

Just let (it) go

When talking about my family, people always ask me if my parents are still together. It's a very simple question, almost naïve if you think about it.

But I never know how to answer.

“My parents live together, but they are not together as a couple, but they live in the same house. Yeah, it's complicated.”

That's what I usually say, and it is somehow funny to look at the people's faces trying to grasp onto what I just blurted out. I'd like to tell them that I'm sorry, but that would mean trying to explain it again, more clearly, and that is something that I can't do.

Nothing is clear when it comes to my parents.

When I want to cut the conversation short without sounding too rude, I just say, “That's why I left home.”

They don't need to know that I'm not being ironic when I say that.

I always had a close relationship with my mum; she has always been there for me whenever I needed a good cry, smart advice, or just some cold, hard truth since I tend to be a little too “over the clouds.”

She is also the person who never gave up on me when I had already. She took care of my body when I was starving it to death, and she believed me when I told her that there was something really heavy inside of my heart that made me see only black. She told me she could be my white.

She is also very strong-minded and opinionated; therefore, it's not difficult to end up in heated discussions with her. Sometimes I think she does it because she needs a vehicle to express her repressed emotions.

I don't think she's right, but I'm not that much better when it comes to emotions.

I used to be really close to my dad; I remember asking him to watch movies together or to play catch together inside and outside our house. Sometimes I thought he was the one having more fun than me, and the thought made me happy, that I too was doing something nice for him. That I was important to him as much as he was for me.

Now I think that he never really got to be a child when he was younger. His dad died in a car accident when he was a teenager, so he had to shoulder the workplace his father left behind and all the hidden debts while his other four brothers were busy arguing over which part of the inheritance was whose.

I saw him becoming more and more a slave to his work, and our playtime went from afternoons to barely an hour, and then it stopped. I missed my friend, but more than that, I missed my dad.

As I grew up, my relationship with him developed into him driving me to school with his car, back home, and then around the city on the weekend if I couldn't find another ride from my friends. Since he was barely home, I didn't feel completely at ease with talking about my personal problems; therefore, our conversations were cut short to "How was your day?" and "Did you have fun?"

I remember that sometimes I felt bad at the idea that he was nothing more than a taxi driver to me, a stranger who was forced to bring you around whenever you wanted, and he never said anything about it; he always agreed to every request of mine.

But that stranger was my dad.

Then, the fights started.

At first my parents were trying to keep them hidden from me and my younger siblings. They would go upstairs or in the garage outside the house. Then they switched to closing the doors, for then don't even bothering anymore.

Sometimes they would start arguing over dinner, my mum screaming at him and he pretending to be oblivious, making her even more upset. I usually stood up and took my sister and brother away with some excuse, such as watching a new program on TV, a super cool YouTube video, or playing football outside.

I remember thinking at every step I took to get us away from there, "Stop, stop, stop, please stop."

The fights usually started because of my dad's absence, because he was always at work and my mum had to take care of us, the meals, the house, and the cleanings. And, even when Dad was home, all he talked about was work.

A year went by like that; I could see the side effects of the atmosphere we had at home in my siblings' behaviours, as my sister became quiet and introverted while my brother very aggressive. I felt somehow guilty because I couldn't protect them from all the negativity that started to stick with us like a second shadow.

Sometimes at night, in bed, after closing my eyes, I could still hear Mum's angry voice screaming at Dad how bad of a parent he was and how that was ruining our family.

So I decided to take the matter into my own hands and become their personal therapist. I wanted to fix this situation as soon as possible, so I thought that a mediator could have helped in achieving that goal. And anyway, what could go wrong?

I approached Mum first; I told her that if she needed anyone to rely on, I could be that person. I reassured her that everything would eventually have been alright and that I could try to talk to Dad about his work schedule, asking him if he could spend more time with us.

"Oh honey, what did I do to deserve you?" she said with her kind tone, but her smile wasn't reaching her eyes. She was tired, and I had to move fast.

