

Her Granddaughter

Nothing gold can stay.

I wonder how you feel about your golden years being aluminum. Do you think it's my fault?

As you grow older, you become more set in your ways — fossilized. As I grow up, I do the same. Set and determined in who I am and who I want to be. The only difference is that I can bend. I can bend when conversations become more stunted and combative. I can bend when the only topics that interest you are politics, bills, and the progress of my schooling. I can even bend when the comments on my habits and appearance begin to grate me. But to bend now does not prevent me from snapping later. Perhaps, you bent too much and this is your era after snapping.

"You come from two different generations," says the woman that links us — your daughter, my mother. "She grew up in a completely different time, it's going to be hard for you to understand one another."

I know that she's right and I know that she's speaking from experience, but why are my expectations still unchanging?

The woman that helped raise me was a vibrant and headstrong woman. She wanted me to be strong and determined. A lady, but a lady who didn't take shit — not from anyone. She told me to be honest and kind, but not give too much when others give too little. She told me never accept the bare minimum from anyone.

The woman who helped raise me told me about the reason she left her home country. She wasn't escaping persecution and she wasn't following a man. She was just "tired of this place and wanted something more." Even two kids and a husband didn't stop her from wanting more from life. When the opportunity arose, she left the country and headed for the city in another place.

The first night she arrived, the friend that promised her a safe place to stay for a while tried to sleep with her. She left his place and found somewhere else. A little frightened, but always true to her nature of not accepting shit from anyone — especially not a man.

But something must have happened along the way.

Her way of living which was surely radical then some how turned to complacency. Suddenly, I was the radical who spoke too loudly and too much.

"A lady must not be too loud. You have to be calm and poised, you can't just yell all the time."

I wonder what changed. Was it only okay for a child to speak volumes endlessly? Did she think that child would straighten herself out to become a quiet woman? Was it only okay when you were grown-grown rather than being a little grown? Was it only okay to show passion when you're angry with individuals rather than entire systems? How could a child who grew up in a ever-changing, loud, and unpredictable world and home be expected to become a quiet lady?

I am her granddaughter. I do almost everything she taught me to be. I have that same desire that she had at my age to not accept what was handed to me and demand more. Why can't she see that what is in me was once in her? When did I become too different?

It feels like the only things still connecting us are honors, awards, and internships — things I earn, rather than things I am. Ways I've changed and grown emotionally over the years don't interest her, but ways that I get closer to wealth and notoriety do. Am I her granddaughter or am I trophy? Am I valid in my existence or am I valid in the ways that I can validate her choices?

These days, we sit in silence for the most part. When she asks me questions, I answer in short phrases or sentences. Anything more is a risk for argument. When she digs too deep or gets too repetitive, I find some reason to not answer and leave.

Am I wasting the time I have left? Will I regret not being home for your 80th birthday? Will I blame myself for not trying harder? In the future, will I regret protecting my current self or will I wish that I would have forced myself to endure?