

Water Colors

My father can say nothing now, all he can do is cry. He's become a fragile shell of himself. He's nothing but a pathetic, sloppy, wet mess. He wants forgiveness, he wants me to give him another chance. The tears in his eyes did nothing to stir any emotion. Watching him cry, I feel nothing. I might be heartless but I have my reasons. You walk through life thinking you know your parents. As a child your parents are Gods. They're faultless, all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect beings. Then something happens, you become aware, your eyes are opened and you see them for what they are – human beings who, like us, are imperfect. They become mortal creatures. They're inept, bumbling, careless creatures just like everyone else. Creatures who won't let you take the car out for a cruise late in the evening. Creatures who set a curfew that is just unacceptable. Creatures who want to ruin your life by telling you what you can and can't do. Still, they're your parents so you must love them.

Your parents are so many different things at different points in your life. Hell, they're the only couple, other than your own and current relationship, that you're certain will be together for eternity. And simultaneously they're the only couple you're certain doesn't have sex anymore. At least, not since you've been conceived.

I need to stop! That is a terrible thought. I'm getting side tracked!

I never knew my mother, but I can sometimes see her face staring down at me right before I fall asleep. At least I think it was her face. Maybe it was all some kind of dream. Still, it is real enough, and I like to believe I have some recollection of her. I always believed she looked like me. I never missed her, though, and that is probably because I

never knew her. To be honest, her absence has only recently become an interest to me. My father told me terrible things about her. How she left when I was just a child. How she refused to be a part of our lives. The terrible things she did, the terrible things she said – and all the terrible things she might have done if she were still around. Of course I believed him. My father, well, he's been around since I can remember. He's always been there for me. Why shouldn't I believe him? He's all I've known. Thinking about it now, it's fascinating how much we remember from our youth, and it's just as interesting how much we forget. I'm looking at my father now as he begs me to forgive him. I know how badly he wants me to forget what I saw this morning. He tells me to move on. He tells me we're alike. Of course I do what all teenagers do; I tell him we are nothing alike. I tell him that I can't ignore what I've seen. What I have seen changed everything I thought I knew about my father – about myself. You see, in life there are things you can be certain of, things that you know are fact, things that are true. Things you just know. You're certain of your birthday, for instance. I mean, of course you only know it's your birthday because you were told *this is the day you were born*. So there is always the possibility that's not entirely true. Anyways, you're certain about your hair color, right? Oh, and you can be certain that school is out for summer. Or even that your parents love you. It is certain that what you can see, touch, smell, and hear is all real. These things are certainties in a child's life. In anyone's life for that matter. But what happens when everything you thought you knew, all that was certain, well, what if none of it was true? None of it was real. Now, on the other hand, the blood running down my father's forehead, the pain he's in right now – he would tell you all of it's real. He would swear the

pain he's in is in fact true, and the tears running down his face are not a lie. Not like everything he's told me before now. Before the golf club had smashed into the top of his head. It was at our most intimate moment that I finally discovered who I was, and what I am capable of doing.

Let's start at the very beginning...this morning! It was a beautiful Friday morning and I should've been at Smithville high school. Instead, my boyfriend and I took the day to be alone together. I can hear all of you now, a sigh of disappointment in my behavior. Please, don't act so innocent. We all know teenagers have been skipping out of class since the classroom was created. I'm a senior, and like all seniors who've put in their time I've become bored with the structure of the classroom. It's tedious, and so much is happening outside in the world, so much I'm missing because of the four walled prison classroom. And my boyfriend, his name is David, he's attractive and quite popular. We've only been going out for a couple weeks, but we clicked since day one. Well, I thought we did. I was quite taken by him and it didn't take even the slightest nudge to get me in the parking lot and into his car. We left as the first period bell rang, and we were out of the parking lot before the students could open their text books. We'd both talked about it, planned out how we'd spend the day together since last week. We'd go to my place because my father works all morning and late into the afternoon. This would be the first time since we'd started going out we could be entirely alone. Of course I knew what that meant, and what it would mean for him. The ride to my house was quiet, but both of us were so happy we couldn't keep the smiles off our faces. When I looked over at David, his hands on the steering wheel, he appeared so confident. He seemed so experienced and worldly. I

wanted him to show me everything he knew. I trusted David, and I am pretty sure I loved him at that moment.