I started the conversation with Dad one evening while he was driving us home after my afternoon class. I tried not to be too obvious, asking him about work and his day, so when he said he was really tired and needed a break, I immediately replied, "Well, you can! Since it's Saturday tomorrow we could all go out to eat for lunch and then go see the beach!"

I didn't like the silence after.

"I'm sorry Maya, but tomorrow I have this appointment I can't skip, but thank you for the proposal. Maybe we could go on Sunday."

"But you said you're tired!"

"I know, but work isn't something you can just decide not to do because of that."

"I understand, but you're just taking a few hours break, not a week! You get some rest and stay together with us!"

In my mind, the solution was easy, so what made me start feeling upset was the fact that for him, we weren't even an option. Despite work making him feel like that, he still preferred it over us.

I stopped talking to him. When we arrived home, I jumped out of the car and shut the door as hard as I could before marching inside home. As soon as my mum greeted me and asked me how I was, I looked at her, "I talked with dad, I'm sorry." She hugged me and said, "You tried."

"I tried, but I failed," it's what I thought as I hugged her back.

Now I know that it wasn't my job, nor my responsibility, and that the burden I carried in my heart throughout all that period wasn't meant to even exist in the first place. But I was a teenager who loved love stories and believed in fairies and unicorns and happy endings, and I fully, honestly, genuinely believed that I could fix my parents' relationship. That I could bring back the affection and love they once shared and be happy again like before I was born.

I knew love always won against everything, and I did love them dearly. So if their love wasn't enough, then mine would be. I could handle the situation.

Mum started to rely on me more; I would help her with the meals and cleaning. Sometimes she would reveal some thoughts about Dad but never too much, just what it took to make her feel a little bit better. I could tell from the tired look of her eyes that she was at a loss for the situation as much as I was. I felt really bad for her.

One autumn afternoon, with grey clouds covering the sky and a nice, cold breeze painting cheeks and nose red, I needed help with my homework, so I went in the living room in search of my mum, but couldn't find her. I decided to go out in the garden. I walked into the garage where she might have been, doing the laundry, but no one was in there. So I headed to the front of the house, where the second entrance is, right after turning the brick corner on the right.

There she was, sitting on the ground. She was crying.

"Mum, are you okay?" I felt really stupid asking that question, but I didn't know what to say, or do. I just approached her and sat next to her.

She sniffed and tried to dry her tears as she replied, "I'm fine, don't worry."

"It doesn't look like it to me," to which she didn't reply.

So I continued, "Things will work out. I can help you. Please, you can trust me!"

She looked in front of her for a few seconds, then rested her head on my shoulder and said, "It's hard."

"I know."

Some days later, I started my last year of high school. I went to my first class, and I sat next to my friends. We were talking about summer while waiting for the teacher. I was starting to feel uncomfortable in thinking about what to say about how I spent my break when all of a sudden, a guy that was clearly not one of our classmates entered inside the class and sat a few desks away from us.

He had brown hair and, from what I could see, blue eyes. He had changed high school that very year and chose the same course as mine because the one he originally wanted to take was already full.

Even after sitting on the chair, he looked lost.

A few months later, he became my boyfriend.

It happened so naturally, like we were meant to be. Right from the start, he treated me like I was someone important, a rare and precious bud to treasure and shower with love in order for it to blossom into a beautiful flower. My initial thought of him was, "His eyes are kind." And I was right, as the first time we hung out together in our city centre, I found myself trapped in them; his clear blue eyes seemed to caress me in a way as to say, "You can let yourself go; you're safe with me." I told him everything about me and my family problems we were having at home. He listened, in silence, and then he hugged me. I felt like crying for the first time after months, like a dam was finally being removed from the back of my eyes.

He came into my life and helped me in so many ways, carefully taking my self-destructive thoughts out of my head like a brain surgeon to just be there for me. He took care of me and my heart without ever expecting something back, filling the cracks with kindness and attention and making me accept them and love them. He never tried to make a move on me in a way that was too pushy or sudden; he waited for me to be ready and not scared anymore of this strange, upsetting, and overwhelming feeling.

