

We are a barefoot family. I only like shoes when I've worn through them so much that I can feel the cool of the ground through the soles. The entrance to our house is flanked by a pile of flip-flops and Chucks and loafers, and the special leather nursing shoes my mother wears at work. But that doesn't mean I ever leave the house with a pair.

When I was in high school, I showed up at seminary at least three times a year without shoes. My father would drop them off at the office, with a five dollar bill for lunch and note: *Really, mija...really?*

I prefer the hot pavement and the cool grass, and the gooey tar patch on the asphalt. I prefer it to the steamy insides of shoes.

I like washing my feet, watching the day swirl down the drain.

My father goes barefoot when he patches the shingles, blistering his feet on the superheated roof. I sit in the car, all the windows rolled down, my feet propped on the open door, a book in my lap, watching him to make sure he doesn't fall. He's not afraid of falling. My mother is. He sits in the grit and pumps caulk onto the bare spot, sticks a new shingle over the hole.

My mother steps into the glaring New Mexico summer and looks up at him, looks at me. "Are you watching him?"

These two humans, the humans that bore me, are defective. My mother's parents both died of cancer, ensuring that she probably will and I maybe will. I don't know exactly how flawed her genes are. My father's mother just barely died of heart failure. Eight-three years, that isn't a bad run. But his father now lives alone in an assisted living place, and he can't remember our faces when we come to visit.

My mother is barefoot too, and it's so hot today, we're lucky she's wearing clothes at all. My father waves the caulk gun at her. "We're fine."

"She's just tanning her feet." Mom points to me.

"She needs a tan. She's been in Idaho for seven months. They make her wear shoes there all the time." He fills in another bare spot.

In high school, when I was in marching band, I used to get the best sock tans. About midway through summer training, we'd get fed up and just go without shoes, showing the rookies with the strike of our heel what a proper eight-to-five step looked like, and the sun would even us out.

Mom goes back inside and Dad looks at me for commiseration. She worries too much. She worries about his heart, which is fine, and his knees, which aren't fine, and his brain, which can still derive the quadratic formula after all this time. He worries about her mental stability.

I get out of the car and back up until my heels hit asphalt so I can point out the other empty places on our roof. They've just redone the tar, so it stinks in the heat, but I squish a toe into it, watch as it bounces back. It was hot at my grandmother's funeral, too. My heels sank into the tar that day, too.

My father is the youngest of seven, and a mistake. Not his life, just his existence. A mistake on the Mason family tree, anyway. Unintentional life. Having graduated from that household, he married and vowed to have few enough children than he could remember all their names, and so that he could fit them all into one car.