I should have been happy. As the chilly February air hit the sides of the car door, I should have been happy to have my coat on. The car was chilly as we waited for it to heat, so I encapsulated myself deeper and deeper into the fabric. The silver fur trim rubbed across my forehead and I finally felt warm. Satisfied. Comfortable.

The more time we spent in the car, the more aware I became of my surroundings. The voice of Rihanna, how far back my brother’s seat was reclined, and my coat. The fabric that once held me gently became my prison, and I needed to escape.

As the feeling of the polyester rubbed against my skin, I began to condensate. My raw skin began to burn, I felt trapped and my 7 year old body couldn’t take it. Feeling the pricks and stings of my open eczema wounds tortured me and I needed to get out. Out of my coat, out of the car, out of my skin. My coat was the cause of all my problems and I needed help. I tried to get it off, but the zipper jams. What did I do so terrible to deserve this karma?

I verbalized my discomfort and told my mom my dilemma. I expected to be met with compassion and care. Maybe she would even show how much she loves me by stopping the car and helping me in the back. Instead, she insisted that I keep it on. She promised to help me when we got home but that wasn’t enough. Could she not feel the agony I was in? Why did she want me to suffer?

I know I wasn’t behaving that week and I gave her a hard time getting to the car but she should have ignored that to help me. She refused to pull over and help me and the longer I sat in the coat, the more angst built. As a forbidden word flew out of my mouth, I felt furious. Furious
at the fact that I said the “F” word and even more furious that my coat was still on. It felt as if my mother orchestrated my demise. She was the one that gave me this coat and the one that refused to help me. Maybe she enjoyed this; by not helping me, she was able to get back at me for all the wrongs I caused her.

After what felt like ages, my mother snapped out of her selfish ways and tried to calm me down and reassure me that it would be okay. She turned off the music and blasted the air conditioner but she was too late. I saw red and there was nothing she could say that would make me feel better. It’s her fault that this coat is on me, her fault that I am like this. She birthed this creature and it is her responsibility to deal with the consequences.

It’s been almost a decade and with time, I realize that it wasn’t a personal attack. As most parents, my mother did the best she could. Regardless of my age, it must have been hard to stop everything she was doing to help me. She had her own personal prerogative and that was getting us home safe and sound. To her, the safety of my brother and I was more important than my personal comfort.

Parents are constantly in a position where they have to sacrifice themselves for the wellbeing of their children. Who am I to judge a woman doing her best when I have never been in that position? Day in and day out, parents give themselves up for their offspring and I have to question if it is fair. Can you blame a parent for committing one selfish act when all they have done is been selfless?

Nathaniel Hawthorne examines what parental protection can look like and if it is always
in the best interest of the child in his famous story “Rappacini’s Daughter”. The questionable scientist, Rappacini, has a daughter, Beatrice, that has been given the ability to be poisonous and have a lethal touch to all life. Beatrice suffers immensely and she expresses her grief to her father with the following words,”...wherefore didst thou inflict this miserable doom upon thy child?” To her, she was stripped of a life filled with love at the hands of her father. Instead of sympathizing with his daughter, he justifies his behavior. He feels no sympathy for the loss she faced and in the end of the story, she commits suicide to escape her Earthly torture. Though Rappacini’s main objective should have been to protect his daughter, he instead had selfish intentions. He made Beatrice a personal lab rat in an unethical and selfish experiment for the furthering of science. His reputation is flooded with the idea that “he cares infinitely more for science than for mankind” and his attitude towards parenting relates to that.

Just like Rappacini, selfish thoughts filled my mind. Even though I knew my mom was tired and wanted to go home, I begged my mom to let us go inside of the new Bath and Body Works that just opened. Once we got inside, without thinking, I swiftly separated from my mother and charged to the display of small PocketBac containers. I was a woman who knew what she wanted and I needed the protection of my mother no more. As I victoriously got my hands on my prize, I began to feast. From the sweet summer smells like a chilled glass of watermelon lemonade that I adored, to the fetid fall fragrances like heavily spiced pumpkin and marshmallow lattes that I couldn’t stand, I was in heaven.

As the scent of vanilla ice cream cones on the boardwalk filled my palette, I began to feel
tense. Becoming aware of my surroundings, I knew I wasn’t alone. As my eyes detached from the display stand, my eyes were met with a powerful figure; a large man in a gray puffy jacket with a shiny metal badge. My feelings of power diminished instantly and I became his prey. I realized that he was locked in on me and that his eyes never broke my direction as he sized me up.

Though he never physically moved closer to me, it felt like he was going to pounce on me in an instant. As my options began to close in, and his gaze became stronger I knew what I had to do. Everything in my body was telling me to run and hope that he couldn’t catch me, but we all know how that story would end. No matter how fast the bovid runs, the feline always wins. I had to abandon my deer-like mindset and be smarter. To not alert the officer, I did what I was taught and slowly and carefully put the hand sanitizer down and rushed to my invisibility cloak.

The same woman that I ran from was the same woman I ran too when things went wrong. Without questioning my rush to her, she held me and didn’t let me go. As my body shook and waited for the threat to disappear, I encapsulated myself deeper and deeper into my mothers arms. The familiar scent of her perfume entered my nostrils and I finally felt safe. Satisfied. Comfortable.

Instead of sticking with my mom, I prioritized self interest which caused me to be in the midst of potential danger. Though it is easy to blame parents and call them selfish for their parenting decisions, children can also be selfish and their actions can lead to their own lack of security and safety. Depending on perspective, the ability Beatrice has can be seen as a blessing.
During this time period, the sixteenth century, women were powerless at the hands of men. When Beatrice expressed her grief, Rappacini responded by saying “Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil, and capable of none?” He justifies his actions by claiming that this power made her stronger and gave her protection. Just like my mother, Rappacini may have believed he was helping his child while there was an underlying factor present, such as not acknowledging his child's wants, that ultimately led to the demise of his child. If he allowed Beatrice to live a normal life, and not keep her confined in the “safety” of the garden, maybe she wouldn’t have ended her life. Beatrice did not have the choice to be his daughter or her involvement in his experiment and if she did, things may have turned out differently for the both of them.

My mother could have abandoned me the way I did her and allow me to suffer the consequences I created for myself, but she didn’t. She could have shooed me off but she chose to leave and keep me safe when she had every opportunity not to. Why would she stop what she was doing now to help me but not before? What changed?

Maybe I was good to her that day or maybe it was the circumstances that caused my mothers shift in behavior. Regardless of these wonders, what is true is that there is no guide to parenting that is without fail. Though parents may fail their children, they are also human and are bound to make mistakes. All of humanity is a victim to mistakes but they are also the subject to learning from said mistakes and growing from them. I can admit that through the years, my mother has grown and maybe her lack of help with my coat acted as the catalyst to this change.