He brought me to this beautiful spot in Ravenna's countryside; there was a tree and a bench surrounded by a fence, and underneath, there was water flowing. We sat there, and he told me he liked me, and I just couldn't believe that it was really happening, and to me at that. After I replied with "Me too," my heart furiously galloping like a wild horse, he lifted his hand and carefully, gently touched my cheek, stopping to see if I wasn't liking it, I smiled in reassurance. The kiss was warm and tasted like serenity. Before leaving, I looked down at the river, following its course with my gaze, and I noticed something. There was a grey block of cement not too far away from that spot we were at.

An open dam.

I remember the first time I went to his house, I got to meet his family. He has a nice sister, just a few years younger than him, and his parents, who greeted me with kind smiles. They invited me for dinner, so while we waited for it to be ready, we sat on the sofa and watched TV. But I couldn't focus at all, since I could hear his parents' joyful laughs and jokes coming from the kitchen.

His mum came out to ask me if I liked roasted potatoes, and after hearing my response, she headed back to the kitchen, where the father surprised her from behind the wall, making her scream and then laugh out loud. He then kissed her on her cheek for forgiveness.

I felt like crying and thought, “Why not us?”

That was what made me feel guilty the most, the fact that I started to feel more at ease in a house that wasn't my home, with parents that weren't my family. I found myself looking at the car dashboard for the minutes that would separate me from the loud mess that was waiting for me.

I would say bye smiling one second, and then the one right after I would be welcomed by a “I want you out from this house!” screamed at the top of my mum's lungs.

At a certain point, probably because I wanted to convince myself that everything was fine and that situations like that can also be normal, I stopped worrying too much about my parents' situation. I think I was in some kind of denial phase, but it was either that or being finally and completely crushed by all of that. And I knew my mind was too strained for it, that I couldn't win against my parents.

I couldn't save anyone.

I was floating inside this bubble-like life made of school, boyfriend, and friends, carefully blowing it up whenever it reached close to the bottom that was waiting for me. I was holding on with all my might to that little piece of normality that I had. “Let me have at least this much, please” was all I could think about whenever I could feel my tears coming out after hearing doors slamming or looking at the worn-out faces of my parents or the pale, emotionless face of my sister.

We were all living in personal bubbles.

Dad was the one breaking his first, when he decided to cheat on my mum with another woman.

Now, when I find myself thinking about it, I wonder if that could be even considered cheating. I guess it is, but not in the way people would normally see it.

You can't destroy something that is not even there in the first place.

Their “us” had been gone for a long time.

My sister was the first one to find out, because the woman had a daughter who contacted her through Instagram. I know Dad didn't just break my sister's bubble; he broke her heart too.

All the bubbles popped soon after.

I was the last one to know, because I decided to spend the “weekend of the great discovery” out with my friends and my boyfriend, like a sort of sleepover party before the start of the final exams.

I received a call from my mum, saying she was outside and asked if I could come out for a second, so I did. As soon as I saw her, the wonky, almost ironic smile she was carrying on her face while her eyes were completely blank made me understand that something wasn't wrong. She asked me if I wanted to walk a few steps.

We took a step, silence, then another, silence, a third one, and then “Dad cheated with another woman.”

I could feel all the gravity hitting me so hard as my bubble exploded, making me fall without any defences. Not that they would have made any difference. I know even now that it would have hurt just the same, because the pain I was feeling wasn't somewhere on my body, but inside.

I looked at her, and she smiled, tenderly, defeated, emptied.

She hugged me like she used to do whenever I was feeling down and helpless, but this time it felt like she was trying to keep both of us together, like trying to hold a table set outside during a storm.

Before leaving, she apologised for ruining my weekend of fun, but she thought it would have been better for me to be with my friends during this kind of situation rather than somewhere else. Like home.

When I went back to my friend's house, I just knew I had the same face as when I first saw my mum, and I knew they knew I had something going on, but the shock on their faces told me that wasn't even an option for them either.

It made me feel slightly better.

I told them the story like my mum did, and they were in disbelief, saying things like, “How could he?” or “Are you sure this is not just a stupid joke?”

