

PAINT ME AS I AM

Also by
H. JAY SCHEUERMANN

The Gore Experiment

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By

H.J. SCHEUERMANN

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my one true love, Belinda. To my niece and nephews, Tabitha, Austin, and Timothy. The world belongs to those who believe in their dreams. And a special thanks to Fred Piechoczek, Lorie Norton, and Patrick Brian Miller for their desire to keep this author's journey through the literary world headed in the right direction.

CHAPTER ONE

Jerrod studied the photograph with calculated purpose, as he delicately caressed the image of the model's thigh. His heart's aspiration was to find a woman of beauty, flawless in both character and build, but he knew that there was no such thing. They only existed in fairy tales, and in his mother's hardened expectations. No woman he had ever brought home measured up to her standards; never good enough for her 'Jerriboy.'

From a very young age Jerrod was taught the old fashioned way that women were just devious whores that wanted nothing more than to take him away from his mother. For most of his years, he believed her and was never able to fully relieve himself of her contention. He had the scars to remind him, scars embedded in his skin, as well as the deep scars on his soul that no one else could see.

Jerrod traced the outline of her breast, his mind allowed him to feel the silk blouse with his fingertip. She smiled just for him. Here was an example of exquisite beauty, and yet he allowed the agonizing memory of his mother's words to manifest into imaginary flaws.

"Mother would never allow me to settle for the likes of you, trashy bitch," Jerrod whispered, and then spit on the page before closing the magazine.

"Alright class, lets move on to surrealism in the 20th century," Holly Wescott instructed, as she turned to erase her lesson regarding impressionism from the marker board.

She was a beautiful woman, a Sandra Bullock look a like, if it weren't for her golden hair. Jerrod was attracted to her, very attracted, but he knew

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what type of man she preferred. Holly preferred spending her time with much older men, more mature. Jerrod was attractive and could have any woman he wanted. Several women on campus considered him striking, with his shoulder length blonde hair, muscular build, and childlike azure eyes, but Holly was not one of them.

“Can anybody tell me who Andre Masson was?” Holly asked, as she turned to face her class.

She waited for a show of hands, but no one responded. She noticed Jerrod entranced by the cover of the *Cosmopolitan*, and decided to call on him.

“Jerrod, can you tell the class who Andre Masson was?”

“Yeah, he was the prick that beat me out of that art institute scholarship by drawing a better Petey the Parrot,” Jerrod replied, without relinquishing his sight from the magazine.

The class exploded into laughter causing Holly’s face to turn crimson.

“Enough class,” she demanded, as she turned to write on the board.

“Andre Masson was an important member of the surrealism art movement during the 1920’s. Can anyone give me the definition of surrealism?” Holly asked, as she continued to scribble out more information on the subject.

“I betcha Jerrod can,” a voice called out from the back of the room.

She ignored the comment, as the rest of her class chuckled and hooted.

“Surrealism is the...” she began, only to be interrupted by Jerrod.

“Sorry Ms. Wescott, but its 2:00 p.m. I’m afraid that we’re out of time.”

The students hurriedly departed their desks before Holly had a chance to dismiss the class, hoping that they would be able to escape a boring homework assignment. Thanks to Jerrod, they did.

“Hold on Jerrod, I’d like to talk to you before you go,” Holly insisted, as she sat behind her desk.

Jerrod sauntered towards her with his hands in his pockets, looking like a little boy that was just caught stealing candy from a nickel and dime store. Holly knew it was all an act.

“Ms. Wescott, why do we have to learn about these dead people all the time? I came here to paint, not study.”

“Jerrod, it helps to know how and where certain styles of art originated.”

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“The only art that matters to me is my own. I don’t care about some dried up Frenchman that dabbled in automatism.”

“Oh, so you do know something about Andre Masson,” Holly replied, in awe of his broad knowledge.

“Mama made me read up on art while I was growing up, insisted that I was the one that needed to continue on with her destiny, since she couldn’t. She said that she could have been one of the world’s greatest artists, if daddy wouldn’t have got drunk and plowed the family car into that guardrail. Mama never was quite the same after the accident. She couldn’t hold a toothbrush, let alone a paintbrush,” Jerrod lied.

