

# A Drawing of Emmanuel

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Sara and her daughter Jess were both beautiful, with wide, piercing blue eyes that reminded me of the deep, salty ocean. Jess, who had just celebrated her seventh birthday with a delicious lemon cake, had an adorable habit of blushing and shuffling her feet when she was embarrassed or anxious. And her smile, God, she had such a beautiful smile. Whenever the two of them laughed, the sun seemed to light up my dusty world. In a way, I had come to love them. And they loved me too; they just didn't know it.

Deep down, in the darkest and most silent corners of their souls, they must have known I was living with them. I was visible in all the little things that disappeared. The half eaten candy bar from the freezer. The pair of socks from the drawer. The deck of cards from Sara's nightstand. I'd seen Sara pause at the family picture that was facing the wrong way. I'd seen Jess's nose crinkle when she breathed in the musty scent I'd left on her pillow, but, like most people, they both dismissed the small oddities that didn't make sense.

I lived in the crawlspace of Sara and Jess's apartment. It was filthy and three feet wide. I ate just enough to keep myself alive and too little to give myself away. I urinated and defecated into a broken, defunct pipe that lead to god knows where. I did what could loosely be called pushups to keep myself from withering away. I'd become a master of solitaire, but my greatest joy came when I pulled the long, rank hair from my eyes and gazed through the rusty grates and tiny peepholes at Sara and Jess.

I watched Sara tuck Jess into bed. She pulled up her downy blanket, embroidered with hearts. She lifted the pink teddy bear, the one that never lost its perfume scent, and set it on the pillow next to Jess. She kissed her daughter gently on the head. I sighed. Then, to my amusement, I watched Sara turn and look directly at me. Unknown to Sara, I was looking directly at her too. She held my gaze for just a moment and then dismissed it, flicking off the lights and delicately closing the door.

I thought of them not as a lover but as family. I was, after all, always there. As I did every night, I listened carefully to Jess's breathing and watched the fluttering of her eyelashes. When I was sure she was asleep, I whispered quietly, "Goodnight."

Jess sat upright. This had never happened before. I froze. Jess slid from her bed, walked over to me, and pressed her hand against the wall. I slowly pressed my hand against the other side. I wanted to cry out, to tell her that I loved her, but I held my tongue, as I had for months. I was sure then that at the bottom of her innocent untainted mind, she knew I was there and she loved me too. As I watched her crawl back into bed, I fell asleep, satisfied.

I woke to the sound of a thundering cascade. The pipe I was using as a headrest shook violently. I could also hear a droning wind. I made my way through the crawlspace to the bedroom. As I peered through the grate on the wall, Jess turned off the bathwater and slid into the tub. I smiled. She was going to be a beautiful woman someday. Sara stood at the bathroom counter wearing a robe and holding a hairdryer as she looked at her reflection in the medicine cabinet.

"Mommy, can we get a dog?" Jess asked, cocking her head.

"We can't have a dog here, honey," Sara laughed, pulling a comb through her hair. "They shed and pee."

"We can get one that doesn't shed," suggested Jess. "We could hide it. I could teach it to pee out on the balcony."

"We don't need a dog," said Sara. "I like that it's only the two of us."

The phone rang.

"That's Randy," said Sara, setting down the hairdryer and dashing out of the bathroom.

"I don't like Randy!" Jess called after her. "He's stupid." I snickered in approval.

Then my eyes shot wide open.

The hairdryer slowly turned on the bathroom counter, its cord caught on the trash can. Sara babbled away on the phone in the living room while Jess relaxed in the hot water, humming. Not her, I panicked. Not my dear, sweet Jess. It couldn't end like this.

My heart thundered like the four horsemen. Blood raced through my veins as adrenaline pumped into every inch of my body. I knew what I had to do. I slammed the grate out of place, tearing through the wall. I ripped

through my dark cocoon, bursting out into the light. As the hairdryer fell off the counter, I snatched it out of the air before it could fall into the water below. A wave of relief washed over me; Jess was safe.

Then came the piercing, ear-splitting scream, the most horrible sound I had ever heard. A sound so vile and desperate, it could only be produced by a little girl who just watched a filth-ridden, long-haired man with tattered clothes plunge through her wall like paper as she took a bath.

"No, no!" I hissed. "It's okay, please, shhhh!" But the scream didn't stop, vibrating through every inch of the building.

"Jessica!" Sara screamed in sheer terror. I heard a phone clatter against the floor. I reached out and slammed the door shut, locking it. Then, I wrapped my hand around Jess's mouth.

I heard Sara crashing against the door. She banged again it over and over, rattling it violently.

"Jessica!" she screamed like a banshee. "Jessica, what's wrong? Jessica, goddammit, open the door! Open it!" Jess squirmed.

"Shh," I pleaded as my mind raced desperately.

Then a metal baseball bat tore a hole in the door.

"Jessica, it's okay, honey. Mommy's coming. Don't be scared," she cried out as the bat tore again and again through the door.

That was when she saw me standing there grasping Jess's head. As I let go, Jess's head banged against the wall. A wave of nausea washed over me. She was dead. I'd suffocated her. I'd killed her.

I jumped back as Sara lunged at me with the bat. It struck the bathroom wall, and I kicked her into the bathtub. As she clambered back out, I tossed the hairdryer into the tub. In one short moment, she was gone.

With tears running down my face, I walked into Jess's room. On the wall, on the spot that Sara had been staring at, on the spot that Jess had touched, hung a drawing. A crayon drawing, stuck to the wall with strips of masking tape. They had not known me in some secret part of their souls. They had not loved me. I was not their family. They were only looking at a crayon drawing.

Three days later, a plumber repaired a leak in the damp basement of the apartment complex. After cutting through an insulated wall, he discovered two months of dried human feces. The police searched every apartment directly above that spot. On the seventh floor, they discovered the bodies of Sara and Jessica Abilene, decaying in a bathtub. Authorities determined that Jessica had been killed by asphyxiation and Sara by electrocution.

In the apartment's exposed crawlspace, the police discovered empty boxes of food, candy wrappings, and water bottles. A deck of cards was arranged in a game of solitaire. In the bathroom sink was a cesspool of long, dirty hair and shaving cream. Missing from the house were a business suit and passport, both formerly belonging to Jeffery Abilene, Jessica's father, who had died two years before.

Tests conducted on the feces and hair revealed the remains belonged to Emmanuel Hendricks, an escaped prisoner convicted of embezzlement.

Police also located a crayon drawing on the wall of Jessica Abilene's bedroom. It depicted three people playing outside on a warm spring day: Sara, Jessica, and a man with long, shaggy hair.