Pulling into my driveway was a little frightening. It felt like every neighbor was spying on us, peeking through blinds and from behind curtains. I never thought going into my own home would feel like breaking into a stranger's house. The entire neighborhood felt foreign, like this wasn't my home and I didn't belong here. Once we were in the house, though, the tension eased, everything felt familiar again, and we immediately went to my bedroom. And this is where things always get complicated with a man. What he wants, and what I thought I wanted, diverge into two separate paths. David was already out of his pants before I had sat down on the bed. He was on top of me and kissing my neck before I could open my mouth to meet his. We all know where this goes afterwards – and clean your filthy minds because it isn't what you're thinking.

I was nervous, and David was upset, of course. We fought like juvenile teenagers with an overabundance of hormones. He claimed I was teasing him; that I was being cruel by not having sex with him. His logic was if I didn't have sex with him that meant I didn't love him. He was your normal teenage guy having a very predictable reaction. Of course he was merciless about the entire thing. David said I was a whore just like my mother, a mother I didn't even know. He said my mother knew how to put-out, and if she'd been around maybe I would have a better understanding on how to please a man. Where David got I was a whore, especially when the fight was about me *not* having sex with him, I might never understand. But what piqued my interest the most was how he knew my mother was a whore? I didn't even know who my mother really was — so how could he

know such details about her? Well, I will have to get back to him about that at a later time, so it will have to wait for now. I have more important things to do. To be honest, I really wasn't upset with David for walking out. Honestly, I was relieved. I was more upset with not having anyone I could talk to about what had just happened. I was upset because I felt alone.

And bored.

But mostly just alone.

I grabbed a tub of ice cream; you know the kind with chunks of brownie and the caramel center. Melt in your mouth, smooth ice cream that you wish came in a bottomless well. Thankfully, there is no endless well of ice cream, especially at moments like this – because if there was I would most likely endlessly swell...into a much larger version of myself.

I ate until my head ached. I had started watching some foreign film about an older man and a much younger woman. Only the French can do films where forty year old men are wooing twenty-something year old women. Halfway through the film I muted the sound and, at that moment, I noticed just how alone I was – it was the silence, the stillness around me that quieted my mind. I started letting that little voice in my head – you know, the one that we all talk with. That inside voice that keeps you company – I started talking with that voice, and thinking about my father. Actually, less about my father and more about the things about him I don't really understand. My father has this room: a very private room -- like his study or something. The thing is I don't think I've ever seen a book in my father's hands, not even a magazine for that matter. He did read a

number of different newspapers, so I assume he must've been fairly educated and obviously knew how to read. But I wasn't sure why he was so secretive about this room. This particular room has always been off limits to me. I've never been inside, and my father always keeps it locked, so even when he's asleep I couldn't slip inside and explore. Trust me, I've tried in the past, and the results weren't enjoyable. Usually it resulted in the equivalent of a capital offense. As a child the room always held this great mystery. But even now, at seventeen, the room is as much of an interest as ever. The walls are thin in our home and every footstep can be heard throughout all corners of the house. As a child I would hear my father pacing back and forth — the clanging of metal filing cabinets opening and closing; the sound of scissors slicing through paper. He would spend endless hours in the evening working behind that door. What he was working on, I never knew. When I was younger I imagined my father was a kind of brilliant inventor, or maybe a secret agent — but as I grew older I knew he was neither of those things. He was my father, who worked somewhere, doing something to pay the bills from month to month.

I flipped the television off and let my mind wander some more.

Again, at that moment I was reminded how alone I am and of all the quietness and solitude that surrounded me. I shouldn't be doing this, I thought, everyone deserves a certain amount of privacy. But I am young, and curious, and closed doors are meant to be opened.

The door was locked, as expected, but I wasn't dealing with a complicated, expensive Medeco lock. This was a simple latched lock that even I could figure out. I took my student ID and slid the card until it sprung the latch bolt, and *click*, the door was open.

What I saw was absolutely shocking.