There was no automobile accident, no injuries, and no father. Jerrod’s biological father, Charles Young, deserted the family when Jerrod was still an infant. His mother had always told him that his father was killed in the war, but once Jerrod was old enough to do some research on the battle that claimed his father, he had discovered that American troops were not engaged in any conflict at the time of his supposed demise. He knew, far too well, how cruel and abusive his mother could be so assumed that his father didn’t die. He escaped. Jerrod’s disruptive behavior and sometimes-violent mood swings only proved that he hadn’t come to terms with his abandonment.

“How awful,” Holly replied, holding her hand to her mouth, picturing a woman stripped of her dreams.

“That’s why I really don’t like all of this textbook crap you’ve been dealing us. I just want to paint,” Jerrod explained, as he leaned over the desk, “I just want to paint.”

“Jerrod, God knows that you are far beyond everyone else in class. Hell, you probably know more than I do, and you’re a talented artist. What are you doing in my class?”

“I promised Mama that I would, and even though she’s gone, she’d find a way to punish me if I broke my promise.”

“What are you talking about Jerrod? It sounds like you’re afraid of your mother. I hate to be so blatant, but dead is dead.”

Jerrod’s facial expression showed signs of an inner struggle with deep-seated emotions.

“Jerrod, is there something you want to talk about?” Holly asked, as she walked around her desk, placing her hand on his shoulder.

Her hand was warm and filled with energy. Jerrod found himself longing to taste her lips. They were the color of a fine rose, rich, and blood-like. He imagined her hand, descending, following the curve of his chest, and down to his *man-thing*. That’s what Mama called it, his *man-*

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thing; a dirty part of him that should never be touched, but he wanted her to touch it now.

“Jerrod, are you okay?” Holly noticed that his eyes were looking off into the distance. He was no longer in the classroom. He was somewhere else, away from his past, away from his pain, away from his mother’s rule.

“Yes, Ms. Wescott, I’m fine,” he replied, allowing his forbidden fantasy to fade slowly into the shadows of his mind, offering her a forced smile.

He hated how she made him feel, vulnerable, and weak. Obedient little Jerrod, he thought.

“Jerrod, the reason I asked you to stay is that you have been very disruptive in class, undermining my authority. It makes it very difficult for me to maintain the other students.”

“I’m sorry Ms. Wescott, I’ll try to contain myself,” Jerrod lied in a sarcastic tone, as his eyes moved up and down her body.

“I’m afraid it’s going to take a little more than your word to remain in my class,” Holly threatened, as she returned to her seat. “If I have any further problems with you, I will have you dropped from my class.”

Jerrod’s heart solidified, his breath couldn’t escape his lungs. His face flushed with anger, yet he knew he must mask his rage. I’ll kill you bitch, were the words filling his head, as he imagined himself reaching across the desk, and ripping out the tongue that had assailed him. The words she heard were simply, “You can’t do that.”

The change in his demeanor frightened Holly. Right before her eyes, he became something savage, and dangerous. He was no longer the twenty-four year old lost child, no longer the mischievous, little misfit that found pleasure in disrupting her lessons.

“Jerrod, I’m sure we can resolve this,” Holly stuttered. “I apologize if I’ve upset you.”

He focused on the ground, no longer willing to look at her. He would not allow her to weaken him with her beauty, or her authority.

“You remind me of my mother, Ms. Wescott,” Jerrod countered, as he turned towards the door. “Intimidation is a very powerful tool.”

Jerrod stormed from the room, his mind twisted by his mother’s words. He could hear her voice, as if she were just steps behind his hurried stride.

“You’re slipping up, Jerriboy,” his mother’s memory beckoned. “You’re letting the whore get to you.”

He covered his ears, as he quickened his pace, shaking his head in an attempt to jar loose her condescending voice.

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“You’ve got to stop her, Jerriboy. She’s no good.”

It did not matter how fast Jerrod walked, he could not escape the torment. The more he refused to listen, the more vociferous his thoughts became. He needed a drink, several of them. He used alcohol, as he always did, to alleviate his oppression. It would not impede her echoing taunts from beyond the grave, but it would allow him to give reason to their existence. Jim Beam was his scapegoat, and would readily accept responsibility for his character flaws.

Jerrod rushed to his Chevelle, jammed the key into the ignition, and then cranked the stereo system to its maximum level.

“Stop it, Mama, just stop it,” Jerrod begged, as he punched the accelerator, leaving a layer of Firestone in his wake.

“You know I’m right, Jerriboy, you need to listen to your mother,” she whispered in his ear.

