

"Sometimes I just want to run the car off the bridge, with all of you kids in it," Dad gripes, as if this was the first time he has ever voiced this thought aloud. ~~A~~ dark confession that started off as an intrusive thought, but grew into an obsessive daydream.

I idly trace the spot on the door where the handle used to be. ~~Its~~ jagged edges catch against dry skin and tear viciously into the already torn skin, dragging drops of blood to the surface. For a moment, I think of opening the door and throwing myself out, damn the consequences ~~that followed~~. It had to be better than trying to escape a sinking car or drowning in polluted water.

Surely, ~~it would be~~ better than staying trapped and listening to Dad tell me how much he wanted to kill all of six of us kids, Mom, and himself.

But the door was jammed and wouldn't open even if I put all my strength in it. It had been stuck ever since Dad ~~had taken~~ took a bat to it in a fit of rage. The ~~true~~ reason for the action is lost to other countless acts of misplaced rage.

"The tires are stripped down already," Dad taps his finger against his 32oz. ~~gas~~ station sweet tea, already half-way gone even though we had only been in the car for 20 minutes.

"If anyone ever found us, they would think we swerved out of control. Like it was an accident."

The ~~l~~ast time he had brought up his fantasies of killing his family, he described in detail how the unmarked revolvers in the gun cabinet would be used to shoot everyone in their sleep. He explained how he would use grandpa's silencer to make sure nobody would hear a thing. How he would kill me last, because my room had a door that would shriek when opened, and he knew I would wake up if I heard it. ~~Then~~ ~~How~~ he would ~~then~~ kill himself, right outside the house.

People would surely mourn us, cry for the family's tragic demise, maybe even wonder why he had done it. Though they would think we all deserved it and that Dad was in the right for doing what he did.

He probably had to change his idea when the keys to the usually unlocked cabinet went missing, leaving all the guns ~~even the one in his bedside drawer, the one in the kitchen, and the one on the living room coffee table~~ behind reinforced glass, locked tight and inaccessible. Something he still yelled at mom for doing.

"I'd finally see Joseph again," Dad says resolutely, the van rattling loudly as we pass over the ~~boundary~~ that separates the asphalt from the shoddily ~~made~~ bridge. "He was only five when he was killed by a drunk driver, you know."

My grip and posture stay perfectly relaxed, even as he laments the loss of his favorite child, ~~the~~ the only one that he ever really wanted.

I purposefully keep my eyes on the end of the bridge, ~~drawing~~. ~~It draws~~ closer as Dad curses God for giving him useless children and a lazy wife.

The last week ~~has~~ been nothing but rain. ~~I~~ I could almost see the torrent of water rushing under the bridge's support system, pushing over its usual boundary line and flooding areas

Commented [SW1]: for succinctness: "It's jagged edges catch and tear viciously into dry and already torn skin, dragging drops..."

Commented [SW2]: perhaps add this to previous paragraph and have the next sentence, "But the door was jammed and...", as a standalone in it's own paragraph for stronger impact.

Commented [SW3]: "the reason why he did it" for succinctness and natural voice.

Commented [SW4]: think about maybe putting this one in parenthesis instead of dashes. if use dashes, use this kind: -

Commented [SW5]: think of replacing with clearer noun for visual. right now it sounds like he is veering off the round into a guardrail. Perhaps change to 'bump' or use 'connects' or 'joins' instead of "separates" later in the sentence

hidden just out of sight. With newfound height, it would easily swallow our dingy van and drag us further down the river.

Weeks would pass as the water drained away, each day revealing more of our waterlogged van, until it was fully on display among the other abandoned vehicles that nobody bothered reporting anymore.

I closed my eyes and tried to keep my lungs from shuddering/shuttering too visibly/noticeably, deliberately not looking to see how high the water actually is/was today. Looking wouldn't/won't help; it only makes/made the fears a reality. I count slowly, waiting to feel the subtle bump that signified the end of the bridge and the arrival of the dirt road. I pretend not to notice when the car jerks to the side before rightening itself, and Dead laughs about how he was just joking; he wasn't going to do it now.

He spends the rest of the ride talking about how he wants to build a fence for the chickens, so they won't get killed by the neighbor's dog anymore.

When the car parks, he yells at the dog with a chicken hanging from its jaws. He leaves his gallon of sweet tea inside the car; I leave my untouched drink as well.

I distribute the treats I managed to convince Dad into buying among my siblings and whisper about a sleep-over in my room, everyone welcome, don't tell Dad or Mom. They nod and go to collect their favorite comfort items for the night.

I grab the cord hanging around my neck and inhale as much air as I can.

My own room will need to be fixed to accommodate all the new additions/everyone and their things.

The door will need to be opened and closed, until the annoying squeak is back in full force.

The beds would-should be moved closer to the walls, all so the window light would blind anyone coming in, while also-leaving anyone already inside with a clear view of whoever entered.

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And the gun hidden in the broken ceiling light would need to be reloaded, the safety checked, and the sight line adjusted.

The others would sleep through the night, while I stayed vigilant, listening for the rattling of locked doors or the crack of glass breaking.

Straining to hear quiet footsteps creeping up wooden stairs or the click of ammunition being slid into place.

Maybe it would be like the last few times, and the night would pass peacefully, just another sleepless night of anxiety and prayers.

Or, tonight would be the night Dad finally saw Joseph again, and I could stop keeping cabinet keys looped around my neck.

Commented [SW6]: consider putting this in italics to clearly signify a change in tone/delivery from the rest of the same sentence

Commented [SW7]: is this the neighbor's dog? it feels like it might not be given the phrasing compared to the previous sentence. just checking.

Commented [SW8]: make this sound more like a necklace cord. Right now, it feels too literally like a noose. Try changing the "necklace cord" or change "hanging" to something like "clasped" or another word SPECIFICALLY for jewelry and not nooses. this will give the line a more stylistically ambiguous or poetic feel, rather than being completely misunderstood

Commented [SW9]: like a blinding streetlight shining through the window? clarify

Commented [SW10]: stylistically, I think adding something to further set this line apart would be a good idea. you could add an extra empty line/paragraph space before and after the sentence, or you can keep it in line with all the other paragraphs and add some kind indication through an em dash, or something similar. You could also try merging the last few paragraphs into one so that this one stands out as alone.

Commented [SW11]: is this an easy thing to do with guns? is it even a feature on guns small enough to hide in a ceiling light?

Commented [SW12]: combine previous paragraph