My boyfriend, though, didn't say anything of that sort; as a matter of fact, he looked at me straight in the eyes with seriousness in his and said, “So what?”

I didn't know what to say. But my tears stopped.

He took me out for a walk, a real one this time, and made me talk about what was going on inside my mind. It came out a mess of words. But he listened till the very end, when my eyes were drained and my heart worn out. Then he told me to follow him.

We went to the centre of this very big parking lot; it was probably already midnight, so no one was around, and the darkness was shielding my puffy face, which I was really glad for.

“Scream,” he said, suddenly. He was already looking at me when I turned my head. I felt like laughing for the first time since that afternoon.

The thing is, he wasn’t joking at all; he was standing there, waiting for me to do it.

“Come on,” he insisted. I told him I didn’t feel like doing it. I was scared.

So he went on and screamed, turning his head up, facing the sky; he screamed at the dark blue sky and its stars. The moon was also witnessing the scene.

Silence followed again; I knew he was waiting for me now, but, after almost an hour of speaking and crying, I felt like I didn’t have any voice left.

We waited in silence; sometimes we would look at each other or at the sky or even around us. I looked at the park where my grandad would bring me to play almost every afternoon, then eat a gelato together.

I looked at the sky again; now that he was gone, the idea of him looking down at me in these conditions made my heart ache. I didn’t want him to witness at all this pain; I wanted him to remember a cheerful, joyful Maya, the one that looks at the sky and searches for funny shapes of clouds and imagines what they might look like, the one that sees beauty even in a rock that, if painted, might become a beautiful jewel.

I screamed as loud as I could, for little Maya, for me.

The sky seemed to understand my pain, moving the stars closer to comfort me. Their cold, bright whiteness pierced my teary eyes and reached the cracks of my heart and said to them, “You’re not alone.”

“Why? Why did he have to do that?” was the lullaby I had repeatedly on my mind.

I could expect anything but this, the idea that he barely had even a few hours to spend with us, but he clearly had enough to find someone else. That was what was rotting my insides.

This question didn't stop even after all five of us sat down in the living room to talk about this situation. Mum started the conversation stating why we were there, trying to keep her voice down and steady, especially for my brother to completely understand the matter.

My dad sat at the very side of the sofa, his left leg bent on the right one's knee, his hands massaging the left foot, as if we were talking about what we wanted for lunch. He wasn't really looking at anything or anyone, and for a second I thought that despite his body language, he was genuinely reflecting on his actions, recollecting what he did and feeling too guilty to say anything.

But then, then he laughed.

It was just a brief sound. At first I thought, or maybe hoped, it was a wheeze, but when I looked in his direction, the ghost of a smile was still hanging on his face.

I still struggle to grasp what my feelings were in that exact moment; I can't really fit them into any category.

Was it pain? No, I didn't feel the ground trembling and then opening and engulf me in his darkness.

Anger maybe? Yes, part of it. I wanted to go straight in front of him and shout at his face all I was thinking, desperately digging into my mind for the most hurtful words and moments and feelings I could. But that's not all.

What was it then? I can only describe it as an electroshock for reality.

And the reality was that he didn't care. And that reality is the reality I was living in. And I couldn't change it.

Therefore, the talk quickly slid into a fight, if my mum shouting to my dad can be considered a fight. Again, something like that usually involves two parties, but here, there was only one.

He thought he didn't do anything wrong. And he believed that because he wasn't acknowledging what he did.

He firmly stated that what my mum was saying wasn't true. Even despite all the proof.

And then, since my mum wasn't giving up, he stated that "you were the one telling me to find someone else."

Maybe it was the way he looked straight into my mum's eyes while saying that, or maybe it was my mum's curved back, like a dying flower against my dad's relaxed posture, half laid down on the sofa's seatback, or maybe it was just selfishness for the old me, who used to admire him like a hero.

"So, you did what you did and now you're trying to blame Mum? As if you're not equipped with judgement?" I spoke. That laugh again. But I kept going.