Jerrod could feel her warm exhale, as she placed her soft lips on his cheek. The moment seemed so real that he looked at the empty passenger seat to be certain that it was his mind, and not her, that was attempting to comfort him. He was alone.

The Chevelle rolled into the parking lot of Grammar’s Bar and Grill, as if it had a mind of its own. Everyday, after class, Jerrod would stop to get his fill of bourbon. Grammar’s was just blocks from the campus and was a convenient place to wash down the stress that so often choked him.

The searing summer sun engulfed him, as he exited his vehicle. Phoenix was always unbearable this time of year, and he hated the heat. If it weren’t for his mother being buried out on Beardsley Road, he would have been long gone, somewhere like Seattle, or Portland. He often wondered what it would be like to live in these places, being a native of Arizona; any change in climate would have suited him just fine.

The bar was dark, absent of windows, and he preferred it that way. It enabled him to saturate his soul in a shadowy corner, away from the world his mother warned him about. He sat at his usual table and kicked his feet up on one of the chairs. He always sat facing the door, a habit he acquired after an altercation with a drunken patron that didn’t like the way Jerrod stared at him.

“Usual Jerrod?” the bartender asked sarcastically, as she wiped down the table, clearing away an ashtray filled with cigarette butts.

Jerrod nodded, and then watched the blonde stroll back behind the bar to mix his whiskey and Coke.

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She was one of those women that Jerrod's mother warned him about, with their tight jeans and low cut blouses. Jeana made him feel that way, made him think the things he did. It was not his fault that she created fantasies that caused him to masturbate in the men's stall when the bar was slow enough. She was the one enticing him, she was to blame, and Mama said so.

"Here you go Jerrod," Jeana said, as she pounded the rocks glass on a napkin in front of him, "Two seventy-five."

Jerrod reached into his pocket and peeled off a ten-dollar bill from his money clip, and then handed it to her, grabbing her hand as she tried to turn away.

"How come you treat me the way you do, Jeana?" Jerrod asked, tightening his grip. "There's no reason to be so unfriendly."

Jeana pulled away as if the Devil himself had grabbed her arm.

"Any woman with the least amount of common sense would know to stay clear of you Jerrod. I have two bogus checks in my drawer that I am still waiting to be paid on."

Jerrod was not having a good day with women, especially this one. He cursed beneath his breath, while she continued her tirade.

"Don't think that I don't notice you staring at me all the time, creep. I do. Keep your eyes to yourself, and damn it, Jerrod, you touch me again and I'll give the word eighty-six a brand new meaning." Jeana snarled, as she turned to walk away.

Jerrod gulped down his drink, and then pounded the glass on the table.

"Bring me another," he demanded, watching her breasts shake against her blouse.

Jeana despised Jerrod and wished that he would do something stupid, something that would allow her to kick him out of Grammar's for good, but he would never push the situation quite that far.

"Stop staring, you damn freak," Jeana snapped, as she snatched the glass from the table.

Jerrod never took his eyes off her, not after what she said to him. He was going to watch every move she made, make her feel uncomfortable, the way she made him feel. He vigilantly scrutinized her every move, as she poured him another drink. Even though her words were brazen, she knew that he would ignore every word she said, so she anticipated his stare. Jeana mumbled a profanity, which only made him smile. Jerrod became more intrigued by her with every foul word, and every hate filled

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scowl. He longed for her bitter presence, imagined painting her, the way she was.

CHAPTER TWO

June 16th, three months to the day since anyone had seen or heard from Rachel Flanders. Without a trace, the twenty-two year old woman had disappeared, becoming only one of the murdered or missing persons in Jackie Jonas's files. She had a stack of them, twelve in all, which she had grouped into a possible single predator abduction folder. Each individual placed into the FBI's case folder was female, early to mid-twenties, and all lived within a ten-mile radius of each other. Four remained unaccounted for, the other eight, brutally murdered.

Jackie was obsessed with each of the women's cases, dating as far back as 1998, but she was especially duty-bound to the Rachel Flanders case. Rachel disappeared forty-eight hours before she was to wed Jackie's brother. Her disappearance crushed Michael. The couple was truly in love, and Jackie knew in her heart that Rachel's disappearance was not a simple case of premarital jitters. Something had happened to her, something terrible, and Jackie had vowed to Michael that she would find out what that something was.

