

"Portrait of a Suicide"

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A pot of cherry flavored lip gloss that promises "supple kissability." A retainer case with scrawled patient information and dust on the top. A bottle of nail polish, Time Square Tangerine color. Assorted perfumes, deodorants and lotions. A disposable camera. These are the things that cover her bureau.

A stuffed raisin, no doubt salvaged from an antique store. Haphazard piles of letters. Crumpled sheets of graded school work. Stacks of novels, a rocking chair with the bottom sagging out. SAT prep books and a collection of china dolls. These are the things that fill her room.

It smells like rotting oranges, and you have to kick some peels out of the way to go through the door. On the walls, certificates proclaiming excellent conduct and attendance are neatly thumb-tacked in a row. A dress hanging from a hanger on the open closet door flutters slightly in the wind. The glass in the window is broken.

It's interesting. You don't get many teenagers jumping from windows. Girls favor pasty pills, boys flashy guns. There is a pillow case on the floor - she wrapped it around her hand to break the glass. It is white, with little purple flowers. You peer out of the window.

Her body is already gone, but there is a faint spot on the concrete still - dark red and sinister, like a sole eye glaring up at you. She was here, it says. Was being the operative term, you remind it.

They told you what was in her pockets, because you asked. Four dollar bills, folded, three pennies. A cell phone, the screen cracked, and a packet of chewing gum. Icy mint flavor. For some reason, this reminds you of your own daughter, but when you snapped on your plastic gloves, you pushed that thought far from your mind.

Her mother is in the other room. Your partner is interviewing her. You never were good with the parents. You instead like to pick up on the little details. The fact that she landed on her head - the diving medals lined carefully on the walls. Dove, like a swan, you think, but try and push the image from your mind. You think of the

glass shards in her feet - the only shards that she did not fully clear away with the pillow case. You wonder why she would want to stand there on that glass and feel that pain, just moments before she ended it all. Maybe she was trying to convince herself not to do it. You don't know.

There is a picture of a boy taped to her mirror. Next to it is a faint outline of lips, in red lipstick that her mother probably doesn't even let her wear. Hearts are drawn on his picture - you wonder briefly if he is a boyfriend or simply admired from afar. If he played any part in this. Maybe you will talk to him.

It is cold - the wind that blows through the window is biting at your clothing. You remember that she was not wearing a jacket - you wonder if it was cold, when she fell. Not fell, you tell yourself. Jumped. When she jumped. You think that probably it was, that she maybe shivered before her head hit the ground at that awkward angle. You wish you could take her a jacket, though you know she is already in the morgue. You wonder if this case is going to give you trouble.

Later, when you have gotten all of your evidence, sealed it away in little plastic baggies and covered the doorway with yellow caution tape that her brother and sister peer at with wide eyes, you will return to your office. You have a sheaf of photos on your desk, waiting for you. Not much to do, open and shut case, easy and you'll be home early for dinner. Maybe you'll make mac-and-cheese. Your daughter isn't there to make sure you don't forget and melt the big plastic spoon by leaving it in the pot. Again.

You sign a few papers. Tuck your hat under your arm. Your newspaper too, though you haven't even looked at it since you bought it this morning. There are crumbs on your desk and you wipe them to the floor, get up to leave. Say good bye to your partner; laugh at his off-color joke.

You go home alone and drink whiskey out of a glass with clinking ice and sweaty sides. Run a hand over your cheeks - there's stubble; your daughter always said it felt prickly when she kissed you. You fall into bed, snore.

You dream of windows that are broken open, of white pillowcases with purple flowers. Try not to think about it.