

Ruined

I hold the broken crystal in my hands.

Carelessly allowing the shards to cut my hands. The vase (my mother's one nice thing—one thing of beauty, one thing of value in a house made shabby from too many children) smashed to pieces in a moment of mindless, childish play. I watch my mother slump into a chair at the kitchen table, hands over her face, shoulders heaving silently, crying for so much more than just a smashed heirloom. I watch her cry, the glass drawing blood from my fingertips. Ruined.

I hold the baby in my hands.

Bent over the bath I smile at her as I pour warm soapy water over her soft body. I feel a twinge of unexpected jealousy followed by an immediate flood of guilt for that twinge as I clean between her legs. Her body's newness and perfection such a contrast to mine now. Her joyful arrival leaving me stretched and loose, torn and ravaged. And ruined.

I hold the memory in my hands.

Turning it over and over, studying it with a surgeon's precise eye, searching for that moment when it all went wrong. A plan, a path, a hope, a dream. I let it fall to my feet and shatter like my mother's vase.

I stare at my reflection and will myself to remember that everything that stands in this world—everything of worth, and of strength, and of use, and of beauty, and of value—everything that stands and that fleetingly endures, is built on the remains of yesterday's ruins.