

Harper Crosby

Selfish.

My father had been selfish many times in his life, but when I found him huddled in that dusty corner with his Smith & Wesson pistol kissing the roof of his mouth, he was more selfish than he had ever been. And in that moment, I hated him more than I ever had. I didn't tell him that, of course; I told him to put the gun down.

We sat in silence in the tedious moments afterwards, during which he kept looking at me and begging me, without words, to say something. We have always shared that ability to speak through expression. When I was little, I used to imagine that we shared an innate power of telepathy, some strong power that had been passed down discreetly through generations so that I shared it with my father just as we shared a name and a nose and a love for hard candy. I didn't say a word in return.

He got up to make two cups of coffee like nothing had even happened. Black coffee for me, half and half for him. He knew he couldn't take that moment back, just as he couldn't take back the long nights he spent smoking on the balcony while he let the television babysit, or the morning I found a woman I didn't like much wrapped in his bathrobe and standing at the top of the stairs, or that first night I saw him cry. (I was only ten at the time, and he was weeping quietly into his hands underneath the sterile gaze of the doctors as they told him once, then again, our deepest condolences.)

While time continued its slow little dance and he sat across from me at the dining room table, his hand came to reach towards mine, hesitating as his fingertips brushed my knuckles. I fit my fingers into his, extending temporary grace. His shoulders relaxed. I'm sorry, he said, as if

that were enough to change what he had tried to do. I didn't forgive him. How could I? I saw, in that moment, that the man who was supposed to teach me was now asking me for the answers, unguarded and vulnerable, trembling before me, and all I wanted was for him to hold me again. I was his last chance.

But I was not an angel. I was only his daughter.

That was the last time I ever saw his face, weathered, wilted, and wrinkled from years of raising me. After a call from the neighbors the next morning, his body was retrieved and shelved away into a dark little box far away from where I lived on without him in my penthouse apartment with quaint little windows and gossamer curtains in his favorite shade of green. It was mine, too.