Of the eight women found dead, Three had been decapitated, the others, mutilated beyond recognition. Jackie feared the worse for Rachel. She stared at her picture for several minutes before placing it back into its folder. She had a new case to familiarize herself with, Suzy Hollister, a twenty year old female student of The Creative Arts Institute. A bicyclist riding along a trail near Interstate 17 & Peoria Avenue had discovered her body.

Jackie flipped opened the folder resting on her desk, knowing that she should expect to see something awful. It was necessary for her to turn her head, taking an extra moment to absorb the initial shock that surged from the page. The horrific vision of the dead woman's body was overwhelming. Jackie slowly returned her sight to the photograph, bracing herself for a more detailed examination of the image.

The woman was naked; her lips had been crudely sewn together with a thick piece of twine. Dried blood was caked around the entry holes, and her tongue had been pulled through the seam, sown with a single

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stitch to the upper lip. Jackie found herself hoping that the woman had been dead before her killer began this macabre act. The pain, she thought, would have been excruciating.

Jackie lifted the first picture from the top of the stack and placed it face down on the opened manila folder, and then examined the next picture. This was a snapshot of the overall torso, displaying two gaping holes where the breasts should have been. They had been vulgarly sawed from her body with a dull object, presumably a kitchen knife.

“What type of sick bastard would do such a thing?” Jackie murmured aloud, shaking her head, as she turned to the next photograph.

The woman’s legs and arms were covered with massive bruises and lacerations and bound together by a thick strip of torn bed sheeting. It was a fresh kill. The woman’s skin, besides the bruising, was not discolored.

“I see you received the folder on the Hollister case,” Special Agent Purcell noted, as he entered her office.

“Yes. Have you looked at these photographs yet, Richard?” Jackie inquired, as she picked up the folder and tossed it back on the desk, “This son of a bitch is insane.”

“I glimpsed through them, but it wasn’t difficult to tell that we’re dealing with the same perp,” Richard replied, as he picked up the folder, once again reviewing the pages. “Do you want to go and check out the crime scene?”

“Forensics has already combed the scene and has brought the body in. I don’t think a trip out there will be beneficial. It was a dump spot. The murder took place somewhere else. We won’t be able to get any more evidence. Lets go talk with her family.”

Jackie was a single mother of a seven-year-old little girl. She often found it difficult to imagine something happening to Hannah. Jackie wished she could shelter her from the merciless world that surrounded her. Hannah was the spitting image of her mother, with her long, naturally curly, auburn hair. They both donned an ivory complexion, and had eyes of jade. Each time Jackie looked at her daughter, she saw herself as a child. She was thankful that, in spite of everything, Hannah still seemed to remain untainted by life in a major city.

Jackie Jonas found abhorrence in this part of her job, and wished that there were softer, easier ways to deal with the families. The circumstances surrounding her cases were horrific, and most parents demanded to know the details of their daughter’s death. It was a burden placed upon Jackie, a duty bestowed upon her for being one of the agents searching for possible suspects, or ties to the crimes. Interviewing family members, boyfriends,

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and social connections often left her with the difficult obligation of divulging specific details pertaining to the victims demise.

“Go ahead and get the car, Richard,” Jackie requested. “I want to call home and check on Hannah.”

CHAPTER THREE

Jerrod spent most of the afternoon at Grammars. The alcohol had finally relieved him of his mother's influence. She no longer demanded him to punish Holly Wescott for her unkind words. She no longer reminded him of how she flaunted her authority, making him feel less than by threatening him the way she did.

The woman sitting alone at the bar had commanded his full attention. Jeana was relieved that it was no longer directed at her. The woman was a regular at Grammars, and Jerrod had talked with her on several occasions. Today he would approach her, become friendlier, and invite her to his home. She had a quality that he wanted to capture on canvas, a beauty, and a flaw that needed to be forever frozen in time.

Jerrod sauntered up to the bar and sat next to the young woman, and then motioned Jeana to bring down two drinks.

"And how is Ms. Shelly today, huh?" Jerrod asked with a smile, his eyes embellished with a facade of admiration.

"I'm okay, Jerrod. How about yourself?" Her smile was forced and unconvincing.

"What's wrong, Shelly, aren't you glad to see me?"

"It's not that, I'm just tired. I've been out job hunting all day, and didn't have much luck."

"A pretty girl like you? You shouldn't have any trouble finding work."

Jeana brought the bourbon and Coke, and a bottle of Miller Lite, and set them in front of Jerrod.

"Five bucks, and I'm not taking anymore checks," Jeana spouted, smiling at Jerrod with a sarcastic shit ass grin.

