

It was a rainy day, I was alone at home. It was pitch dark outside. Suddenly I heard someone knocking on my door. I thought about ignoring it. But as always I get up and I open the door and just as I expected I see my little niece standing at my door looking at me with eager eyes. She was a small frail girl with brown thick hair and dark green eyes. I promised her a while back that today I would take her out to the beach since her mother was too busy working multiple jobs to look after her. Today however, due to the heavy rain I've decided that we'll just stay indoors. "Come on inside it's pouring, why aren't you wearing a jacket?" She just looked at me with a confused look on her face and asked "what rain?" I didn't entertain her silly little attempt at a prank and just ushered her inside. I did find it a bit weird that despite walking to my house in this heavy rain she isn't wet in the slightest. She's quieter than usual today. "You alright?" I ask more out of curiosity than genuine concern. But I lost interest in whatever answer she might give me after the first three seconds of silence and went into the kitchen to prepare lunch for us instead of waiting for her to reply. I don't know why I agreed to do this. Maybe I felt bad for my sister, seeing her work herself to death just for a few pennies to give to her daughter. By the time I finished making lunch I had concluded that children are parasites.

"Here" I handed the little girl what is most likely the best sandwich she'll ever taste in her life. Feeling pleased with myself I turned on the TV for her and went upstairs to work in my office. While working however I heard a noise outside my house and went to investigate.

I live in a small mountain town. The kind of town where everyone knows everyone and weddings are considered big town events that almost everyone is expected to attend. What I hate most about living in a small town though is how everyone feels entitled to you. They deserve to know my name just like they deserve to know why I decided to murder my own mother. Why do they care so much about other people's business Is something i don't think ill ever understand. My sister doesn't think I did it. She's stupid of course for thinking that since all the evidence points towards me being the killer. But who am I to tell her she's wrong? I'm just a business man who moved back to their childhood town to get away from the toxicity of the city. Or atleast that's the narrative they've carefully crafted for me.

When I arrived outside to investigate the noise I saw someone in the house next door taking out the trash. I think I'm going insane. At first I wondered why someone would be taking the trash out In this weather and then I remembered that the house next door hasn't been occupied since Robin (the old woman who last lived there) got married and moved out. Now there's a man taking out the trash? What's happening today? Maybe I am going crazy. My head hurts...

I felt a hot anger bubble up inside of me. Anger at past me for deciding to take care of this stupid kid. Anger at my brain for not doing better. Anger at the people in this town for caring about me so much. Before I knew it I was standing in the town square. My legs had seemingly moved on their own. I was soaking wet. During that flash of Anger I guess I forgot umbrellas only work when you hold them above your head.

I saw Lori who works at the local nursery walk hurriedly past me as I stood in the town square. She gave me a quick glance but then did a double take as if she couldn't believe her eyes. She stood there in front me at an awkward distance just staring at me for a while before I broke the silence. "is something the matter?" "A-are you Randy Robertson?" She

asked in a low hesitant voice. Her face was ghost white. I thought the whole situation amusing so I decided to play around a little. "No, I'm his brother Matthew," I said with a small smirk. "Oh, alright, s-sorry, I thought for a second Randy had risen from the dead, forgive me you two look so similar..." I'm definitely going crazy "who says I'm- Randy's dead?" My response made her visibly uncomfortable as I could see her debating on whether or not to tell me about my own brother's death! Wait. what. No my- "so they haven't told you yet..." She gave me a look of pity- no. sympathy? Before she said "I hate to be the one who tells you this but I'm not surprised, your sister was probably too busy getting high to even tell you" for a split second I could see a look of disgust on her face as she mentioned my sister. I feel like I should be offended at this. Finally, after another round of uncomfortable silence, she concluded "Randy died last year of brain cancer". "Oh".

I am crazy.

I walked to the town's church. If I'm "dead" this is probably where the culturally Christian folks that live in this accursed town would bury me. I felt a little silly for even deciding to come here. Of course, I can't be dead. Before I reached the graveyard it had stopped raining and just as I thought there was no gravestone to be found. Hah. I've been tricked. Lori was probably laughing to herself as she walked away. What a fool I was to even talk to that wretched woman.

