

# Girl Ajar

by Kshiti Vaghela

*MRA has signed in.*

**MRA: hi you.**

**Me: Can you hold on a sec?**

**Me: Got to do something real quick.**

**MRA: sure.**

*Sent at 6:36 pm.*

Mother saw and swung. It was a talented slap. The kind which left white welts and then dissolved to venom in your veins. The inside of your cheek puckered and bloated.

In 3rd grade, Mother would look in the mirror as she finished a topsy-tail and say, You stay away from Benny and Jeremy. Play with Molly. But Molly was a tight curled bitch, and everyone knew that. You didn't play. You strutted behind her. Benny told funny knock knock's while you stood at the ladder to go up the slide and Jeremy tied your laces to it so that a minute later you're hanging with both of them howling at your hair brushing the mulch. And then she heard about it. The principal was your backyard neighbor after all. Don't play with any of them, Mother said.

**MRA: I'll be around. Just holler.**

*Sent at 6:37 pm.*

You stare at her face for a few seconds and after refusing to lift your palm to the now rising pink bubble which might have been a sort of abomination on a smooth chocolate mousse, Mother swipes again and catches the other side. Harder. The tears are squeezing out of you because you're laughing. Then she grabs the edge of your laptop and you yelp and grope before Mother has the chance to take

that two-slate gem. Before you get to hear it cry some unearthly sound as it cleaves. But no, it's saved, thank god, and you clutch it to your chest, grinning. There are blotches on Mother's face which might have mirrored yours, only her nose catches the best of it.

Mother loathes them all. The boy who helped you up after you slipped off the swing set, and the one who hugged you in the sandbox. The one with a crooked smile who sat by you to let you copy the homework from his planner because you were too self-conscious to wear glasses, and the one who stuck out a leg and sent you sprawling in the middle of the hall only to apologize ten years later through a message and smiley faces on Facebook. Then the one who offered you a ride to the lab so that you wouldn't have to waste gas, and the one who took you on nightly strolls while he patrolled so that insomnia wasn't a word in your book. Of course, Mother didn't know all of them. They were Rachel and Amy and Linda fabricated from your initials-only chat contact list. You are smart, you know. So smart that secrets pour out of you as lies. Only, Mother is smarter sometimes-- she learns to distill the crude into clear truth oils and greases you with them.

Mother's hands send the breakfast tray that was under the laptop to gravity. Your toes curl in. She stares, teeth gnashing incomprehensibly. Molded, the artist would be famous. She is breathing again and so are you. The pause is enough to inch your knees up towards your face and cover the electric-hot machine completely, but she's at your face again, fingers grabbing the swollen flaps of skin like tying twist ties. Shaking your head you make them slip, hair swatting uselessly, but Mother lands those hands which are almost-copies of your own on your thighs: a quick double beat plays and pain escapes in waves through the hollow of your mouth.

**MRA: you there? Or just invisible?**

*Sent at 6:40 pm.*

And so, Mother knew about this one. The one with his angled three letters etched along the top of the chat box. The one who sent you a taped shoebox every Christmas and birthday, and then again for some lost bet. The one for who you woke up early and stayed up late to maybe catch a glimpse of between the 16 hour gap that split time. Just to tell some silly story you didn't want forgotten, or discuss a sleeper line, or feel wounded with about Amish shootings. Or tell rare dreams and rave about ranting. The one who came to visit (no, your mother didn't know this part, or so you hoped) and left you your first kiss, telling you to practice on fruit, and then had you running after the rental car that carried him away into the rising sun. His is the name which laced in your mother's pure, brown soul a whip of hatred.

When you look up again, her presence has evaporated. Over. She was gone. The silence makes buzzes in your ears. You unclench, unwind, swish your hair to the right side, gingerly run the back of your fingers under your nose and over your twitching lips, pick up the tray and open the laptop. It starts at a buttons notice. You wince at the welcome sound and expect the door to fly open again. You wait, a game of statue, fingers white and poised to slam the screen shut. One minute more. Then you look and the light fights with your lids.

He's still there.

**MRA: everything ok?**

**Me: Yeah. The internet just cut off**

**MRA: oh ok**

**Me: Should be good now**

**MRA: may I share something?**