Jerrod knew that Jeana was only trying to embarrass him. She would do anything to humiliate him, especially in front of women. Jerrod pulled a ten-dollar bill from his pocket and pitched it on the bar.

"I'm glad Jeana, because whores really shouldn't leave a paper trail when conducting business. You should stick to taking only cash."

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Jeana snatched the money from the bar and marched off towards the register.

“Piss head,” she mumbled, discomfited by his quick wit and sharp tongue.

Shelly chuckled at Jerrod’s remark. She knew what was going on, and understood that the relationship between the pair was hostile at best, and that they took every opportunity to take jabs at one another.

“You’re really on top of it today, Jerrod,” Shelly laughed softly, trying to avoid any further insult to Jeana.

“Lets drink these and get the hell out of here,” Jerrod suggested, throwing back his drink in two large gulps.

“I’ve had a rough enough day already,” Shelly explained. “What makes you think that I want to go anywhere with you?”

Jerrod reached into his pocket and showed her his stack of bills, fanning them in front of her nose. Shelly had a look on her face of disgust.

“I’m not a prostitute, asshole,” she snapped, pushing his hand away.

“Nothing like that, Shelly,” Jerrod assured her. “It’s just that you said you were having a hard time finding work. I was offering you a job.”

“What type of job?”

“It’s nothing sexual, I promise. I have an assignment due at the end of the week, for my art class.”

“And?” Shelly questioned, waiting for the part about how he needed a nude model to sketch.

“And I need a model for the project, and no, I don’t need you nude. Actually, what you’re wearing would do just fine. The colors in your outfit will really bring the painting a sense of vitality.”

Shelly considered his offer, took another look at the stack of bills, and knew that her electric company would be grateful for even a partial payment.

“What does it pay?”

“I usually pay my models about twenty dollars an hour, but sense you need the cash, I’ll pay you twenty-five.”

“In cash, in advance?” she asked, recalling Jeana’s statement regarding the two bounced checks in her drawer.

“Cash, in advance,” Jerrod replied with a smile, handing her fifty dollars, and then stood to help her with her chair.

“Alright Jerrod, but no funny stuff. Do I make myself perfectly clear?”

“Perfectly.”

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Jerrod and Shelly left Grammars, leaving her Ford Escort in the parking lot. He had convinced her to save the gasoline she did have for job hunting; he'd gladly drive her back to the bar once they were finished. On their way to his house, Jerrod found himself struggling to remain focused on Shelly's words. It was difficult to hold a conversation while his mother was constantly interrupting.

"So tell me, Jerrod, how many models have you painted?" Shelly asked, trying to keep the conversation alive.

"She's just being noseey, Jerriboy. It's none of her business," his mother's voice interjected.

His thoughts begged her to be quiet.

"I'm not sure. I really haven't counted them. Dozens I guess."

"What do you do with the paintings once they are finished, and graded?"

"Jerriboy, you've got to put a stop to this. She's asking too many questions," his mother insisted.

Jerrod tried his best to ignore his mother's continuous harassment.

"I sometimes keep them, or I give them to my models. Would you like to keep yours?" Jerrod smiled.

"We'll have to see how it turns out," Shelly replied, noting Jerrod's sudden and peculiar facial expressions.

"We'll have to see how it turns out. Jerriboy, she's mocking you. She doesn't think you're any good. No good Jerriboy." His mother's voice echoed in his mind, like a shotgun blast in a mineshaft.

'Hush, mama,' Jerrod thought, fighting back the urge to scream, demanding her silence.

"Is everything alright?" Shelly inquired, now slightly frightened by his subtle oddness.

"Fine, just fine. I get a little nervous just before starting a new project. Don't ask me why, I just do."

"She's making you feel that way, Jerriboy, she's the one to blame. Stop her, Jerriboy, stop her."

Jerrod wanted to reach inside his own head and rip out what remained of his mother. She was the one causing so much heartache and pain, but he could never think it, she would punish him, and he knew it.

Jerrod pulled his vehicle into his driveway, and then used the remote control to open the garage door.

"We're here," Jerrod stated. "I can't wait to get started."

Shelly smiled and exited the vehicle, checking out her surroundings, praying that she had made the right decision. Normally, she would not

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leave the bar with a stranger. Jerrod seemed harmless enough, but there was something in his attitude that concerned her. It appeared as if he were constantly struggling to contain himself. From what, she hadn't a clue, and it wasn't to a highly concerning degree, but just enough to be perceptible.