I opened the door to my house once again and went to take a shower but as I was showering I suddenly remembered that I was supposed to be taking care of my niece. I quickly dried myself off and went to search for her around the house. She was nowhere to be found. I decided to call my sister to see if she had picked up Alice while I was away. What's her number again? I waited until I heard that familiar voice through the speaker "Hello?" I could almost feel her exhaustion from the phone. "Hey is Alice with you?" "No, but she's at home with the babysitter, since when do you care about Alice always?" "Ah, I was just wondering where she went after she visited me this morning" a short pause "Are you okay Randy?" "I'm healthy... why?" "Well Alice was home all day according to the babysitter so either she's lying, Alice is lying or you're having another one of your episodes." My sister thinks I'm crazy too. "Forget it I'll see you later" I close the phone slightly irritated that reality doesn't seem to be lining up with my memories and experiences anymore. My head felt like it was about to explode and I was starting to feel Nauseated.

I thought for a long time. After searching on the Internet for a long time I decided that either Lori was crazy or I was crazy and had hallucinated the whole event. There was only one way to figure this out.

The drive to Lori's house was pretty short and before I could prepare myself I was standing in front of her house. Lori's house was an old house. The kind you would see in the history books. She opened the door. She looked terrified when she recognized my face. I don't blame her. She should be afraid of me. After all, I've shown that I'm perfectly capable of murdering every single one of the petty folk that lives here. "Oh, R-randy.. w-what do y-y-you want" that stutter.. that annoying stutter... she's had it for as long as I've known her. Of course, it's gotten worse since the news of my mother's death. I got straight to the point "did you see me yesterday in the town square?" She quickly replied "No?" I left as soon as I got my answer. I don't think Lori would lie to me. We were friends back in high school.

As I drove back home I thought about the past. I remember Lori wasn't always like this. I think I messed her up when I skinned her cat in front of her as a kid because she messed up presenting a group project we were assigned to do together. People are fragile like that I guess. Suddenly I felt a darkness wash over me and I heard a car crash.

When I woke up I was in the hospital strapped to a bunch of machines. A nurse came into my room and asked me how I was feeling and told me that she had already contacted my sister and told her what happened. As I lay in bed I got another moment to reflect. I've been getting a lot of those lately and it's starting to get uncomfortable. Do I regret anything I've done in the past? Yes? But do I regret my actions because I genuinely feel guilty or because they brought more bad consequences than good?

Heather (my sister) came to visit me. She brought Alice with her. Alice gave me a drawing of a cat that was eerily the same shade of ginger that I remember Lori's cat being. Life is funny like that. Maybe there's a god out there laughing at me. I talked with Heather (more like Heather talked to me) a doctor came in later with a clipboard and a grim expression. I jokingly asked him "what is it do I have brain cancer or something?" Yes, yes, I did in fact have brain cancer. Oh, you should've seen the expression on my sister's face. She was so devastated "how long does he have left?" She exclaimed. At least I think that's what she said. I wasn't really listening at that point. I just kept laughing and laughing and for a little while everything was okay again.

I decided that before I die I wanted to do something good for the sake of it. See if this morality stuff is worth the hype. I'm going to take Alice to the beach. This time for real and no rain, thunder, or tsunami on this earth can stop me.

I immediately regretted that decision. I think this brain cancer is what's been causing all of this confusion. I've always been a logical person. I've maintained a well-crafted and likable personality until late this year... I started letting my apathy towards others snowball into pure social lethargy. I've stopped pretending to care about my sister or fake grieving for my mother. I don't even bother to remember people's names anymore. I've been getting too comfortable... one loose thread, one slip up, one uncontrolled twitch of the facial muscles and I'll be sent tumbling down the thorned hills of the US criminal justice system. Everyone knows that once you fall down there, you can't get back up. Not without throwing away everything and starting from scratch anyway.

