

I FOR ISOBEL

You are writing an unsent letter as any character and at any point in the novel “I for Isobel”.

4 March 1955

Mother,

Do you know who I am?

I am your daughter, Isobel Callaghan. The daughter you have taken as your play-thing, and used as a punching-bag. The daughter you have emotionally neglected for all these years, sending me into adulthood merely a girl who has too late found herself walled in. The daughter you wish you hadn't had. No, not because I'm nothing but a 'bitch' who 'brings shame to the family', but because there will never come a day where you will win. I will make sure of that.

My 9th birthday. Do you remember that? Why would you, when I only spent it racing to the hideyhole out on the back verandah, fishing my book from under the seat and retreating to Baker Street. I remember the look on your face, when I was finally recognized for my intellect, by Mr. Mansell. “You are not allowed to read the grown-up books”, you said. Well, where else did my own constant battle with an idiot in the attic come from, then? Jane Eyre is no children's book mother... All the adults' look of indignation towards you did something to you. I saw it in your eyes. For once, it was I who felt relief from the live animal tormenting me – one who could only be put to rest when the sadist you have raised within me, was satisfied. When I, and my intellect, could be the one to silence you.

I knew things would get worse when Mr. Mansell presented me with a gift – I still have it, you know. The floral brooch. I knew that would ignite something in you. Because Margaret's birthday has always been a black day for me, one where I would be reminded that presents on one's birthday are a pleasure that only Margaret could enjoy. But, that birthday would be my turn. My turn to enjoy a real present for a real girl. Being the tender age of 9, one should not have to quiver in terror about the wrath that would befall them, for receiving a birthday present. But I knew better. If you have dug your nails into my arm and hissed into my ear before, all for accepting some coins from trusted grown-ups, I knew what was to come for this. So, I slid my treasure under the pillow and waited for my bedroom door to slam open, as my world grew smaller and smaller. It was in that moment I could witness the true strength of my resilience, as the slams and bruises were merely marks on my body, but the words that echoed around the room as you abused me loomed closer to my heart. Still, I didn't budge. Didn't you notice? I knew you better than that.

Your torment has never ceased. Even now, as I write this, I hold the broken shreds of the yellow dress you so wrongly ripped...Grace, grace.

I adopted a state of grace, you fool! I was never sulking. Not once. How else am I expected to cope with this plight? I only wish there are rules to keep, to be safe. How about the time you sold the bracelet Margaret was wearing, and used me as your scapegoat? Self-forgetfulness is something I greatly despise, but it is much worse when that self-forgetfulness is a lie altogether – you sold that bracelet, but I was still the face of that “accident”. Nevertheless, I still remained dutiful with my grace, as I soon learned that sacrifice was one way to maintain it. Despite setting the table and vowing to silence when I

could have spoke up, I sit here a failure, as this state of grace has been truly unkind.... My grace lies limp in the yokes of this dress. Damn you, mother. Damn you.

I can not help but wonder what else you have ruined within me before I was lucky enough to even know it. My discovery of literature was because of you, mother. Don't you get it? Reading was my solace long before it was a hobby. My justifications for neglecting social interaction would simply be because books were better. I didn't need to go to the swimming pools, as it wasn't hot in Baker Street. You see, even birthday presents didn't matter when life had these enchanting surprises that are free to everyone. Nevertheless, I am curious. I want to know what other concealments there are, lingering right above my head. I want to know the truth behind my poem about Smoke, the cat. Mrs. Adam's friendly behavior with me leads me to believe otherwise, to what you have told me. Given her affectionate and her considerate nature, always asking how my writing is going. How does she know I write, mother? My quest to uncovering the truth from lies has only grown larger. But you're no hurdle, mother.

Some day, I will write a book about you. The book will be my truth. I will unleash the demon that lives in your soul and expose you to the rest of the world. I will be sure to pay no mind to my invisible knife, either, and only the most raw accounts of the harrowing toxicity will be documented.

I am unsure of what the future holds.

You see, with just the right mindset, birthdays, injustices, presents, all vanish. I may have failed in keeping up this state of grace, but failure can not deny one's right to try again. I will never stop trying, mother. Not in this lifetime.

You could change you name... change your country, change your language, but in the end, you would resurrect yourself. You can't change me, May Callaghan.

Your daughter,

Isobel.

Written explanation:

For my creative piece, I have chosen to write a letter from Isobel to her mother, May Callaghan. It is evident throughout the text that there are a lot of repressed feelings towards her mother. Hence, a letter that was never sent is most fitting with this notion. My piece takes place after Isobel loses her state of grace at the end of section 3. She is sitting with the yokes of the yellow dress in her hands, pondering all that has happened between her and her mother to have lead to this moment.

Isobel draws on her experiences as a child, all the way to the moment of her failure, her loss of grace. She recollects her 9th birthday, more specifically, and also wonders what else that could mean for Isobel. She questions whether there is anything else she will live her whole life without knowing, touching briefly on her inability to have a solid connection with someone as a result of the abusive relationship with her mother she faces.

The key ideas or themes my response focuses on are Isobel's discovery of literature, the distinction between truth and lies and the exploration of a toxic mother-daughter relationship.

While nothing new is added to the text, as it primarily focuses on a recollection of past events, Isobel mentions a building relationship with Mrs. Adams. Even though Isobel only discovers herself properly as a writer in section 5 due to discovering Mrs. Adams enjoyed her poem about Smoke, Isobel begins to unravel this truth from earlier on, according to my piece.

My overall use of voice aids the piece greatly, as the angry tone ignites a more rough word choice from Isobel. Thus, a new reader would discover a lot about Isobel's past with her mother, just by the time and sense of purpose and conviction in the voice. Dialogue has also aided greatly in finding this appropriate voice.