

Revelation of the Trooper's Daughter

Mom scrubbed at the stain on Daddy's state trooper jacket, her elbow into it. I was perched on the bathtub's edge inspecting each one of my curls in a compact. The radio played. She wet the washcloth again and dug into it.

Upping the stairs I heard the jingle of handcuffs, bouncing against Dad's leg. He stuck his head into the bathroom.

"Heh-lohhhhh Sassy!" A grin. One back.

"Mornin'! You gonna take any bad guys to jail today?"

That's what the legal system was for me then—justice instantaneous.

"Maybe," He leaned and gave Mom a kiss.

The question was an old one, but I was still waiting to hear a yes, the robber or the murderer caught. I was tired of boring speeding tickets, motorist assists, fender benders. I wanted a big cop tale, mastermind criminals locked in the back of his squad, on the front cover of the paper. The only other stories I overheard were murmured around the adult table at Christmastime. Those were the pure shockers. Traffic accidents, suicides, gory scenes. Relatives always happened upon these ones—thrilled by the macabre or their distance from it—and he complied in plain facts, never overboard, hardly entertained. Spinning ghost stories.

One guy had tied a chain around a bridge support, pulled it through the back hatch of his jeep, and wrapped it around his neck, pedal to the metal. His teeth were found on the hatch, his head under the car, still idling. A trucker got passed by some wanted psycho in a deathtrap when its hood came clean off, sailed through the air, and sliced through the rig's windshield and the trucker. One guy was mistaken for a Halloween decoration, dangling from the 251 bridge. Another rotted alone in an upstairs apartment for a week.

But that was all just dirty work. No heroics.

“I can’t get this out, I’ve tried everything...” She soaped the rag. He lowered his voice.

I listened harder.

“I don’t think it’s going to come out.”

“Well maybe if I just let it soak—”

“It’s from that accident the other day.” I looked away from the compact and towards him. “It’s brain fluid.”

My mom dropped the rag like instinct.

I later found out about a poor young woman who’d fallen asleep behind the wheel on a country curve. She had crossed the center line and struck a southbound semi. My dad was the first there. He had pried open the driver’s door but she was up against it, dead. When it released she went limp, her head yawned forward, and a very bit of matter—brain tissue—leaked onto his coat.

But right then it was just me and the stain, upwards facing on the bathroom counter, a little smudge darker than water that would not lift. Permanent and real, his dirty, terrifying, essential, ignored work. Who else wanted to walk up to that? The stain glared back at me. Who else *could* and still call me Sassy?