one?” I instinctively say.

“Yeah, don't mind her. She's just stupid,” Jame *had* to add.

Maybe I was being stupid but it was infectious and I know who I caught it from. Jame was being irrational. She has always had it out for Aleighna. Filling in the silence, Jame interrupted my thought by saying,

“You have everything we don't. You have mom and that's enough for anyone to cry. You couldn't imagine having your mom stolen by your own sister.”

“What? The *only* person I have is mom. You two stick together all the time and leave me out,” Aleighna snuffles as she replies.

“So, uh, what do you want to eat?” I say again.

“Mac and cheese and some greens please.”

Jame

I lugged my things downstairs in a Fedex box that blocked my view. I forgot what a pain that stupid nail was. I brace for impact but instead of falling on my face, I make it down the steps successfully. Mom must have gotten the step fixed for the new owners.

Artist's Statement

This story was written with Robin Benway's writing techniques in mind. Some of her techniques I used are snapshots, dialogue and using a motif. All of these techniques are visible throughout my story and elevate the story even further. The snapshot that I wrote is to describe how the car ride made Aleighna feel lonely and out of place. Every bit of dialogue is to further push the story along. Pushing it in the direction that they each have their own relationship with each other and their mother. The thoughtshots in the story also convey this story. Each character has their own unique relationship with their mom.

The characters in my story are Jame, Rayu, and Aleighna. I would consider Aleighna the main character because it was her relationship with her mom that made Jame insecure about hers. While Aleighna has a better relationship with their mom compared to the other sisters, Jame's relationship with their mom is practically non-existent. This sister-mother dynamic sets up the essential question, 'What does it mean to be a family?'