"Come on, Shelly, let's go inside and I'll show you my studio."

Shelly smiled, and then followed Jerrod into the house. From the garage, they entered into the north side of the living room. The first thing she noticed was the home's tidiness. Everything in the room was immaculate, carefully positioned and dusted. The front rooms were decorated with chrome and highly polished, black lacquer furniture that utilized abstract shapes in its design.

"Beautiful place, Jerrod. Did you decorate it yourself?" Shelly asked, as she slipped off one of her high-heeled shoes to run her foot across the plush gray carpet.

"Yeah. I had a little help with the layout though. Seen it in a magazine."

Shelly was extraordinarily attracted to Jerrod's coffee table, three geometrical shapes made of high gloss metal, with a thick oval sheet of beveled, smoked glass.

"Interesting," Shelly commented, as she studied the intricate construction of the table.

Without the support of each of the carefully placed base pieces, the table would not be able to support the glass. From an initial observation, it would appear as if the table was suspended in some type of magical force field. Its design was very scientifically calculated.

"Where did you get this table?"

"I made it," Jerrod replied, as he watched Shelly examine the table in awe.

"Amazing," Shelly said, aware that this was a signature of Jerrod's intelligence.

"About ready to get started?" Jerrod pointed down the hall to a room that was previously the master bedroom. He had converted it, mainly due to its size, into a fully equipped, painting studio.

Shelly followed Jerrod into the room. It was bright and roomy, filled with soft spotlights that angled down from each of the corners. A thick black tarp covered the wall containing the only window. The rest of the walls were adorned with canvas's, painting of still life's, children, and one of a very old man sitting on a park bench, wearing drab, worn out clothing, reading a copy of the New Yorker.

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“This is really great stuff, Jerrod.”

“She’s lying to you, Jerriboy. Can’t you tell that she’s nothing more than a deceitful little bitch?” his mother’s voice interjected.

“Sit anywhere you feel comfortable,” Jerrod stated, as he tried to ignore his mother’s disapproval.

Shelly looked around and chose a position on an elegant love seat. At first, she found the plastic slipcovers to be somewhat tacky, and out of character for Jerrod, but then figured that they were there to protect the fabric from the paint. Who knew, maybe Jerrod liked his sex a little kinky, found pleasure from the feeling of paint, plastic, and flesh. She began to unbutton her shirt. Jerrod watched with pleasure, as she slid her breast from the confines of her bra. She had lied. She wanted Jerrod, wanted to expose herself to him.

“Like this?” she asked, as she lay back against the arm of the love seat stretching her silky body into an erotic position.

“I told you, Jerriboy, nothing more than a devious little whore.”

Jerrod fought the voice that rattled within him. He focused on the beautiful young woman sitting before him, her hair supple and colored the shades of natural oak, her breast, full and flawless.

“I told you, Shelly, it’s not like that. You can keep your clothes on, or keep them off if you like,” Jerrod replied, as he fell victim to her exquisiteness. “It’s up to you. After all, it’s your portrait.”

Shelly smiled in admiration. She assumed that the artist needing a model thing was just a ploy to get her to his place. She figured she would take advantage of the situation. It had been months since she had been with a man, and she wanted Jerrod to be her next.

“Alright, lets get this thing on the road,” Jerrod stated, as he dimmed the lights in the room, leaving a single tawny light glowing on his subject.

“What romantic lighting. Will you be able to capture its essence on canvas?” Shelly asked, as she ran her fingers through her hair, giving it a wild, wind blown affect.

“I hope so,” Jerrod replied, as he set up his canvas, and then began to sketch an outline using a charcoal pencil.

“No, Jerriboy, she’s not that beautiful, look closer,” his mother’s voice begged. “Closer, find her true self.”

Jerrod remained focused on the beauty of his subject, creating delicate curves and shades. He began to give the painting life, adding color with flesh tone oils, and brilliant background hues.

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“Look at the devious whore, Jerriboy, look at her eyes. She’s begging you, paint me as I am,” his mother insisted, pointing out more of the woman’s flaws.

Jerrod tried to resist, but his hand became his mother’s hand, dried and brittle, guiding the paintbrush across the canvas. The image of the young woman became tainted with icy colors, cold and lifeless.

“How’s it going?” Shelly asked, repositioning herself on the love seat.

“Fine,” Jerrod replied with a smile, masking the rage created by his mother, struggling to deny its need for a recipient.

