

## **Crayon Skin**

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PROSE, 1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE (Grades 10-12)

He was what? Five or so years old. Not quite old enough to understand the weight of his words. In class the prompt was to draw his family. So there was the little brother, the mother, father, the doggy and, of course, he included the nanny. He prided himself on being an artist, and one who portrayed reality, so his mother's had the wrinkles she hated, he had a head full of curly hair and, of course, he drew the numbers on the teen girl's arm.

Skipping home down the Tel-Aviv blocks, which were held together by hope and sandy grit, he couldn't wait to show off his masterpiece. He was sure it would go in the box of treasured works. But when he got home, the smell of food distracted him, and it was late by the time he was finally convinced inside after playing with friends.

Even the hour and move toward bed couldn't stop his excitement. He brandished his piece for all to see. "Don't you love it?" he asked the girl whose impossible task to get paid involved getting him and his brothers asleep under their covers. I remembered the numbers, he thought proudly to himself, all six of them. Her eyes glittered and instinctively went to cover her forearm where blue ink had already begun to seep into young firm skin, slightly scarred from abuse.

Her eyes glistened slightly as her lips moved into the position he knew all too well, those prepared to reprimand. Instead, for the first time, she closed her mouth and stayed silent. She nodded in the obligatory congratulation that such a work deserved, but he noticed her calloused hand never left her forearm.

Getting him ready for bed, she covered the blue which he had come to love with this sheet or that pillow. As he tucked himself under the covers, she told him a bedtime story of Poland and turned off the light. As her shadow melted into the darkness, he felt her lightly grasp the drawing he held tight in his hand. A quick tug of her wrist and he lost the paper before the struggle could even begin.

He knew there was no point in asking for it back. He watched her fold it carefully along an edge and silently tear the paper perfectly. She was always so good at dividing things exactly. He hadn't seen her leave. Gravity and his eyelids had worked together to ensure that within seconds of her tearing the paper he was asleep.

In the morning the smell of eggs and jam woke him up, and he sat groggily upright, noticing the paper on his desk. He reached out and pulled the paper until the drawing was in his line of sight. Everything remained the same except on the far right, where the paper's edge was soft, and the girl was missing an arm. The only proof that she had once had all her crayon limbs was a slight blue staining on the edge of the paper where his marker had remained. He could tell that where the marker stain remained, there had been more attempts to tear the paper, but no matter how many times she had tried to rip it off, the blue remained, seeping further into the rest of the brown crayon skin.

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