

Burnt

To this day, I still don't know why Mom kept her old dompas.

I found it when cleaning out her room, her lack of presence made the space cold and lifeless.

When I'd been younger, the room had been my safe place - where I'd come after nightmares or a bad day at school. Sometimes I'd come in to find Mom staring blank-faced down at something in her hands that I never saw. She'd put it away quickly, looking up and smiling at me as if nothing was wrong.

Having found the old, tattered book in her bedside table drawer, I realised then that *that* was what she'd been looking at, memories and nightmares flashing before her eyes.

It was tattered and torn with use - half-hidden beneath old papers and other oddments.

Carefully, I removed it from the drawer, hands shaking, and opened it. Inside, I saw her face - younger than I remembered and monotone in colour - staring up at me, beside her name, race and occupation - *domestic worker* - all in a language she hadn't understood.

This is what had followed her, even after the *regime* had ended. I hated that it had stuck with her, that it had affected her whole life.

She would have lived freely in an ideal world, without such pain or torture. But the world was far from ideal.

The power of one group had ruined the lives of thousands of people. Even then, I couldn't understand how the people could have allowed things to get as bad as they did. In my mind, people were people, with no difference in DNA makeup. Race has, and always will be, only the bizarre resort of those who needed to feel better than they were, those who needed validation.

They were the ones who had plagued my childhood, as I found my mother crying late at night. They were the ones who had split my family apart, my father being sent away because he was one of the so-called '*privileged*', without wanting to be so. Simply by accident of birth, he was split from his family and barred from ever seeing us again. I, his daughter, had never even seen his face except for in photos.

My grandfather had once told me that, when the laws had been eased, my mother had tried to find him again, but had had her heart broken when she found he'd been one of those killed

while protesting. She'd changed for the worse then, he'd said, and had never been herself again.

And it wasn't just her life that had been affected. Thousands and thousands of others had grown up without fathers, mothers, or parents altogether due to the flaws of those in power.

Often, I thought I hated them, those people who ruined lives. When I saw what they'd done to my country, my home, I knew that I did.

My mother, however, had never spoken badly about them. Whenever the topic was brought up, whether it be at the dinner table or on the way home from school, she scolded me for being rude and tried to make me see things from their perspective.

"Hey they're in the minority," she told me, avoiding eye contact as she turned the corner, "They felt they were being surrounded. They were scared. When you're scared, you feel you need to lash out, don't you? Well, that's just what they were doing."

I don't think I ever believed her. I don't think I ever could, knowing what I know now, knowing how they hurt her. She'd taken whatever job she could, at the expense of her freedom and happiness, just to try and survive. She'd kept her head down and hadn't fought it, not knowing how to create the change she needed.

That night, when she'd gone for good, I wept for her, for myself, for the life she could have had, had the government not interfered.

She'd once told me she'd wanted to be a doctor.

Because of the law, she'd never lived to fulfil her dreams. She'd had one child who had grown up without a father. Had the law been fair, she would have lived in a nice house, with a husband she loved and rooms full of all the children she wanted. Instead, she had lived mostly alone, with only one child who was dependent on her alone to survive.

I know that the pressure must have gotten to her, but she never let that show before me. She kept a brave face, never breaking down, only doing so in the loneliness of the night.

That day, having found the object that ruled my mother's life, I decided that enough was enough.

I headed to the lounge, where the fireplace stood, cold and lifeless. Beside it stood a basket of logs, half-full, steady and waiting to be burnt. Fetching the matches, I set the fire, grinning as it came to life.

Once it was at a full roar, I lifted the old dompas, staring at it and thinking of all it symbolised, of all those it had hurt.

With a lightness in my head and my heart, I threw it into the fire and watched with pleasure as it burned to ashes.

“This is for you, Mom,” I thought, as the tears fell softly, to the beige carpeted floor.