

Therapy on a Sunny Day
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Dr. Johnson, I know you told me I don't have to lie on the couch, but it's really better this way. It feels natural. I've seen guys like me on TV go to therapists lots of times, and every time they did they were lying on a couch. So that's what I'm going to do. I've often thought that if I ever had to go see a therapist, they'd want to know about my family background. I guess that's where we'll start.

I was born in Oklahoma, but raised in Tennessee. Nice place. Freaky weather though. Have you ever heard about those people that are sad on cloudy days and happy on sunny days? Of course you have. Therapist and all. I think I'm one of those people. I'm totally dependent on the weather for my mood, and in Tennessee the weather's always changing. I've never had two good days in a row. On the bright side that also means I've never had two horrible days in a row, either.

I think my mom was a weather person, too. Maybe even more so than me on the cloudy days. Dad wasn't really connected to weather patterns, or if he was, he never showed it. He didn't show much of anything most of the time.

I've got two sisters. Twins. I used to call them the 'twisters.' Get it? Twin sisters—twisters. Yeah, well they left me out of everything fun when we were kids, like I was some sort of idiot child they hated. The feeling was mutual. I never had any brothers, so I didn't have any allies. The twisters used to team up on me. Big time. Once, back when I was in middle school and they were both in high school, I had sort of a crush on a girl. Not Miranda; she could never compare to Miranda. But she was this real cute thing named Jacqueline. Fiery red hair, as red as your paperweight is now. I loved her with all the love my beating eleven-year-old heart could muster.

Somehow the twisters convinced me that I could trust them to deliver a letter to Jacqueline. It took me a week just to get it right. I poured my heart and soul into it. To this day I still think if she'd read that letter she'd have fallen head-over-heels for me. Granted, if that had happened I never would have met my Miranda. On the other hand I wouldn't have known Miranda existed, so I guess I wouldn't have known what I was missing out on. Still, I'm glad it worked out the way it did.

Jacqueline beat me up. Badly. People always like to laugh at that part, like it's a harmless childhood memory. Nothing funnier than a scrawny little boy getting his nose broken by a girl with a snarky little grin, right? That was the first time I'd ever seen my own blood on someone else's fists, dripping down her knuckles into a puddle of blood beside her princess sneakers.

The twisters had never given Jacqueline the letter. They'd flushed it down a dirty toilet. Instead they wrote their own letter to her. Called her names. Said I hated her and that her janitor mother was trash, just like her. Based on the letter I don't blame her for attacking me. I just thought she knew me better than to think that I'd written anything like that. I loved her, and she never believed it.

Word got around fast that, not only had I told the girl I hated her and her mother, but that I also had tried to beat her up—and lost. I only hit her once, after she'd been wailing on me for a while. But that single punch was a good enough hit to knock her front tooth from its slimy root. I bet she didn't know I had that in me. She was just like the other kids and assumed I was just a sack of bones. You probably didn't think I was as strong as I am, either, doctor. I'm not much bigger now than I was back then, but I can really pack a punch if you press me too hard.

I got a reputation as a wuss and a wifebeater from the other kids. Nobody believed that I didn't write that letter, and her missing tooth was evidence enough that I'd been the instigator. Not one person stuck up for me. It was like this huge wave of indifference had swept over all my so-called friends. I guess they didn't think it was really a big deal—or they were afraid of getting in trouble too. Maybe they didn't want to be lumped into the same category as me. All I know is that when I needed them most they weren't there for me. Nobody was ever there for me the way my Miranda was. I wish she was here with me now.

You can guess how my life went from there. I was kicked into an alternative school program, the kind where you wear collared shirts and khakis all day. I was never allowed back into public school. The school officials always said I had problems with authority, but I swear I never did anything that was unprovoked. Like this one time, my pompous teacher told me I had too much pride, that I was some sort of know-it-all, and that I would never amount to anything if I didn't straighten myself up. Keep in mind, this man was the freak who kept his eyes glued to every pair of khakis in the room, mine included.

I wasn't going to take any crap from him, and I let him know it. I would've thought a little bit longer about my methods if I'd known that spitting in someone's face counted as assault and battery, which, by the way, is the stupidest thing I've ever heard. What was I going to do? Spit enough times to make him drown in my saliva? It's not an attack, it's an insult. Besides, it was hailing that day. I've never had a good hail day. The sound of it smacking down on the roof over and over and over just drives me insane.

I guess you get a lot of crazy types coming through these fancy doors every day. Except when you're on vacation, that is. Looks like you went on trips with your family in all these pictures. I didn't think you were allowed to set up family photos in your office. Seems like it could make lonely people feel more isolated. I guess you justify it by saying you're giving us something to look forward to, like, "This is where you could be in five years, if you just keep paying to come to my therapy sessions." Yeah, thanks for that.

You took the kids skiing, huh? I bet they loved that. And you've got a boat, too? It must be nice to have so much money that you can just throw it into the ocean. Sure, you give pocket change to your fancy-pants charities. And then you spend the rest of the day burning your skin bright red on that yacht, thinking about what a blessing you are to other people.

And just look at that woman! She's quite the beauty. Ample chest, long legs, and if I didn't know any better, I'd say that look you're giving her says you love her, maybe even for more than the long hours you two spent in the bedroom. That's the same look I used to give Miranda. A lot of people gave her that look, but they didn't mean it like I did.

I feel bad for that wife of yours. She can't help that she's every man's fantasy creature. She could've had any man she ever wanted. You just happened to come into her life at the right time with the right amount of suave and money and swept her right off her dainty feet. She won't be happy with what I've done, but it's really not my fault. It doesn't matter what she thinks anyway, because I know Miranda would back me up if she could. I can feel her smiling down on me right now.