Jerrod glanced at his work, his mother’s work, anticipating what the illustration would look like. His mother had been an artist with a perverse imagination. Nothing he found on his canvas shocked him. The image was abstract and filled with wintry grays and glacial blues. The body in the painting was a picture of perfection, as in real life, but the face was twisted and distorted, covered by a colossal and crooked nose, one that you would expect to see on a wicked old witch. A scaled tongue slithered from her mouth, with the head of a venomous snake as its tip. Jerrod chuckled at his mother’s mind’s eye.

“She’s too noseey, Jerriboy, much too noseey. She’s a liar, Jerriboy. You can see that, can’t you? That’s why you painted her the way you did.”

“Please, Mother, enough!” Jerrod shouted, immediately realizing that he had just allowed his mother to enter the room, exposing her to Shelly.

“What’s that all about?” Shelly asked, puzzled by Jerrod’s outburst.

“Shut up, Shelly, shut up Mama,” Jerrod insisted, savagely forcing the canvas to the ground in a fit of rage.

Shelly swiftly sat up and began dressing. She was frightened by Jerrod’s sudden explosion of anger. Jerrod rushed towards her, teeth clenched, a white knuckled hold on his paintbrush.

“Liar, you damn liar,” Jerrod shouted, as he pounced on Shelly with the force of a starved lion.

Shelly let out a partial scream, seconds before his hand covered her mouth. With the other hand, in a singular upward motion, Jerrod rammed the end of his paintbrush beneath her chin until it stopped at the roof of her mouth. Shelly’s eyes bulged in pain, as blood filled her mouth, spilling from her lips in a gurgled wave. Jerrod snarled as he twisted the end of the brush, opening the wound even further.

“Nosey little liar,” Jerrod growled, just before snapping half of the brush off into her throat.

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“Good boy, that’s my Jerriboy. Finish her off, finish her off,” his mother insisted.

Jerrod watched the woman as she fought to breathe; he gazed into her eyes, searching to receive a glimpse of her soul. He saw nothing, but could hear her lies echoing in his head, and heard his mother ordering him to finish her off. He grabbed the woman’s neck and squeezed it in his hands, crushing her windpipe, ending her suffering.

CHAPTER FOUR

Special Agents Jackie Jonas and Richard Purcell arrived at the Hollister residence just before 3:00 p.m. There were several vehicles in the driveway, giving Jackie the impression that the family had gathered after hearing about Suzy Hollister's death. Richard eased the vehicle off to the side of the road, and then switched off the engine.

"Looks like it's going to be a busy interview," Richard commented, as he started to get out of the vehicle.

"Hold up, Richard, I'd like to say something before we go in."

"Yeah, what is it?"

"I want you to let me start this interview off. You're always so blunt, kind of callous, if you know what I mean."

"Me, callous?" Richard asked, acting as if he didn't know what she was talking about.

Richard was a ten-year veteran of the bureau, the last four of which had been spent with Jackie in the Behavioral Science Division, a special unit assigned to serial killer cases. He disliked his job as much as he disliked the weirdoes he was forced to apprehend. He had seen enough killing in his two tours of Vietnam to last a lifetime, and longed for the day when he could retire. Unlike Jackie, who valued her work and cared for her victims and their families, Richard was the type of person that would rather just line up all the sick bastards in the world and chop them down with an M-16.

"Richard, I mean it," Jackie snapped. "Let me handle this one."

Richard nodded in acceptance and motioned her out of the vehicle. Jackie led the way as the pair made their way up the sidewalk. She shook her finger at Richard with a *behave yourself* scowl before knocking on the door. An elderly man in his late sixties, with silver hair and a crooked back, answered the door.

"May I help you?" Mr. Hollister asked, with a dry and cracked voice.

Jackie flipped open her identification wallet. "Mr. Hollister, I'm Special Agent Jonas, and this is my partner, Special Agent Purcell. We

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are with the FBI. We realize that this is a difficult time for you and your family, but we need to ask you some important questions.”

Mr. Hollister stood silent for a moment, and then stepped aside, allowing the agents to enter the home.

“The police have already been here twice. I don’t know what else we can tell you,” the old man moaned, as he directed them into the living room.

As they entered the room, they found four other family members, a mother, two sisters, and a brother consoling each other. Each individual was exceedingly distraught by the news of Suzy’s death.

