It feels like my family is a scattered constellation, pieces of us floating, never quite aligning. We exist together, but there’s a chasm between our souls, a gap that grows wider with each unspoken word, each unacknowledged feeling. I’ve watched them move on, watched them cope, even watched my mother assume the role of strength in the midst of it all, overshadowing in a way that feels both deliberate and suffocating. I feel she carries everyone’s pain but mine.

I’ve felt the weight of silence more than I’ve felt their embrace. They mourn my daughters absence, and yet I’ve never been asked how I felt about it. They don’t look at me with sorrow or compassion, they look at me with like I’m to blame. I’m a reminder of something broken. Something that can never be repaired. It’s as if I’m the ghost haunting the family instead of the one grieving, Lost in my own world of guilt and confusion. I’ve tried to make sense of the past, of the abuse that twisted my sense of self-worth that made me believe that maybe this was the division between me and my family, my punishment for a life I never asked for. And as I sit here, continuing their lives I realize that acceptance isn’t something they can offer, and maybe its something I’ll never find.

I carry this heavy truth in silence. No one knows what it feels like to be trapped beneath the weight of blame and regret.

I’ve spent years wondering if I’d done something different, if I’d of fought harder or been stronger, would things have turned out the same? Would I’d have gone through what I went through at such a young age, which robbed me of my life, my ability to know what love really means or trust.

Would my daughter still be here, if I’d fought harder and not given her and her sister up for adoption, or would my family still have their judgment?

Would they see me for who I truly am instead of what I’ve failed to become?

The hardest part is not the alienation I feel but the erasure. The way some speak about my daughter missing, like she’s a memory belonging to them, like her absence is theirs to mourn alone. But they don’t know what its like to wake up everyday with the gnawing ache of not knowing, with the guilt that claws at my insides, whispering that I’m to blame, that I was the one who should have kept her safe.

Everyone talks about the grief they feel. The void she left in their lives. They gather around it, a shared sorrow that binds them closer while pushing me further into the shadows.

My mother, she has always been the center, the one whose feelings seem to matter most. Even when I was young, it was her pain, her disappointments, her version of the truth that mattered. I leaned early on to step back, to make myself small, to let her shine, because trying to stand in her light only brought me more heartache. But my daughter missing, is her tragedy, her loss, and I’m just a foot hole in a story she tells as if she’s the one it happened to.

I’ve tried to reach out, to bridge the gap but every time I do it feels like everyone pulls further away. No one understands the guilt I carry the sense of responsibility that eats away at me every second. I feel like no one understands what it’s like to love someone so deeply yet failed them. I want to scream k why no one can see me, why no one can understand that I’m not just grieving my daughter. I’m grieving the loss of my family, the loss of the person zi should’ve been.

 I live in the space where grief and guilt have no names and the past is just a dark, uncharted territory I walk alone. I wonder if I’ll ever stop feeling like an outsider in my own life.