

A decorative wreath of sunflowers and vines on a yellow background. The wreath is composed of two sunflowers, one at the top left and one at the bottom right, connected by a series of leafy branches and small buds. The sunflowers have dark centers and many thin petals. The branches are thin and elegant, with several leaves and small, teardrop-shaped buds.

**FROZEN SUNFLOWERS
AND TANGLED VINES**

THE ECOLOGY OF MY LIFE

RESH GREWAL

Mama,

I remember you piercing my ears when I was two, with a dirty sewing needle and scrap of cloth. I remember crying and you hushing me with soft caresses of your fingers. We didn't have any jewelry so you looped a piece of string through my lobes and tied them into a small knot. It was the first piece of beauty I was given in the middle of the slum.

My first gift after the adoption was finalized was a pair of earrings. They were simple, unassuming gold hoops, humble. You would have loved them. I certainly did, tugged on them when I was nervous and pet them when I was happy. But I always missed the strings. They were another part of you that I had lost.

Our final project in AP Psych is an exploration of our identity. It should be comforting to know that my peers struggle with theirs too. But our identity is inextricably linked with that of our parents and I don't have you by my side anymore.

One of our writing prompts is *what would you say to your ten year old self?* Ten was probably a random number. It's a solid one, basic and trustworthy. My teacher doesn't know what we know. That ten is when I began to hate myself. That until ten, I intentionally ignored your existence because I desperately craved the solace of being normal. I didn't want to be the immigrant, the adopted one. I pretended I wasn't abused, hadn't witnessed your death, hadn't been plucked from our home. I pretended to be someone that wasn't real because I thought survival would be easier.

At ten, the facade broke and our life in India flooded my mind. I made a memorial for you in the backyard and spent hours talking to you after school, apologizing for trying to forget. I began to wear black because you never got a funeral and I never got to grieve.

I wish I could tell little ten year old Resh that I understand. I used to blame her for your death and that became so much worse after pretending you never existed, but I get it now. My childhood was robbed from me. When I moved to America and saw the chance to finally be a kid, I jumped at the opportunity. I wanted to leave everything behind and embrace the new life I was given. I'm not angry at her, not anymore. And I wish she had more than five years to be a kid.

My teacher's name is Serenity and I think you would like her. She cried when reading my letter to ten year old Resh and said that you would forgive me. Do you? Her dad passed away this year and I couldn't help but think of you. It's weird to watch grief up close because my family always masks it.

I ask her how we mourn. She tells me that she doesn't know but she can feel it in her throat.

Last month it was in my gut, round and heavy, throbbing at every motion. But now it's moving up. Eventually it will be out.

I think that's profound and sad and beautiful. It reminds me of you, but then again nearly everything does. I don't know if I have mourned you because I'm not sure how to.

Do we mourn or do we go through mourning? Her grief is moving through her, maybe mine is trapped in me. Maybe my chronic headaches and never ending nausea is you living in me. I'm okay with the discomfort if it means having you.

Sometimes I am scared to mourn you because beginning something implies ending it. If I stop mourning you, are you simply a memory? Simple isn't a word that I think you deserve. You don't deserve to be a memory. Maybe that is why I write to you, why I give you life on paper. Maybe I was meant to become an author, to carry on your legacy.

The world will never forget you. I won't let it. I just hope that I can make you proud.