“I’m terribly sorry for bothering you at a time like this,” Jackie began, “but there are some questions that we need to ask.”

Mrs. Hollister glanced up at the pair of agents, and then began to weep openly. She stood, and then offered the agents a seat on the sofa. Jackie politely accepted, while Richard opted to stand.

“We would like to talk to each of you individually, if we could?” Jackie asked. “Special Agent Purcell, would you like to take Mr. Hollister into the kitchen and begin an interview?”

Richard nodded, thankful that Jackie chose to start him off with the less distraught member of the family. He followed Mr. Hollister into the kitchen.

“Mrs. Hollister, is there some place we can talk privately?” Jackie asked, placing her hand on the woman’s shoulder.

“Will the spare bedroom do?”

“That will be just fine,” Jackie replied, and then followed her into the first door on the right side of the hall.

Mrs. Hollister sat on the bed, and then offered Jackie a seat on a chair that sat behind a small wooden desk against the wall. The room was decorated in soft pastels, highlighted by the radiance of the early afternoon sun. Mrs. Hollister ran her hand across the hand-sewn quilt that was folded at the end of the bed.

“This used to be Suzy’s room,” she cried, struggling to hold any form of composure. “I wish she was here now.”

Jackie leaned forward, reaching out for the elderly woman’s hand. She sympathized with her but fought the compulsion to take on the woman’s pain.

“Mrs. Hollister?” Jackie began.

“Please, dear, call me Judy,” the woman urged in a sorrowful and shaken voice, “Mrs. Hollister seems much too formal right now.”

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“Alright Judy, can you tell me if Suzy was dating anyone? Did she mention any new acquaintances?”

“No, nobody at all. Suzy wasn’t much for socializing, she was too busy with school and all,” Mrs. Hollister replied, breaking into tears again, as she thought about her daughter.

“Mrs. Hollister, Judy,” Jackie corrected herself, “we believe that Suzy was a victim of a serial killer, someone that she knew. Can you think of anybody that may have established a suspicious interest in your daughter?”

Mrs. Hollister paused for a moment, gathering her thoughts, and then answered Jackie’s question.

“No, nobody I can think of. I’m sorry; I realize that I’m not being much help. You see, Suzy was somewhat of a loner, and we didn’t have that good of a relationship.”

“What do you mean, Judy?”

Mrs. Hollister looked at Jackie with frightened eyes. She had something to say, but they were words that she never wanted to speak.

“Well, I might as well tell you. I mean, you’ll probably find out anyway,” Mrs. Hollister wept, and then confessed the family’s little secret, “You see, our daughter Suzy...”

Mrs. Hollister broke out into tears, unable to speak. She fell back onto the bed as if a knockout blow hit her straight on.

“Mrs. Hollister, are you alright?” Jackie asked, as she sat on the bed next to her, assisting the woman as she attempted to sit up.

“Suzy was a lesbian,” Mrs. Hollister exclaimed, covering her mouth with both hands, as if the words left a bitter taste in her mouth.

“And?” Jackie replied, never changing her demeanor, treating the news as if it meant nothing.

Mrs. Hollister looked up at Jackie, ashamed by her embarrassment concerning her daughter’s sexual preference.

“My husband never accepted Suzy’s ... condition.”

“Condition, ma’am?” Jackie asked.

“That’s what George called it, a condition. George and Suzy never came to terms. She was asked to leave our home last summer, when she told us that she was gay. I tried to reason with him, but he couldn’t accept it. No, not George.”

“What did Suzy do?”

“She didn’t have much of a choice. She moved out, got herself a little apartment on 35th Avenue, and continued to go to school.”

“The Creative Art Institute?” Jackie asked.

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“Yes, she really loved her art. Suzy painted me that picture right there. She loved clowns,” Mrs. Hollister explained, pointing to a painting on the wall.

“Suzy was very talented,” Jackie reassured her, as she stood up, “We’re going to catch your daughter’s killer, Judy, I promise.”

Jackie excused herself, and then returned to the living room. Richard had already questioned George Hollister and the children. He was ready to go and urged Jackie to speed things up. They left the home with very little to go on. Jackie wished that the family could have offered more information, but realized that family members sometimes become like strangers to one another if their relationship is plagued by irreconcilable differences.

“Lesbian, huh,” Richard chuckled, as they approached their vehicle. “How’s that going to fit into your profile?”

Jackie thought for a minute, and then replied in a resentful tone, “It doesn’t.”