There was nothing. Nothing but a near empty room. Other than some metal filing cabinets lining the walls the room was bare. Light brownish, tan, filing cabinets, maybe ten or eleven of them, filled with some great mystery. Or maybe something quite boring, possibly files from his job. A job which I didn't know much about. Still, it was odd; there wasn't a desk or a chair. There were no paintings or mirrors on the walls. No coffee table. Just cabinets. I took a step inside and the floor *sk-reaked*. The room smelled old and stale, mildewed, like a locker room with wet towels. I turned my head away to breathe some fresh air. My father should really take better care to properly ventilate all the rooms. I walked in and stepped on something – it was a pair of my father's white underwear. The horror! They looked petrified: stiff from age and God knows what else. He should also try to keep his dirty laundry off the floor.

I let the door stay open while I further explored inside. I don't know what I was hoping to find. Possibly an image of my mother and father together. A family album that he's tucked away out of fear of hurting me. Or hurting himself. I checked the filing cabinets but they were all locked. There was really nothing else to see – nothing but what was locked away in those cabinets. So I had no choice, I'd already crossed one threshold, going further wasn't going to damn me anymore than I've already damned myself. I did what any loving daughter would do, I opened the cabinets. It wasn't exactly easy, but it wasn't impossible either. With some assistance from internet how-to videos I quickly went from *trying* to pick the locks to *successfully* picking the locks. You can learn anything from the internet now. How to cook? Google it. How to sew? Google it. How to

write an essay...don't bother with that one actually. Just search for an essay, copy and paste it, and put your name on it. You get the idea.

On to more pressing matters!

The first cabinet clicked open quickly. Much like the room, it was stale and musty inside the cabinet. It smelled of wet earth. The contents inside the cabinet were the culprit for the stench. Old clothes – children's' clothing – bundled up, dirt caked on them and ripped in places. Little boys' clothing. A pair of khaki pants, polo shirt, a red ball cap, and a stuffed teddy-bear. Nothing that I remembered wearing or owning as a child. Especially since I'm a girl. The clothes looked old, at least a decade old. I thought to myself, *why keep dirty clothes in a filing cabinet?* But I didn't understand much of my father – his tendency to move every few years when I very young, his reluctance to talk about his job, how he isolates himself in this very room. The next drawer down was the same, piles and piles of clothing – five drawers in total filled with nothing but clothing for young boys. What the hell did it mean?

After what I had just seen I was filled with anxiety while picking the second cabinet's lock. My hands shook, I was sweating heavily, my eyes wouldn't focus and I could feel the blood pumping. It was like my father's hands had wrapped themselves around my heart and were squeezing the blood through my entire body. *Faster*, I thought to myself, or else he will walk in and catch me. I feared what he might do. I'd never been frightened of my father, and I couldn't explain why I suddenly dreaded him. There was something bizarre about this room, about the children's clothing. Why lock it away – why hide it from me? The thought shook me into urgency; I had to know what else was locked away

in the other cabinets. When the second lock *popped* open I hesitated before inching the drawer open. I didn't know what I expected, but relief washed over me when it was revealed.

It was a photo album. Inside were pictures. Images of my father and me together, playing outside on the swings. Another image of us together when I was seven or eight during Christmas. Another of me blowing out candles during a birthday party. And for the first time I saw a picture of myself as an infant. There were stacks of pictures that I'd never seen. I sat down and leafed through the numerous images.

One image particularly interested me. It was a young mother and father holding a child. The faces of the parents had been scratched out with a knife or sharp object, leaving only their bodies intact. I set the image to the side and continued to leaf through the photos.

Then I found something interesting. Clippings from different newspapers. Clippings about missing children. Different states, different children, the dates ranging from fifteen to twenty years ago. The third photo album had more of the same. Numerous articles, sometimes twenty or thirty articles on one missing child. Every album organized, each page dedicated to a particular incident, a particular child. I was chilled. I couldn't explain it, but something was wrong with how methodical the articles were organized. Why would my father be interested in collecting literature on this topic?