"What are you thinking about?" a little girl's voice. I turn my head to look at the little twerp that dared to interrupt my thoughts. It was Alice. I'm at the beach already? Wasn't I at the hospital...? My head was throbbing, I felt like throwing up. At that moment I felt like I was going to die very, very, soon. "Alice I've killed many people. Even before you were born." I could see her eyes widen with shock and fear. This would amuse me if I wasn't convinced that I was gonna die. My vision went blurry and my ears were ringing but I could still hear myself faintly talking. I don't know why but I told her everything. All the animals I've tortured for fun when I was her age. All the people I've hurt and that night when I killed my own mother. "The death of your father was unplanned. He just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. I couldn't let him go. He would've told the police and I would be sent to

prison." My vision was starting to clear again and eventually my eyes could see Alice again and she was crying. I didn't know what to do.

I think I may have just traumatized another person for life. "Uhm hey how about I get you an ice cream huh?" But she didn't stop crying. Do kids these days, not like ice cream? I couldn't let her go to her mother like this and I'm too weak to commit and cover-up another murder right now. So I did what any good businessman would do in a time like this.

I threw money at her.

She stopped crying and her face went from fear and distress to a look of confusion. Alice who was around 9 years old and lacked any kind of emotional intelligence from the lack of attention she got as a child had forgotten all about her dead father (whom let's be honest she never knew all too well) as soon as a ten-cent coin smacked her in the face. I smiled "Come on ill get you whatever you want, do you want a new iPad?" Alice nodded eagerly and with a new iPad in one hand and a vanilla ice cream in the other she promised me she wouldn't tell her mother or anyone about anything I said while I was "sick".

"Hey, sweetie did you have a nice time with your uncle Randy?" Alice ran into her mother's arms. "Oh, Randy you shouldn't have! this thing must have cost you a fortune!" She was referring to the iPad but I decided that I wouldn't tell her that I wasted much more money trying to impress her daughter by buying her ice cream with real gold flakes on it than I ever did on that iPad. That information would probably be too much on her poverty-stricken heart anyways.

I was in the hospital for the next five days after that and every day without fail Alice begged her mother to take her to visit me. I think at some point she stopped asking for permission and just started running away from her babysitter to visit me. I don't know why this child likes me so much. All I did was throw loose change at her. I think? My memory is getting worse. Another impairment to add to the increasingly long list of them. Alice has been bringing me drawings and they've been getting increasingly darker with each visit. Last time she just gave me what appeared to be a blank piece of paper but when I turned it around I saw a small drawing of my head? And what appears to be blood around it. I don't know really. To be frank, Alice is a terrible artist. I showed her some of my much superior childhood drawings but that only seemed to make things worse. At least her technical skills got better after I showed her the proper way to draw human organs. Her proportions need some work though.

Since my hospital room was slowly starting to turn into a second home for Alice as a consequence her mother came in a lot too. Heather was worried about Alice. "Kids her age shouldn't be drawing those kinds of things..." She would rant to me about all sorts of things in her life. Nothing new there. If there's anything I have in common with my sister its narcissism. She doesn't seem to be as aware of it as I am though. As I listen to her talk about all the boring details of her life like how she almost got run over by a car or how Alice almost killed someone in a fight at school I wonder if this is what it sounds like to others when I talk too. The most exciting event to ever happen to my dear sister Heather was probably my cancer diagnosis. I hope my approaching death spices up her personality somehow.

I was right about one thing though. I will die soon. But I was wrong about how.

It was midnight and I was awake. I haven't slept for days. My head hurts far too much. They should just kill me and get it over with. As I was thinking this I saw a dark figure standing at the door. "WAIT- NO I DIDN'T ACTUALLY MEAN IT!" I yelled. As the figure moved closer I could see who it was. It was Lori. "Lori it's past visiting hours". Stupid Lori can't even visit at the right time. But she didn't reply. She just kept staring at me. "Okay, very funny Lori you can stop your little prank now" silence. "Lori?" Quickly approaching my bed Lori finally spoke to me "The axe forgets, the tree remembers"

And those were the last words I heard before I was thrust into an eternal slumber. Hey, at least she didn't stutter that time.

The End