

To Alaska

To Alaska, from your mother.

The thick, grey envelope tumbles out of my grasp and drops to the ground, settling on the damp grass beside the mailbox. Heart beating an imperfect rhythm in my chest, I watch as the moisture tarnishes the edges of the paper with a darker grey, as though the envelope is slowly being devoured by the dew.

No postage stamp. No address. The woman who calls herself my mother must have dropped it into my mailbox by hand.

I glance nervously along the deserted street, but there is nobody around. It's early on a Sunday morning, most people are still asleep. The letter is not from my mother, of course. My mother is still at work, on the overnight shift at the hospital. My mother lives with me—she doesn't need to write me letters.

I almost leave the envelope where it lies. Almost. If the woman who wrote the letter is still nearby, it would send the exact message that I wish to impart. *You meaning nothing to me.*

It's probably just another invitation to meet her—it happens every couple of years. Usually, though, the adoption agency reaches out to my parents and they pass the message on.

Alaska, would you like to meet your birth mother?

You mean my incubator? No thank you. I have all the parents I need right here.

It's the truth. Darren and Jean Ford are everything I need. I want for nothing. What would be the point of reaching out to someone who never wanted me in the first place?

But this is the first time I've received a letter. Nice personal touch. Not.

Making up my mind, I snatch the envelope off the ground, hurrying inside the house. I try to ignore the way the golden letters curl elegantly across the paper as though someone had put a lot of care into writing them. It's all a ruse, of course—the woman who wrote this letter doesn't care about me. Not really.

If you truly care about someone, you don't give them up at birth.

Despite the damp weather, my living room feels stifling, and without conscious thought I find myself in the back garden, surrounded by dew-bejewelled sunflowers. One, two, three, four. One for each of the miscarriages that caused Jean Ford's soul to become red-raw with grief so that she couldn't possibly try again.

Sometimes I sit in the garden and talk to them—my older siblings who were never to be. Here was a woman who wanted a child, and had to resort to adoption to make this dream a reality.

My lip curls as I gaze at the unopened envelope in my hand. Here was a woman who was blessed with a child, and gave her up at birth.

I'm not going to read it. I've never met my incubator, but I can imagine what it will say.

Hey honey, you don't know me but I need some money for drugs.

Or Hi, do you want to visit me in prison? We have dessert every second Wednesday.

Or even worse.

Dear Alaska, here's all the reasons why you should forgive me for not wanting you.

The woman who wrote the letter is not my mother. Still, those golden letters beckon me.

And so, attempting to have an open mind, I open the envelope.

There are pages and pages of that same curled writing. It's not a letter so much as a story. A story of a woman named Bianca.

At first, it's just a sob story. The way her dad was never around as a kid. The way her mother was hooked on meth and her many boyfriends were there for the drugs more than her.

I skim ahead, looking for mention of a baby. Of me.

As I turn the page, a photo drops into my hand. It's slightly out of focus, as older photos tend to be. Soft at the edges like a memory.

A frightened girl stares back at me. Dark hair pulled into a ponytail. A tiny baby cradled in her lap.

It's her eyes that get me. Those eyes that are so full of fear and something else...
determination?

I wanted to keep you. Please understand, Alaska, that I wanted to keep you. I wanted to raise you in a loving home that I never had. But I was scared. So scared.

"Yeah right," I say aloud to the sunflowers.

But I can't stop reading her story. She was seventeen. The same age that I am now. She doesn't know who my father is—I have to understand that life was hard back then. Out of focus. A drug-filled haze to cover up the trauma and depression.

I was lying there in the hospital with a tiny baby and I realised—I don't know how to raise a baby. Worse than that, I don't know what a loving home even looks like. I don't have a partner. I don't have money or parental support. I realised the best thing I could do for you was to say goodbye.

The letters are blurring on the paper, and it takes me a moment to realise that I'm crying.

But why? I don't want this woman in my life. I have everything that I need.

I read her story three times before I finally pick up the pen. There was so much I never knew about her, what harm would it be to share my story too?

To Bianca, I begin the letter.

Then I screw up the page and pick up another sheet of paper.

To Mum...