

Untitled

By Alyssa Wolf

The day is young, but it is already a nasty one. It is 10 a.m. and I can feel the sun pounding down on my back. If I did not already have a healthy tan, I would be burned in minutes. I hate these days. I am always thirsty, but Mama still makes me walk. She says if we stop walking, we die. I say if we keep walking, we die. She laughs and sighs at the same time and pulls me close for a hug. She smells funny and her skin is sticky, but I don't care. I love Mama's hugs. They make the hot days more okay even though they make me hotter. Mama gives me one last squeeze and her bones poke mine. It hurts me, but I don't tell her. She hates hurting me.

We keep walking because Mama is the boss. As we walk, Mama trips four times. I counted. Mama taught me how to count to ten. She catches herself, but I ask her if she needs help walking. She says she is okay, just getting old. I tell her I never want to be old. Mama says she hopes I get to be very old. That was a mean thing to say so I stop talking to Mama. After 15 minutes, Mama seems weird again. She is massaging her head and neck with her hands. I feel bad for her, so I start talking to Mama again. She smiles at me. She looks tired and in pain. I ask her if she wants to sit down. She tells me if we stop walking, we die. I tell Mama I don't want to die. She says that is the best news she has heard all day. We keep walking. My throat gets scratchy and dry; I want to tell Mama, but she gets mad when I tell her I am thirsty. So I be a big kid and think about something else.

Two hours later, Mama goes and sits under a tree. I am happy for the shade. Mama has never let us rest before. Mama lies on the ground. I ask her if she is okay. She says when you get old like her you need naps. I tell Mama she doesn't nap. She laughs and holds me tight. Mama's hugs are the best. The day is warm and it makes me sleepy. I wake up because the mosquitoes start biting me. The sun is setting. I hate mosquitoes. I shake Mama. She doesn't wake up. I shake Mama again. She doesn't wake up. Her body is super-hot: hotter than the sun. My throat is so dry it feels like it is cracking. I want to scream at Mama, but I can't. I shake her really hard and she opens her eyes. She looks mad. I whisper sorry to Mama even though moving my lips makes them bleed. Mama says thanks for waking her. I smile. Mama is scaring me. I tell her we need to keep walking or we will die. She says she is too tired and her body won't move. I want to cry, but Mama says be strong. I am so strong. I ask Mama what is on her neck. It looks mad and angry. It is red and covering Mama's pretty skin. I want it

gone. Mama feels it with her hand and looks very scared. It makes me want to cry. Mama says it is a rash. She says I used to get them all the time when I was a baby. That makes me feel better. I tell mama she is getting younger, not older. She smiles so big at me. I smile, but my lips start to bleed again, so I stop. Mama tells me to walk. I grab her arm and try to pick her up. Mama scolds me. She says, "No. Walk by yourself." I am not strong or big anymore, I start to cry. Mama starts to cry too. Then she stops. She tells me to leave again. I won't. She can't move, so Mama can't hit me and tell me to leave. I have won. I sleep a couple feet away from Mama and wait for her to get better. I hear Mama crying at me, telling me to leave. I won't. I love Mama. Mama tells me if I stay, I will die. I tell her if she stays, she will die. She tells me she is dead no matter what. I don't cry this time. I stand up very tall, I walk over to Mama and I hit her. She cries harder and says she is sorry. I don't talk to Mama because I am mad at her. I walk. Mama always wants me to walk. I walk until I see the morning light start to peak over the edge of the land. I love the sunrise. I hold out my hand searching for Mama and it falls limply at my side. I look around for Mama. Then I remember: I left her. I stop dead in my tracks. I look at the sun, beginning its slow journey across the sky. I turn around and see no one. Before I have even thought about what to do next, I am running full speed back to her. I trip on myself because I am running so fast and I am very thirsty. I run and run. I fall, I get back up, I run. Then I see the top of the tree under which I abandoned Mama. I run at it screaming, "Mama!" I feel the dryness in my throat rip open and I taste blood, "Mama!" I scream.

Then I stop. There is a big car next to the tree. There are three people picking Mama up off of the ground. Mama is limp and not moving. What did they do to her? I run at the one holding Mama's feet. I scream and hit him. The girl who was holding mama's arms grabs me. She tries to hug me like Mama does. This infuriates me. I scream and kick and the woman begins to cry. This makes me think I am hurting her. I smile and keep kicking. The other woman has completely forgotten about Mama. She walks over to the automobile and pulls out a clear cylinder. She tries to give it to me but I don't know what it is so I throw it at her. She carefully picks it up and opens the top. With eyes glued on me she opens her mouth and pours a little of the contents into her mouth. She smiles and hands it to me. By now I realize what is in the cylinder: water. I take one tentative sip. It tastes amazing. I drink the whole bottle in one gulp. I look up and they are all staring at me. Even the one I was kicking is staring at me, silent tears running down her curious face. None of them moves. They are scared I will hurt them again. I smile at them and the crying woman smiles back at me before continuing crying. I get the impression this is quite a normal activity for her.

I look down at Mama. She isn't dead, but she is close. I look from Mama to those strangers, pleading a silent plea for help. They see my plea and carefully move towards Mama. They reach to pick her up. I follow and grab her hand. I think her hand tightens around mine, but it is such a slight movement I can't be sure. I watch them to make sure they don't bump her as they lay her in their automobile. I begin to walk in the direction I came from and I feel the hot tears pooling in my eyes again. I go to wipe them away when I feel a firm hand grasp my neck. I freeze. I turn around quickly, fists raised in defense, and see the man smiling down at me. He is old, much older than either of the women, and older than Mama. He says something to me in a language I don't understand. I tell him I don't understand in the polite way Mama always tells me to talk to strangers. He looks back at the girls for help, but they are fussing over Mama. As I stand awkwardly, picking at my scabbed lips, the man pulls something out of his pocket. It is very small. He opens the top the same way he opened the water. He dips his finger in the thick viscous liquid. He gently moves his hand towards my face. I flinch but he makes a cooing noise like Mama makes. I know it is okay. I stand there, my eyes fixed on his. He smears the goop on my lips. It has a weird smell I don't like, and then, the tight pulling sensation on my lips is gone, the pain is gone. I put my own finger to my lips. The goop is absorbing into my lips. My lips feel soft and not as broken. I want to hug this stranger. I search his face for any signs of animosity. When all I see is kindness and love, I do hug him. He hugs me back. We hug for many minutes. When I open my teary eyes, I see the girls getting into the automobile with Mama. They seem anxious to go. For one fleeting second I think: are they going to leave us? Then I remember the one who kept crying. She was crying for me. They had the same look on their faces as this old man. They wouldn't leave me. The old man stands up and wraps his big hand around mine. It feels warm and safe. We slowly walk to the car and he helps me into the seat. He buckles me in and rolls down my window. I look at Mama. The women are putting a bunch of wires into Mama's thin arms. They can speak a little of my language and tell me the wires are to make her feel better. They say that they have come from very far away to help us. I am worried about Mama, but they smile at me and reassure me she will be okay. I believe them. I trust them. As the car takes off and the hot wind begins to blow against my face Mama begins to stir a little. A slow laugh starts deep in my chest. It rings out of my mouth and doesn't stop coming for many minutes. I laugh at the wind hitting me in the face. I laugh because Mama loves my laugh, and I cry because I stopped walking, but that doesn't mean I am dying.