

Synopsis - "Macarons for growing up" is a story about a little girl Anna, who lives with her addicted mother and sister, who lied to her about studying in Paris, but who actually is registered in a psychiatric hospital there. Anna is trying to figure out the secrets of her family and find out more about her father, who, as it turned out, is in colony for sexual assault towards Anna's older sister Ella.

My intention was to show the specificity of the relationship between mother and daughter, between sisters, the features of the influence that the elder siblings have on the younger ones, show the horrifying side of harassment, the shaming for speaking up.

I'd like to put my piece in the " This/ Um" section.

Bio: Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm Ani. I'm 17 and I've been a writer for 17 years. My intention is to transfer an idea from my heart straight into your souls.

## *Macaròns for growing up*



I always admired my older sister, Ella.

When I was 6, my mother told me stories and fairy tales about the inhabitants of the Magic Forest, the gnomes and fairies.

Every time I shrieked at her if she named a fairy other than Ella. My sister had long, fair hair and a passion for cooking. Sometimes I begged her to let me help her bake something. Sometimes she allowed me to. And sometimes, and only sometimes, if our concoction turned out fairly well, she allowed me to call her Ellie.

After she came back home from her first year in college in France, she became madly obsessed with mini french biscuits with a fancy name: *macaròns* (once I named them macaronis and she forbade me to call her Ellie). New Ella was not only a fairy, but also *french*. She began to tie her hair up, put on dark lipstick (mother once called her a bad word, they are not talking anymore). Ella taught me some French words like Laisse-moi tranquille, je ne suis pas d'humeur\* too! But most importantly, she offered to teach me how to bake *macaròns*. “Control, ma fille\*, is your main ingredient”.

*In the bowl of a food processor, combine the powdered sugar, almond flour, and ½ teaspoon of salt, and process on low speed, until extra fine. Sift the almond flour mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a large bowl.*

Every ingredient should be the exact amount as it is required, no frivolity!  
“You should reincarnate into scales, a Swedish clock, ma fille\*” she said.

*In a separate large bowl, beat the egg whites and the remaining ½ teaspoon of salt with an electric hand mixer until soft peaks form. Gradually add the granulated sugar until fully incorporated. Continue to beat until stiff peaks form (you should be able to turn the bowl upside down without anything falling out).*

When Ella was in the mood, she loved adding 2 drops of red food color, so our *macaròns* became a charming soft pink, like her nails used to be before.

*Add about ⅓ of the sifted almond flour mixture at a time to the beaten egg whites and use a spatula to gently fold until combined. After the last addition of almond flour, continue to fold slowly until the batter falls into ribbons and you can make a figure 8 while holding the spatula up.*

*Transfer the macaron batter into a piping bag fitted with a round tip.*

*Place 4 dots of the batter in each corner of a rimmed baking sheet, and place a piece of parchment paper over it, using the batter to help adhere the parchment to the baking sheet.*

One Tuesday, I was determined to call her Ellie at least one more time, so I stole a round ruler from my geometry teacher so that our *macaròns* come out exactly right in diameter.

*Pipe the macarons onto the parchment paper in 1½-inch (3-cm) circles, spacing at least 1-inch (2-cm) apart.*

After the work was done, she took a glimpse at me and winked and dimples appeared on her sunken cheeks, like dimples on bitten sweet apples. It was one of the brightest days of my life.

*Tap the baking sheet on a flat surface 5 times to release any air bubbles.  
Let the macarons sit at room temperature for 30 minutes to 1 hour, until dry to the touch.*

Meanwhile Ellie recounted stories from her brilliant student life. I especially loved how she described her professor of contact psychoanalysis, Madame Bell. On Mondays, Madame always had puffy eyes and her arms and legs were shaking violently, “As if Tinker Bell was bitten by a rotten zombie”. I always tried to extinguish uncontrollable laughter, so as not to wake my always sleeping mother. Ellie asked me not to laugh at her, said that I will understand Madame when I grow up. Said that I will understand *her* when I grow up.

*Preheat the oven to 300°F (150°C).*

*Bake the macarons for 17 minutes, until the feet are well-risen and the macarons don't stick to the parchment paper.*

Once we burned our *macaròns*. My mother came running to the smell of the burning dough and began to hysterically yell at my sister, calling her a “deranged spender, whose only job is transferring products, money, nerves”. Ella then flew to Paris 4 days earlier. I tried to defend her in front of my mother, who only said “She is not who she claims to be. Your sister is a mad cunt, who destroyed my family”. She took a handful of sleeping pills with muddy water and fell asleep again. I don't like to remember that day.

