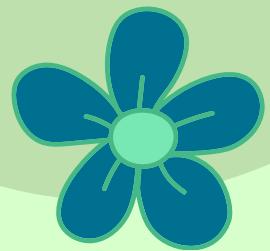


# Wildflower Post

*Newsletter*



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*Welcome to our first issue!*

Wildflower Post is a bimonthly newsletter that features works from writers aged 18 and under. We aim to spotlight and celebrate youth perspectives: brave, radical, honest voices that speak without and despite fear of being silenced. The newsletter will be published on the 1st and 15th of each month.

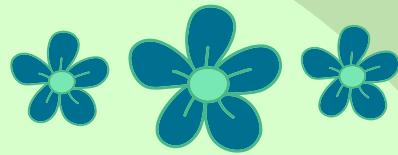
Thank you for your support!



TODAY'S WRITER  
*Aatira Shah*



Aatira Shah is a junior at Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart in Houston, Texas. She has been passionate about creative writing since childhood, exploring poetry, short stories, and playwriting across genres. She has attended the Young Writers Workshop at Bard College at Simon's Rock, the Kenyon Review Young Writers Workshop, and the *New York Times* Summer Academy.



## *Seventeen Chains*

AATIRA SHAH

One of the few things I remember about my mother is her neck—delicate, beautiful, always burdened with no fewer than seventeen necklaces at a time. Often, I would try to count them, but I would always give up after seventeen, as though that number was a wall I couldn't climb. Even more hung from the edge of her full-length mirror, their tarnished shades blending like watercolor stains, positioned where the liveliness of the room could catch each fleeting reflection. Every morning she stood there, pulling apart tangled chains of bronze and silver and gold, muttering to herself when they wouldn't come undone. I would sit cross-legged on the floor beside her, my fingers working faster than hers, slipping into knots with the ease of a locksmith.

I knew the feel of her jewelry better than she did—the sharpness of a broken clasp, the soft bend of a chain on the verge of snapping. My nails dug into the tangy iron scent, which reminded me as much of blood as of gears grinding in a forgotten machine. I, the well-oiled machine, always made it through the knots before I left for school.

My baby sister wasn't allowed to touch Mom's jewelry, but she fiddled with it anyway. Sometimes, she'd slip her hand behind the mirror to free a necklace that shimmered in its quiet, hidden nook; other times, she'd gently tug at the chain gracefully draped around Mom's neck—as if coaxing out a secret—and occasionally, her tiny fingers would meander over the scattered trinkets abandoned on the bathroom counter. My mother would collect her from wherever she'd wandered to and deposit her in the playpen in the living room.

One morning, my sister cried and cried when my mother retrieved her, even more brokenhearted than usual, clinging to my mother's gold necklace with her tiny, determined fingers as my mother held her—a hold that seemed clinical rather than comforting.

My mother placed her in the crib and walked away.

My dad, watching from the couch, didn't say a word. His gaze shifted to me, and he tilted his head toward my sister with a weary expectation.

“Make her stop crying,” his face said, though his mouth didn’t move.

I stood on tiptoes to lift my sister, her tears soaking into my shoulder. My right pigtail was higher than my left. I hadn’t had breakfast yet. I rocked her gently, murmuring, “Don’t cry.” My mother, halfway down the hall, turned briefly to watch. Her face showed nothing—not thanks, not guilt.

“Don’t cry,” I said again, though I’d only ever heard mothers on TV say it, usually to children who weren’t really crying.

My sister reached for my face, her small hands sticky, her sobs softening into hiccups. Her cloth diaper came undone, its knot slipping loose. I glanced back at the couch, where my dad had been, but it was empty—just the faint indentation of where he’d been, fading into the cushions. My hands trembled as I tied the diaper, the knot slipping once before I tightened it again. I wasn’t sure if I was really fixing it or just holding it together for now. Me, the fixer. Me, the knotted thread holding everyone together.

One quiet evening, long after my sister learned that crying got you nothing, my mother left her necklaces on my dresser. Not one or two, but all of them. They lay in a heap, tangled worse than I'd ever seen before.

"I don't have the patience anymore," she said, her voice soft, almost ashamed. It took me hours to untangle them, sitting cross-legged on my bed. I worked slowly, pulling each chain free, following it to its clasp. My fingers ached, but I couldn't stop. When I finally finished, I went looking for her, the necklaces draped over my forearm in neat rows.

Her door was open. Her bed was empty.

I found her in the living room, standing in front of her mirror. She held out her own arm. Clumsily, I slipped the dangling chains from my possession to hers. They swayed back and forth, glinting faintly in the darkness. She didn't move, didn't speak. She looked at me in the mirror; her reflection fixed me with an expression I couldn't place—regret, sorrow, maybe something else entirely.

"Mom?" I said. It came out small and hoarse.

She ran her fingers through the chains, brushing them together with soft metallic clinks, a sound that echoed in the silence of the room. I could practically hear them tangling again. "This must have taken you a long time," she said, her voice soft but warm. She reached out and brushed my hair back gently, startling me with her tenderness.

"It's nothing," I mumbled.

As I caught my reflection in the mirror, my mother gently placed a necklace over my head, its slender length slipping quietly into place. She smiled faintly, her hand lingering on my shoulder for a moment before she stepped away.

The next morning, she was gone.

Her necklaces were gone too. All except the one around my neck—a fragile chain, weighed down by a leaden pendant. No inscriptions, no images. Just a dull brass ball that not even light wanted to reflect off of. I never took it off.

Now, as dawn spills through my window, the remnants of a restless dream still cling like mist. I wake abruptly, my hand instinctively reaching for my neck. The pendant's familiar weight presses against my throat, a stark contrast to the whisper-thin gold links from which it dangles. It feels cold to the touch, almost icy, as if it's been steeped in the night's chill. Tracing the chain with drowsy fingers, I remind myself there's only one thing around my neck. But I can feel the rest of them, the seventeen chains and all the ones I never counted.

The icy bite of the metal spreads, mingling with the warmth of my skin, reviving fragments of the dream—a faceless figure on a fog-shrouded pier, insistent rain on a window that won't close, the sensation of falling. Fleeting images, so tangled with the cold weight pressing into my throat that I can't tell if they were ever separate.