"You know, you always claim how family is the most important thing, but all I see now here are remains of it, and I wonder if they're even real. The fact that you're sitting here, without a grain of guilt on your face, looking at us as if we're just stupid beings you can play around with," and, as I was saying it, I started to walk towards him, just for delivering the last line with all the pain I had in my body, "This is not a family, and you're not a husband, nor a father, not for me."

I could hear my heartbeat in my ears, but that sound wasn't enough to fill the depth of the silence inside the room. I thought of looking at the others and seeing if they were at least breathing, but I didn't, now it wasn't the time.

I was staring at him, looking straight into his eyes, sure I wasn't letting out nothing but cold glaze. This time, he wasn't laughing.

He broke the eye contact first. I ended the conversation.

In that period, thinking about the past felt more strange than hurtful.

Him playing with me tag or hide and seek; watching Disney movies together; dreaming about the farm we wanted to build together with all our favourite animals; me asking him to dry my hair with the hairdryer because "I like the way you do it better than Mum's;" him spending an entire week making me learn how to ride a bike, always right behind me whenever I was about to fall or just because I was scared; him taking time to greet on Christmas day even if we were hosting this huge family gathering and he was the one in charge of taking care of everything. And, years after, when I learnt that Santa Klaus is not about a real person but about real emotions, like love and happiness; he was the one who always woke up late at night to place my presents under the tree, making sure that the cookies and milk for Santa and the carrots for his reindeers were eaten, leaving a handwritten thanking note.

Did that mean nothing to him?

In the past years he barely had time for me or my sister or my brother or my mum, so where did he find the time for someone else?

Or better, why did he choose to give his time to her? Over us?

Just why her and not me?

But I decided to take those thoughts and crumple them, tear them apart till nothing was left but shattered pieces here and there that I could more easily hide under the rug of my mind.

You might be able to hide thoughts, but you can't hide yourself from them. Nor from emotions. And they did find me sitting in a corner, my mouth shut by some tape, blindfolded and with my hands covering my ears. They took everything off and made me listen to myself again.

After rejection, though, comes anger, and I could feel it running throughout my veins and slowly filling up every part of my body like a disease. As a matter of fact, I wasn't feeling like myself at all. I felt sick.

The fights got worse. There was no way to hide away from them. I felt helpless, looking at my siblings withering gradually as this whole atmosphere was draining them completely.

"Not them too," is what I kept telling myself, desperately trying to think about some sort of impossible solution. After all, what could I do?

I decided to try talking with Mum.

"Hey honey, I'm sorry, but today I'm not really at my best."

I knew she was feeling guilty for the situation, and that made me feel guilty too.

"You are the most amazing mum in the entire world, I'm so lucky to have you. Please, don't let this bring you down! You're not alone, never. I'll always be here."

She cried, a lot. For the first time, I thought about how fragile she was in reality, how even Mum is as human as I am, and why was that so easy to forget most of the time. At that moment, I saw a young girl dreaming about a beautiful, happy family with her longstanding lover, who was also her best friend and made her happy and carefree. I could hear the sound of all those beliefs built in time breaking down in a split second.

She always helped me throughout my difficulties and worries. She was always at my side. I was glad to be some kind of vent, yet that was all I could be for her.

And it made me feel useless. Transparent.

The role I self-charged myself to cover had completely drained me. I was living my life as if I were some side character, an outsider. Desperately digging deep down inside of me in order to find some solution, but the ground was dry and my arms tired. All I wanted to do was scream.

My friends and my boyfriend were really caring; even if I wasn't always in the mood for a talk, they let me know that they were there. I was immensely grateful, but sometimes, I just wanted to be alone, in silence.

Silence. I struggled to remember how it sounded like. For if it wasn't people, it was my brain, and it was all just too much, too much to handle.

At some point, even the thought of having to go back home made my insides start twisting and tightening like a spiny bush. The pain and guilt of not being good enough to solve the situation started to mutate into resentment against not just my dad, but both my parents, shifting my thoughts from "I can't do anything good" to "I can't stand them anymore." Because even if the main fault was on Dad, Mum also didn't seem to take any firm position in the matter, letting him walk around the house as if nothing happened.

