MAGNETS

When I was growing up, our fridge didn't have any magnets. It was the kind of fridge that came built in. Actually, it was our second fridge in five years' time. We have my mom's chronic depression and borderline bipolar disorder to thank for that.

It also meant we got to have an entirely new set of plates and glasses every six months or so. The art of kintsugi only really got a foothold in our household as I got older and better at concealing my family's true nature. Unfortunately by then, you could say, the damage had already been done and no amount of gold could hide the cracks in our crockery.

But I diverge, let's go back to that fridge I just mentioned. As I said, ours didn't have any magnets because its magnetic surface was covered up by something that I can only assume is what laminate feels like compared to hardwood. And wood – even fake wood – does not have magnetic properties. So nothing could stick to it.

When I was younger, I didn't think about the significance of this. I didn't think about why we would actually want to have magnets covering our fridge? All other surfaces in the house were already covered in bric-a-brac and nicknacks gathered from our trips around Europe and my mom's obsession with collecting every miniature piece of Swarovski she could find. Because as long as we had an outward expression of how good of a family we were, people would never look at the cracks – as if my parents' blatant passive aggressiveness wasn't obvious enough.

So why would I want to add more clutter to this already messy household, I thought? If anything, I should be throwing things out. Which is exactly what I did. Whenever my parents were gone for a while, I

cleaned house in a way that would make Marie Kondo proud. And since not a lot of things in that house sparked joy, they all simply had to go. The valuable pieces of course, like the Swarovski, I would hide away in the cupboard. Might need to sell those at some point to finance my great escape from this place.

As soon as my parents returned however, my mom made sure to put everything I hadn't thrown out, back on display, for all the world to see. from the scorpion trapped in amber they bought during their honeymoon in Morocco to the gaudy crystal vase she would smash into the wall a couple of weeks later, narrowly missing my face. I never liked that vase anyway.

Our fridge didn't have any magnets so there was nothing that could stick to it. There were no stickfigure drawings depicting our dysfunctional family pinned to it. Because the truth is, it would be too complicated to explain why my mom wasn't in the picture. That would mean we'd have to address the real issue.

Well, now that I've brought it up, mommy isn't in the picture because she spent half my childhood in a psychiatric facility. I guess it wasn't that complicated to explain. But you see, that's not the picture perfect thing you'd want to hang on a fridge, for all the world to see.

But let's put the mommy issues aside for now. Let's focus on the kids, because children are the future. So let's celebrate their accomplishments. Let's celebrate their lives. But alas, our fridge didn't have any magnets so no amount of good report cards could grace its surface. No matter how far your son would go in the world of academia could ever be good enough to get pinned down by a tacky magnet. In the end, much like Linkin Park predicted, it doesn't even matter.

Fine, we'll do away with academic achievements as who could ever be proud of something like that. So what about friends? Should we put some pictures of friends up there? Well now, they also wouldn't make the

cut as you frequently heard your father say: “These people aren’t your friends, Laurens, they’re just using you. You can’t see that, but I can,” or, if he was leaning more towards blaming you directly, he’d go: “As soon as your friends find out what a rotten personality you really have, they’ll all abandon you, once they get to know you, they’ll all see you for the bad person you really are.” My dad, being an accountant, was nothing if not good with numbers. So you could always count on him to have more than one way of bringing you down.

Well, I guess we won’t be having pictures of my friends on our fridge or have them visit home anymore. But what about that special one? What about our significant others? Probably not a good idea either, as I remember the first time I brought my college girlfriend home, my mom’s response was: “Well, she’s not the prettiest girl I’ve ever seen,” or as she also put it: “Is that really the best you can do?”

Girlfriends are out. What about boyfriends? Also a no, I’m afraid, as my dad preferred to ignore the very existence of the first boy I dated back in Belgium. But get this, six months into the relationship, he’s suddenly surprised that I’ve never brought my boyfriend to any of the family functions. Suddenly, he’s the biggest LGBTQIA+ ally, but left entirely speechless when I ask him the name of my boyfriend. Something he never even bothered to ask.

In my own way, I’ve tried to provide ample material for the fridge. I’ve got three degrees to my name. I’ve had friends. I’ve had girlfriends. I’ve had boyfriends. I’ve made a home for myself in the house that I bought by myself. I’ve tried everything I could to make you appreciate me. To make you hear me, see me, love me, but our fridge didn’t have any magnets. So nothing I did or said or didn’t do or didn’t say could ever make the cut.

I was the first one to ask to be held and cuddled.
I was the first one to make myself smaller.
I was the first one to surpass you in every way.

I was the one who survived you.
I was the one who chose me over family.

I started putting magnets on my fridge, making damn sure I celebrated my friends, my partners, my accomplishments, and the knowledge that who I am matters enough to make it stick.

All they have is a blank space with fake wood to cover it up. And wood – even fake wood – doesn't have magnetic properties.