

Tattoo Regret

Name _____ Date _____

Adapted from: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/aug/11/devastated-by-my-sons-tattoo>

My son's tattoo hurt me deeply

When Tess Morgan's son came home with a tattoo, she was grief-stricken. She knew her reaction was OTT (he's 21) but it signalled a change in their relationship

Put out the bunting, crack open the beers, stand there in the kitchen smiling from ear to ear, because he's home – our student son is home and the family is together again. And after supper, after the washing up is done, the others – his younger siblings – drift off to watch television, and he says: "Would you like to see my tattoo?"

I say, "You're joking."

He says, "No, I'm not."

But still I wait. Any minute he's going to laugh and say, "You should see your faces" because this has been a running joke for years, this idea of getting a tattoo – the hard man act, iron muscles, shaved head, Jason Statham, Ross Kemp. He's a clever boy. Maybe during his school years he thought a tattoo would balance the geeky glory of academic achievement.

His father says, "Where?"

"On my arm," he says, and touches his bicep through his shirt.

His lovely shoulder.

In the silence, he says, "I didn't think you'd be this upset."

After a while, he says, "It wasn't just a drunken whim. I thought about it. I went to a professional. It cost £150."

£150? I think, briefly, of all the things I could buy with £150.

"It's just a tattoo," he says, when the silence goes on so long that we have nearly fallen over the edge of it into a pit of black nothingness. "It's not as if I came home and said I'd got someone pregnant."

It seems to me, unhinged by shock, that this might have been the better option.

His father asks, "Does it hurt?"

"Yes," I say, cutting across this male bonding. "It does. Very much."

For three days, I can't speak to my son. I can hardly bear to look at him. I decide this is rational. The last thing we need, I think, is an explosion of white-hot words that everyone carries around for the rest of their lives, engraved on their hearts. In any case, I'm not even sure what it is I want to say. In my mind's eye I stand there, a bitter old woman with pursed lips wringing my black-gloved hands. He's done the one thing that I've said for years, please don't do this. It would really upset me if you did this. And now it's happened. So, there's nothing left to say.

So, I cry instead. I have a lump in my throat that stops me from eating. I feel as if someone has died. I keep thinking of his skin, his precious skin, inked like a pig carcass.



How do you think your parents would react to you getting inked?