"She was the one crying her eyes out, so why can't she just send him away?" was all I could think about from that moment on. And, consequently, even the slightest sight of Dad started irritating me to the point I had to clutch my fingers in fists till I started to feel the pain of my nails in the palm of my hand.

I wanted to hurt him the same way he hurt all of us. I wanted him to feel the guilt I was carrying because of him. That very guilt that was supposed to be his.

Whenever my boyfriend was driving me home, I kept track of the minutes separating me from that nest of problems I really struggled to associate with home. He would take my left hand, gripped on my knee, and hold it in his, gently caressing my palm with his fingers. I knew he was trying to reassure me, but that made me feel even worse, as I knew I would have missed that warmth once stepping out from his car.

Before entering inside the front door, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, trying to push myself to move forward. Cutting the roots that my feet seemed to have grown from the ground.

Walking inside looked like a slow-motion action movie where the main character confidently walks throughout fire and explosions. The only difference was that I wasn't confident, at all. I was stuck in between those fires that constantly seemed about to burn me.

I refused to give in though, and facing Dad was the last thing I wanted to do. “Not now,” I was telling that part of me that was about to break, “I know, but I can’t now. I need more time.”

Time, was that really all it took?

Now I understand better my mum’s hesitancy towards Dad. Despite everything, he had been her partner for thirty years and the father of her children. Besides, I know feelings were still involved, even if they couldn’t be called love anymore, but longing, routine, and even affection. Being in a relationship made me develop some kind of comprehension towards her behaviour, even if I don’t agree with it. But it’s thanks to her that I managed to develop this way of thinking, making me promise to myself that I won’t let any men take me for granted and to recognise when it’s time to let go of someone or something.

My dad, though, was a harder and bigger matter to digest.

Actually, I was starting to think it was something impossible for me to do, since, no matter how I looked at it, he was the house-and-my-own-peace breaker. He was the last string of cloth that kept me attached to that therapist attire I was desperate to take off of me.

My birthday was approaching, and the only present I wanted was a break from my family. And suddenly, like he read my mind, my boyfriend gifts me with two tickets to one of my favourite singers, in Paris.

“I thought it was a great way to breathe some fresh air,” is what he said smiling at me in his perfectly calm tone as if he just didn’t take my heart in his hands and made it feel a little bit more alive.

I’ll always remember how, sitting on our assigned chairs, waiting for the next song, the lights down and the sky starting to get dark, pink and orange drapes to adorn it, a new, surprise song started to echo in the stadium and my ears.

“You can let it go.”

“[...] they won’t hurt you anymore as long as you can let them go.”

I cried.

A strong wind blows and sweeps away everything in its path; dark blue waves collide forcefully with each other, creating a current too strong to be stopped; rain crashes to the ground as if trying to plant itself inside, down to the centre of the earth itself. Then, everything slows down. The wind comes back

to caress the trees as if apologising; the sea hugs the shore, and the water is absorbed by the ground, nourishing the plants that will soon become beautiful flowers.

My boyfriend, standing next to me, took my right hand and brought it close to his mouth, kissing it. It was delicate; again, I could feel this tingling emotion all over my body. I felt so loved, cherished, and finally at peace. He just demonstrated to me once again that not every relationship is meant to end up like my parents', that I could stand up from that cold, old corner and leave, living my own life, freely.

I had the power to make a choice.

Back home, I asked to start a therapy session. Despite my dad's "Why would you need it?" I was granted the consent and went to my first meeting.

It didn't take much for the therapist to understand that the situation was pretty messed up. But she listened to me talking about this therapist role I tried to assume in order to save any still intact piece of this dismantled family and how miserable and upset it made me feel in the end. And how I still couldn't bring myself to discard it.

So she asked me what I thought of this situation now, and all I could say was, "I just want it to be over."

She smiled, fondly, and said, "But this is not something you can control, because it involves your mum and dad."

"But there must be something I can do!" I almost cried.

"There is nothing you can do to fix it because you didn't have to in the first place; none of this happened because of you. It's not your responsibility."