*Make the buttercream: In a large bowl, add the butter and beat with a mixer for 1 minute until light and fluffy. Sift in the powdered sugar and beat until fully incorporated. Add the vanilla and beat to combine. Add the cream, 1 tablespoon at a time, and beat to combine, until desired consistency is reached.*

*Transfer the buttercream to a piping bag fitted with a round tip.*

Ella's next visit was rather peaceful. One evening I caught her drinking plum sherry with mom. I hid in the corridor and began to eavesdrop on them because drunk people usually share secrets, right? But after half an hour I got bored and went back to my room to read. None of them uttered a word.

The next day I caught Ella making almond flour, she always made it by herself.

*Start with 1 1/2 cups blanched slivered almonds. Because blanching almonds removes their skins, blanched almonds will yield a finer, more delicate texture than regular ones.*

These days our apartment was filled with the delicious, soul-stirring aroma of roasted almonds. On such days I admired Ellie more than ever, she looked like a concentrated

nymph, her every movement was clear and calculated and the work surface was so clean and organized that it looked like a surgeon's table.

Even her hair lay perfectly hair to hair, turning from a light cascade into a polished bun.

On such days, my mother's head ached worse than before, she became more aggressive and snarled more offensively.

On such days, she drank more sleeping pills.

On such days, the image of Ellie was covered with a silk of humility and awe.

She became more talkative and almost always answered my questions between the roar of the blender.

*Add the almonds to a high-speed blender, and process until they look just finer than bread crumbs, about 10 seconds. Stir to loosen any clumps or large chunks near the blender's base, and process for a few seconds more. Be careful not to blend them for too long, or they will turn into almond butter!*

On one of those days, I gained the courage to ask about things that I could not ask my mother. I asked her about the red days, about boys, especially about my classmate Jason who was staring at me and freaked me out, about my father. Ellie answered in cold blood and detailedly, called Jason a dumbass, and turned on the blender after the question about my father. It was the longest 30 seconds of my life.

When the roar subsided, she turned to me and with an unreadable expression on her face, said that I would understand everything when I grew up, that I would understand *her* when I grew up.

I swallowed a stabbing resentment against her and the whole world, decided to take advantage of the moment of her condescension and ask more. So I decided to change the subject, ask the most innocuous and neutral question in my head.

I said "Ellie, why *macaròns* and not croissants?" And my world crumbled into pollen like almonds in our glass blender.

Ella turned to me and asked with a dead man's voice how old I was.

"Fourteen " I lied. She took a deep breath, massaged her temples and artificially calmly asked if I remembered Bill, Big Bill, my mom's boyfriend.

I strained my memory but realized that I only remembered a stocky male silhouette and a shabby "New Jersey" baseball cap.

Ella opened her mouth and her trembling lips almost uttered what I had been waiting for, it seems, all my life, when suddenly the dull noise of falling objects and cries of my sleepy mother were heard from the bedroom. Because of the hoarse voice, I managed to make out only a few bad words and misty "Again! This bitch bakes her nasty almonds! Do you want to remind me once again how you ruined my life?! You, cop slut, I'll show you how to seduce other people's men and send them to the colony by fraud!"

Ella glimpsed at me with her "you'll-understand-*me*-when-you-grow-up" look and rushed out of the apartment while mom tried to open the corridor door.

The front door closed. Mother ran into the kitchen, took me by the scruff of my neck and wailed while resting her sobby nose on top of my head.

"She's a crazy liar, Anna, don't believe her. She's lying, she made up every single thing, everything to destroy my happiness. She lied to you too, Anna, she's ill, mentally ill, she doesn't attend college in Paris, she's in a hospital there, Anna, believe me, I'm your mom, Anna, I love you, I love you, I'm so, so sorry."

I don't remember much of what happened after.

In my next memory Ellie (Ellie?) was standing at the kitchen counter with her sleeves rolled up squeezing freshly whipped buttercream onto cookie halves.

*Add a dollop of buttercream to one macaron shell. Top it with another macaron shell to create a sandwich. Repeat with remaining macaron shells and cream. Place in an airtight container for 24 hours to "bloom".*

***Enjoy!***

Mother slept, I stood next to Ella and did not listen to her story about her first visit to the Louvre and Mona Lisa.

"Mona Lisa? What about Bill? I grew up, I don't understand.

Mom says you're crazy. Why is mom always sleeping? Why can't I remember almost anything from my childhood?

Ellie, why do we make *macarons every day*?"

"Your father, Bill, was a perverted man.  
He was allergic to almonds."

I don't believe in fairy tales anymore, neither fairies, nor gnomes.

\*Laisse-moi tranquille - leave me alone  
je ne suis pas d'humeur - I'm not in the mood  
ma fille - my girl