I'd been anticipating it, waiting for the moment it would all come together. I came across an image of a familiar face. A face that looked at me and told a story. A face that felt like looking into a mirror from over a decade ago. A child's face. Under the face was

a story about a missing girl from the state of Florida. The police were looking for the little girl. Her parents had been murdered in their own home, their throats slit with a knife from their own kitchen, but the police believed the little girl was still alive. There were no suspects. Every article, on every child, the police had said the same thing – there were no suspects. I looked at the picture of the little girl again, printed in color, her blue eyes staring at me. I know those eyes. I see them every morning, every night, every time I look into a mirror. My own eyes welled up, the tears fell onto the image and bled the colors together. Until that moment, I had never felt such fear, such hatred in my life. But I'd also never felt so free. It was like a new baptism. This was an awakening.

I waited for my father's car to arrive. When I heard the vehicle approaching I rushed to his study and waited. I listened for his footsteps. I wasn't supposed to be home for another thirty-minutes, so I suspected he would enter his study soon as he got home.

And I wasn't wrong.

When he walked into the study he uttered something like *what the* – before the golf club collided with the top of his head. After that it was a waiting game. Waiting for him to wake from his slumber. I did all those things you see in the movies. You know the whole ordeal with tying your victim up, hands behind his back, and gagging them with a towel, or sock – or in my father's case I used his filthy underwear he'd left in the study.

All I had to do was Google it. God bless YouTube and how disturbed some of those videos have become. Do a search for the sickest thing you can imagine – you'll get results! Also, I should mention that duct-tape is just as reliable and strong as advertised. I saw a show on television once where they actually cut a car in half – seriously – and put

it back together with duct-tape. Yes! You guessed it! The damn thing drove just fine. I swear by duct-tape now. My father, on the other hand, he was swearing *through* the duct tape. I really couldn't make out much other than *muhv-ver vugger* and *uht uh ell* or something like that.

And here we are. Back at the beginning of our story. And by now, I assume you all know why my father is in this position, lying tied up on the floor. If not, maybe he can tell all of us what's going on because, to be honest, I still haven't filled in all the little details myself.

But I have an idea. I dramatically rip the duct-tape off his mouth and watch with some satisfaction as he coughs out his gross undies.

“What the *Hell* are you doing?”

“Don't play stupid, dad. You're a smart man! You've done such a wonderful job at always being one step ahead of everyone else. You've fooled everyone, even me, so I know you that you know exactly what's going on. Oh, wait a minute, I'm so sorry...that little knock on your noggin might have jarred a few things. *Can – you – und-er-stand – me – fath – er?*”

“Damnit, listen, Jess – I don't know what the hell is wrong with you – but this isn't a joke. I could call the cops right now and have you arrested for this. This isn't right, Jess...I'm your father!”

“Can you really call the cops? I mean, with your hands being tied up and all, how is that going to work for you? And even better, are you my really my father? Wait, don't answer that just yet. I'll tell you what, how about I just go ahead and call them for you?”

Show them what all you have in here. I bet they'd find all kinds of interesting things lying around.”

“What's this about? Is it about that, over there, those articles – stories – yeah, it is, isn't it. Untie me, now! I want to show you something, it will explain everything.”

“You don't need your hands to explain yourself — to lie to me like you've done my entire life!”

“This is no lie, Jess. You don't understand. I help people. I help parents and families. I wanted to help. Hell, I did help. You were young, so you wouldn't remember. But I would take it upon myself to try and aid families who've lost loved ones. Children that were abducted. Amber alerts – I was one of those parents involved with the community. Put that down, Jess. Please don't hit me again. Why? What – what do you think I am? What are you trying to say?”

“So you're telling me all those articles, all those children's clothing and pictures and articles, that is for your little Holmes-esque endeavors to help search for missing children?”

“Yes, yes that is it! I – many parents did that. The entire community got involved. We – we didn't have cellphones and social media back then. It was up to communities to get involved.”

“You're good – Damn! You're really good! Such a good actor, dad. I'm impressed. No! Really! I am! No wonder you've fooled them all for so long. And I would have believed you, dad, but you had to keep all this – this evidence – for me to find. And this little girl –

this smeared image, the family in Florida – LOOK AT IT! – that was my family. That little girl is ME!”

