

**INSPIRATION**

By

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INT. CLAIRE'S BEDROOM - DAY

The big room is filled with the trappings of a typical but urbane fourth-grade girl. Jack, late 30s and Bohemian scruffy, pokes his head in the door.

JACK

Chop chop! Breakfast is ready.

INT. CLAIRE'S CLOSET - DAY

An oversized walk-in brimming with clothes and toys. Two sheets are tacked up to create another space at the back.

JACK (O.S.)

C'mon Claire! Let's go.

Claire, almost 10, bursts from behind the sheets in a funky outfit. With nervous guilt, she carefully pulls them closed.

CLAIRE

Okay! I'm coming! Sheesh!

She moves some clothes to hide the curtain, scurries into the bedroom, grabs her bookbag and runs out.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Jack sits at the table, reading the paper. Cereal, milk, toast and juice are set out.

Claire enters and heads for the coffee pot.

CLAIRE

I'm in a hurry. I'll just have coffee.

JACK

You should eat something.

Claire pours a bit of coffee into a mug.

CLAIRE

I'm not hungry.

JACK

I know I shouldn't start this debate again, but don't you think you're a little young for coffee?

CLAIRE

Mom says I'm old enough. And she makes the rules.

Jack watches, bemused, as she pours in a big splash of milk, adds three spoons of sugar, and plops at the table.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

(sips)

Ahhh.

JACK

I thought you were in a hurry.

CLAIRE

Can I take a minute to enjoy my coffee? Please?

JACK

Take all the time you need. The principal won't be keeping me after school if you're late.

He opens the paper. Claire sticks her tongue out at him. She plays with a piece of toast and takes a bite.

CLAIRE

When does Mom come home?

JACK

Um, Sunday afternoon. Around two o'clock.

CLAIRE

(heavy sigh)

Aww. I don't know why she went. Do you think there's any decent painters around there? I mean, it's Wisconsin for cripes sake.

JACK  
(pointedly clears his throat)  
Language.

CLAIRE  
I said cripes. Crrriipes.

JACK  
(puts down the paper)  
Mmm. Too close for comfort. And  
what's wrong with Wisconsin?

CLAIRE  
I dunno. I was just wondering  
if there's anything out there  
to inspire people.

JACK  
Inspiration comes from inside,  
you know that. Besides, your  
mom's one of the best in the  
business. If there's talent out  
in the hinterlands, she'll find  
it. She found me, didn't she?

CLAIRE  
(rolls her eyes)  
I gotta go meet Audrey.

She takes a big gulp of coffee, jumps up, throws on her  
jacket and dashes out.

JACK  
Claire!

She pokes her head in the room.

CLAIRE  
What?! I don't wanna be late!

JACK  
Don't forget your lunch.

CLAIRE  
Oh.

She grabs a brown bag on the counter and dashes out. Jack  
shakes his head and grins.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Claire exits a moneyed old apartment building and walks along the tree-lined sidewalk.

CLAIRE (V.O.)

Jack's been living with us since March. Almost seven months. Mom's boyfriends don't usually last that long. I like it better when it's just us girls. It's always been just me and Mom. I don't know my father. I used to ask Mom about him a lot, but all she ever said was "Some other time, Claire." I'm almost ten now, but I don't think some other time will ever come.

Mom's had lots of boyfriends. Mostly artists and writers. Never somebody boring like a lawyer or a bus driver. Mom likes creative people. She owns a big gallery. She goes on trips sometimes to find new artists. It sounds glamorous, but she says it's not really.

AUDREY, 10, catches up to Claire. She's perky but plain, and works at being cool. They walk and chat animatedly.

CLAIRE (V.O. CONT'D)

I always tell Audrey that Mom went to some exotic, faraway place to find someone nobody else knows about. No matter how fantastical I make the story, Audrey always believes it. Well, she doesn't believe the story. She believes me. That's why she's my best friend.

AUDREY

So, is your mom coming back from Tokyo tonight?

CLAIRE

No, she has to have dinner with the emperor and his wife. She bought a special kimono to wear. It's blue silk with pink glass beads and long feathers from a Japanese peacock.

AUDREY

Ooh. That sounds divine. Your mom is so lucky.

CLAIRE

I wish I could go. Better than being stuck home with Jack. If I have to eat fish sticks one more night I'll barf.