I met her the day after I graduated. I knew it was going to be a good day right off the bat because the sun was shining and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Mom was dead, and my father was at the factory, so I figured I'd reward myself with a day off. I was working a slave job at a fast food joint at the time; I didn't mind calling in sick. Normally I would've spent a day like that on the couch, but for whatever reason I decided to head to the park. Divine intervention, according to Miranda.

There was a car pulled over on the way. I didn't think anything of it. I never do, but about fifty yards past that I saw Miranda. She didn't have the figure of your wife, but she had this illustrious hair that I couldn't take my eyes off of. I was so distracted I almost veered right into her. I managed to pull over in front of her. I realize now she must have thought I was some sort of rapist. I imagine you of all people know there aren't many things I consider evil, but rape is one of them.

Maybe rape is where I should've started, right when I walked into your office. But you didn't seem to want to talk to me about my fundamental beliefs, and you didn't start out with my family. You just wanted to talk to me about my apparent problem with paranoia. But paranoia didn't kill Miranda, and it didn't rape her either. *Someone* has to take responsibility for it. Surely you can see that I was in the right by trying to find her killer. A few false accusations don't make me crazy. What makes me crazy is everyone else's incompetence.

I got out of the car and asked her if she needed any help. She looked like she could handle things herself, but she was headed to the gas station. The nearest was another four miles out.

"Stay right there," I told her. "I'll go get you a gallon or two."

I ended up getting her five gallons, because I had one of those huge jugs in my trunk anyway and I didn't want her to think I was skimping out by only filling it a quarter of the way. By the time I got back there were three motorcycles parked beside her.

"Come on, little woman," a gruff man taunted her. I could smell his sour breath from my car. "Why don't you come take a ride with me?"

I was tempted to run over all three bikers, but I couldn't have done that without putting Miranda in danger. So instead I beat the men with every ounce of rage I could muster. It was a sunny day, so I didn't have a lot of rage built up inside of me. But I knew it was going to be a good day, so I could win the fight. It didn't hurt that I had the huge jug to swing around as a makeshift weapon. By the time I was finished I had all three of them drenched with gasoline, and I threatened to burn them straight to Hell. I didn't actually have anything to start a fire with, but they didn't know that. Their motorcycles were roaring away within seconds.

I would have burned them if I'd had a lighter. I never told Miranda that, because I thought it might scare her a little. But I would have done it. Now that I look back, I wish I had told her. She would have been proud of me. She would have loved me even more if she'd known that I would do anything to protect her.

I'd used all the gas on the bikers, so we weren't able to fill her car up right then. I'd earned her trust, though, so we rode together to the gas station to fill the jug again. I bought her a big cinnamon bun this time, and she smiled away. When we got her car running, the sun was starting to set and my chances of going to the park were shot. I asked her if maybe she'd like to go out to dinner, and she agreed—but not with me smelling like gasoline and bleeding. I hadn't noticed.

I was working on a solution when she offered to take me home. I accepted, of course, and fought to keep my heartbeat down as I followed her home. Her apartment smelled like lavender. Her laundry was out, scattered across the dinner table. I could see her shirts and tank tops. Bras and panties. She gathered them together in a hurry, and I pretended not to notice. She led me to the shower and, because the handles were a bit tricky, she started the water for me. Steam filled the room as she stepped out, leaving me to my own devices.

The shower was sized for a petite woman. My head stood four inches above the curtain. I wanted her to come into the bathroom with me. I wanted to talk to her, completely naked, a thin

veil between us. She could have even dressed herself for the date in my presence—and I could have undressed her in my presence later that night. It wasn't until the date that I learned she wasn't that type of girl. She was religious, and she made it abundantly clear she wouldn't have anything sexual to do with me until we were married. Call me crazy, but I preferred it that way.

Her brother had left a bunch of clothes with her to take to Goodwill, so I chose an outfit from the small collection to wear on our date. Everything went better than I could have imagined. I think she could tell I wasn't quite right, but she didn't care. She saw the good in me, and for years any time I had an outburst she would remind me why she married me. She saw that I have a good sense of justice in my heart.

When she died last month I nearly lost myself. I'd spent so much time obsessing over her and pleasing her that I didn't know what to do anymore. I thought about asking God for help, but that was the one thing we'd never agreed on. She tried telling me that God was there whether I liked it or not, but I didn't accept that. I don't need some unseen force telling me how to live my life. I don't need *anyone* telling me how to live my life. I've never had to rely on anyone but myself and Miranda, and it's just me now. I can guide my own actions, thank you very much.

That's why I've never gone to see a therapist until now. But I guess you know I didn't actually come here for the advice. I know it was you, Dr. Johnson. I found your number in her contacts. I know she'd been seeing you for months. I know you were giving her advice on life and—inadvertently, of course—diagnosing me. I know she saw you the day she died. The police might not think that's enough motivation to rape and kill her, but that's because they didn't examine your methods the way I did. They bought your alibi in the blink of an eye, as if simply saying you and your wife were alone together was enough proof. But because I'm more thorough than the police, I actually scheduled a session with you.

I can't believe you tried convincing me it's the police's job to find the killer. You implied I'm paranoid, the same way everyone else does. I'm not as big a fool as you think I am. I know you were just trying to throw me off the trail, trying to get me to stop the search before I discovered it was you. But in your attempt to hide it from me, you did nothing but solidify I was right all along. I feel no pity for you, sir, even if I have to hit you with that paperweight twelve times before your skull cracks open. You deserve worse.

I suppose the only thing left to do is to go track down that wife of yours. Miranda knows I won't enjoy what I'm going to do to her, but justice must be served.

It's a sunny day outside.