“That isn't your family, I'm your family. What the hell's gotten into you? Jess, you're scaring me. Where did you get these ideas from?”

“I've seen everything I've needed to see. I will call the fucking cops if you don't admit it. I swear to God I'll call them right now, and I know they'll give me the answers. I don't care if I'm arrested, it won't last long. After they've combed over this entire place – don't you even try to speak right now, not until I'm finished – once they've looked through every cabinet, drawer, under every floorboard, I know they'll find everything they need to put you away. So, dad, what's it going to be, are you going to tell me what I want to know?”

“There's nothing – Jess, let me out of this chair now, damnit!”

“I'm calling the cops, Dad, and we'll just see what happens to you then!”

“Jess, I'm your father. I raised you! Let me out of here now!”

“Stop crying, it isn't gonna work. Just tell me everything. EVERYTHING!”

“Whatcha want to know, Jess? I'll tell you.”

“Are they my parents?”

“Why does it matter? What's this going to resolve? It means nothing now — ”

“I want to know, you have three seconds or I'm calling the cops and they will give me the answers after they've grilled you over and over and over and — ”

“Yes, they are. They're your parents. Are you happy now? Is that what you wanted to hear?”

“Did you kill them?”

“Jess...Jessica...Stop. Please, I’m begging you.”

“Answer me.”

“Why does it matter now? You’ve known your entire life, didn’t you?”

“I want to hear it from you.”

“Yes. Yes, I killed them. I killed them both and I watched them die.”

“Why didn’t you kill me? Why let me live? Why kill them and let me live?”

“Because you are like me, Jess. I saw you and I knew you were supposed to be mine. I didn’t plan on taking you – raising you on my own. It just happened, like we chose each other. Your parents, they didn’t know you. I did, though, I knew you. You want to know what you were doing as I slit your parents’ throats? Is that it? Yeah, don’t act like you didn’t know the whole time, you knew just as I did that one day it would come to this! You needed this moment, just as I needed you to be the one to take my life. I knew you’d be the one. The day I killed your parents, you watched me, you watched me do it the entire time. And you were laughing. Laughing as you painted a picture with water colors. There was so much blood, Jess, just so much of it. Your parents just spilled out like two water balloons bursting on the floor. And you looked at me, smiling, like you were thanking me – like I’d freed you from some kind of prison. And as your parents’ blood puddled around them, you walked over, your brush in hand, and dipped it in their blood. You were finishing your painting with their blood. You know what it was? What you painted? You drew a portrait of a family, a family, Jess, that you no longer had. You inked it with the blood of your own parents. Tell me that isn’t providence, Jess.”

“You killed them? And you let me live because I'm – because you think I'm like you? You're wrong, you're so damn wrong!”

“Look at you – look what you're doing! Tell me we aren't alike, hon. Tell me you – go ahead – tell me you aren't going to kill me. I know better. I know you better. I raised you, Jess. I'm your father, more-so than that man in Florida. He's nothing to you, but I – I will live on after death. You'll remember me – we made memories together, Jess! But he, well, he's been forgotten. Both of them are gone! Rotted. Dead in body, mind, and soul. Go ahead. Kill me. But you know that I've always loved you – and – ”

I couldn't take anymore. His mouth was just too much. The pretentious bullshit was beginning to grind on my nerves. I'll clean up the blood later today. That painting, though, I wonder if he still has it tucked away in one of these filing cabinets. I remember as a child I always loved to paint, but I don't have any of my old work.

After fifteen minutes of sifting through hundreds of folders and old clothes and newspaper clippings I find what I'm looking for – the painting.

It's almost like he said except for the image is different. It's inked in blood, but I never finished the entire picture. The little girl in the picture needs her hair to be a bit longer, and I should probably make her a little taller since I've grown so much. I dip my finger in the swelling puddle of blood at my father's feet and smear some on the sheet of paper. The legs grow, the little girl is now older – a teenager like myself. I add some flowing hair and a bigger smile. And the sun! I need a big, shiny, red rising sun above the house and trees! And I will add a big smile. The sun will have a gargantuan smile as well and it

will be looking down on all three of us – my mother, father, and me. I love my family,
and I'm certain they love me...

END