It took me some minutes to find my voice again. Her words were playing repeatedly in my mind, fighting against that engraved feeling of defeat that was about to eat me alive. But I wasn't still completely convinced of what she said.

"I just don't want my mum and siblings to keep suffering like this because of someone who doesn't care about us!" I spat it out like a viper with its venom.

I think she managed to read my words, because the next thing she asked me was if I hated my dad.

"I resent him, a lot, but he's my dad, and he will always be." She smiled, her face the portrait of empathy.

Till that moment, I never realised that I always had a clear opinion about him and that the answer has always been there.

I always struggled with letting go. As far as I can remember, I always felt the need to fight with all of my might for everything I cared about. I guess that's why I was afraid of facing the problem. I was afraid of the exact moment where I had to just let it go. But once I managed to acknowledge it, I felt some hands lifting me up from the ground and putting me right back on track, even with a nice, little push forward.

Yes, forward is where I had to go.

I still remember that realisation, even now that I know the reason why I couldn't bring myself to let it go was because I was afraid that it would have meant forgiving him. But you don't have to do that in order to move on; you can just live and accept the positive that's in it. Like the memories we shared and the one we will create from now on.

After all, I was thankful to him for showing me the kind of person I would never want to be, nor I deserved by my side. My parents were the embodiment of a relationship I wanted to distance myself from, because the side effects are too poisonous, and I don't want my future children to even experience what I had to go through. And I almost risked it, trapped in the limbo of resentment and self-destruction they both helped to craft.

I had to close this circle.

The first occasion was when I saw Mum smoking outside in our garden. I was coming back from the city centre.

"Hey!" I greeted her, smiling, but her reply was emotionless. I already knew where this would have led to.

But not this time.

So, I just kept walking, heading inside. I couldn't see her face, but I know she didn't expect me to avoid the conversation. In fact, she tried to catch my attention, telling me she just had a fight with Dad, to which I simply replied with, "Oh."

So she reinforced the attack, "Yeah, I can't with him! He's never home, but then he complains about not being updated about things...Is that difficult to just cut some time for us?"

I knew she was waiting for my agreement, for then starting an entire conversation that would have led to another terrible confrontation with him, which would have required an ulterior involvement from me and so on, without an end.

I looked at her in her eyes; I knew she wasn't really doing it on purpose; she just wanted reassurance, someone telling her everything would have been alright. But that wasn't my job.

"This is something between you two; please keep me out of it."

Time seemed to stop; I seriously thought for a moment I was seeing everything moving in slow motion.

"Yeah, you're right; forget it. How was your afternoon?"

Everything went back to normal, but something had changed.

Now it was Dad's turn.

Sitting in the kitchen, I could tell Dad was slightly uncomfortable. A part of me felt bad about it, because it showed me how hard the situation affected our already unstable relationship; the other part of me felt a sense of superiority, not because I was holding some kind of power over him, but because I could look at his face and stare into his eyes without feeling weak nor on the verge of tears. I was unaffected by him and the situation.

I decided to start the conversation, aiming straight to the point, as I really wanted to clarify everything and move on to a new chapter of life in which I was free to live my very own life and maybe rebuild some walls of this dad-daughter bond, starting from the very first brick at the base.

It took a while, but then he also started to speak; even if he didn't explicitly say sorry, I knew he was. I could see it throughout his eyes the regret of his choices. I knew he had his demons to fight too.

So, without making him wait in anxiety another second, I once again looked him in the eyes and smiled while saying, "I just want you to be my dad."

I could see a sparkle lighting up in his eyes, replacing all that sadness reflected in them. Then he stood up and walked towards me. Before I could even think about how unexpected that was, he put his arms around me.

We hugged. And the tempest inside of me got quiet down once and for all.

I knew that it's not like from that moment on everything would have been perfect. I knew that it would have never been like before, when I was a child and he was my favourite hero. But it didn't matter. Now

I could see my dad for what he was—imperfect, human, but also someone who, after all, wants to be in my life.

This is enough for me. And maybe, it's enough for us.