

DID THAT PAINTING JUST WINK AT ME?

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It was Friday – the end of a very normal week. It's strange going five straight days without experiencing any symptoms, but I'd rather not look a gift horse in the mouth for once. I don't want to jinx the progress I've made.

Coming back home is always a relief. Working in the office can be stressful sometimes, so I always look forward to coming home to paint the rest of my day away. And while the house itself isn't perfect in any way, the memories it brings from my childhood definitely are enough to keep me around. My parents have long since passed away, so I'm continuing their legacy of passing the house down each generation.

The living room is the first thing you see – a wide open room, with light brown couches and chairs, a low table usually kept somewhat messy on purpose, the decomposed corpses of my parents, and a decent amount of greenery scattered about. It looks a bit old-timey, but, hey, it's mine.

I go left of the living room and enter my study. I plan to spend the rest of my life here. The room is well lit, with floor-to-ceiling windows, a desk in the middle, a covering to keep the floor from being dirtied from paint and multiple canvases and paintings on the wall and floor.

I felt inspired today after not experiencing any symptoms for so long. I wanted to commemorate this day forever – maybe it's the start of my new, illness free life, where I won't ever have to suffer my hallucinations again, or maybe it won't last forever, but I can hold it up as a record of sorts.

I sit on the chair and carefully plan out my next move. Starting with a rough sketch, I sketch the head, the teary eyes, the bloody smile... I sketch a self-portrait of myself. That's how I want to remember this week. A portrait of me, crying from joy in my living room. It's a painting somewhat similar to the one my parents had made of themselves together once. I really miss them.

After what seems like mere minutes to me, my phone says it's almost 12AM. I have to leave this painting for tomorrow. It would be Saturday and I'd have all the time in the world to finish it then.

I pick it up and stare at it for a while – really look at it. It's me, but... maybe it's not. The happy face I drew only minutes ago seems to blur and contort... But I had taken such careful strokes, how come it doesn't look like me? Her face slowly splits in two and her mouth stretches past what's humanly possible...

And that's when it starts. A horrible pain, similar to getting your head split open by a chainsaw. I feel my brain being split into two and mashed against the sides of my skull. I feel like an otherworldly being takes out each of my eyes one by one... and eats them.

I scream from the pain and fall to the floor, the hallucinations vivid and bloody. From the open door I see my parents – or rather, what’s left of them – on the living room floor, their chests split open and their organs leaking out onto the carpet...

The ceiling starts to crack and the wallpaper starts to peel off. Dust falls from the ceiling and covers everything in such a huge amount, I can no longer breathe.

“It’s okay!” I yell out, only to myself and all the ghosts watching me. A hallucination – that’s all it is, I’m sure. This isn’t unusual, this is completely normal. Just a... rather severe hallucination, nothing more.

I continue lying to myself as the previously silent house now fills with screams. “What are you doing?! Please, Scarlett, let your father go!”

“Baby, calm down, it’ll all-” the person behind the disembodied voice gags and seemingly starts choking, which is followed by a louder than it should’ve been ‘thud’. Another follows, screaming in fear, before seemingly experiencing the first person’s fate.

Palms pressed tightly against my ears, I realize – those voices are my parents’. They called my name and begged me for mercy? But I didn’t kill them! I have done no such thing! The coroners ruled their deaths accidental, I had nothing to do with it!

The screams stopped – but the house seemed to replace them. It grumbled and moaned, doors opened and slammed shut by themselves, creating a cacophony of horrible noises. My eardrums bled and dripped down my face and onto the floor.

“STOP! MAKE IT STOP! PLEASE!”

...

It was silent, at least for a while. I immediately tried getting up. I sat up, hoping everything was back tonormal, but immediately noticed nothing had changed since my hallucination. The bodies remained, the cracked ceiling was still there, the wallpaper was still peeling off... What is happening?

I looked all around, hoping at least SOMETHING was still normal. The windows, previously open and letting in the sunlight – now blacked out and cracked... My previous paintings – all torn apart or dirtied with red paint... All, except one. The newest one.

My self-portrait lies against the wall, still crying from joy. The longer I looked at it, the less she seemed to be grinning because of an accomplishment and more... at me. Her smile seemed villainous, vicious, even.

She moved, somehow, still smiling, and locked eyes with me. Her tears had stopped falling, her face turning to pure joy as her bloodied hands reached up – past the top of the painting and to the light on the ceiling – the only light still working, I noticed.

I stood, petrified. There was nothing I could do or say to stop her or even understand anything that's going on. I only stared back, a silent plea for mercy, as she winked at me before her muscles tensed, strokes of paint and pencil I hadn't made myself, and the light went out.

She left me here?! I screamed from fear and crawled towards where I saw her last, pawing at where the floor and wall met, trying to find her. But she was gone. She left me in my nightmare – to suffer. She left me with her parting gift – that wink. To rot.