AUDREY

I think Jack's a good cook.

CLAIRE

You're just saying that cuz you think he's cute.

AUDREY

Well... He is. Kinda.

CLAIRE

You're blind.

AUDREY

I think your mom's gonna marry him.

CLAIRE

She is not!

AUDREY

Bet she will. Jack's her longest boyfriend ever. Maybe you can wear her kimono to the wedding!

CLAIRE

There's not gonna be a wedding.

AUDREY

(sing-song)

We'll see... Hey, you can give them that thing you're making as a wedding present!

CLAIRE

That would be a dumb idea.

AUDREY

Why? You're almost done, aren't you?

CLAIRE

Uh, I'm not sure.

AUDREY

Well, is it working? Like you said?

CLAIRE

Yeah... I think so. But nobody will ever see it anyway. It's private.

AUDREY

You'll let me see it, right?

CLAIRE

(sing-song)

We'll see...

Audrey acts miffed and stops to tie her shoes. Claire sighs dramatically and walks on.

CLAIRE

Audrey, c'mon. We can't be late again!

AUDREY

Don't worry. We won't.

Audrey blows a huge purple bubble and catches up to her. Claire sees the bubble and pops it.

CLAIRE

I thought banana was your morning flavor.

AUDREY

Yesterday half the playground  
had it. So I switched.

CLAIRE

Good idea. You gotta stay ahead  
of the crowd. And I like grape  
better anyways. Gimme a piece.

Audrey stops to hand her a piece. They chew contentedly.

AUDREY

Hey. How come it's so quiet?

They exchange looks and run around the corner to see the  
empty schoolyard. The last kids enter. The door shuts  
with a loud thud and the school bell RINGS.

CLAIRE and AUDREY

Oh no!

They run into the schoolyard.

INT. JACK'S STUDIO - DAY

The room is filled with paints, brushes and canvases.  
Jack is lost in painting for the entire scene.

A DOOR SLAMS and FOOTSTEPS CLOMP through the apartment.

CLAIRE (O.S.)

I'm home!

JACK

(shouting)

How was your day?

CLAIRE (O.S.)

Good. Sara Green ripped her  
skirt at recess. Everybody  
laughed at her.

JACK

(normal tone)

That's nice.

CLAIRE (O.S.)

I'm going out!

JACK  
(shouts)  
Hey! What about your homework?

CLAIRE (O.S.)  
I'll do it later. Bye!

A DOOR SLAMS.

JACK  
(normal tone)  
And they say parenting is hard.

INT. LIVINGROOM - NIGHT

A take-out pizza and school books are strewn across the coffee table. JAZZ plays on the stereo.

JACK  
...Okay, then you bring down  
the 7. And 6 goes into 57 how  
many times?

CLAIRE  
Um, 8. No 9! With 3 left over.

JACK  
Good. See you got this.

Jack sips a glass of wine. Claire finishes the problem, claps the book shut and grabs another slice.

CLAIRE  
That's enough for now.

They eat quietly for a few beats.

JACK  
So, how'd you do on that  
geography project?

CLAIRE  
(matter-of-factly)  
We got an A+. Mrs. Cho said it  
was the best report she ever  
read.

JACK

It should be. You guys worked hard enough on it. You and Audrey sure make a good team. (playful, after a beat) So... does she like Ethan too?

CLAIRE

(wary)

What? How do you know Ethan?

JACK

I don't. I just noticed you wrote his name on your book like... ten thousand times.

CLAIRE

Oh. He's... nobody.

Claire scoops up her books and shoves them under a chair.

JACK

Is he smart?

CLAIRE

Mmm... Kinda.

JACK

Is he cute?

CLAIRE

I don't know.

JACK

He better be both, if you like him.

CLAIRE

I don't like him! Who says I like him?

JACK

Ah, the book cover oracle never lies. I can remember when I was your age, I wrote the name 'Peggy' all over my books.

CLAIRE

That's a dumb name.

JACK

Yeah, come to think of it, Peggy wasn't too bright. But she was foxy. I was in fifth grade; she was in sixth. Yep, she broke my heart.

CLAIRE

That was like a hundred years ago.

JACK

Yeah, but every lost love always stings a little bit. So be careful with this guy. Artists are real romantics. We bruise easy.

CLAIRE

(alarmed)

Huh?! What do you mean?

JACK

Well, most artists have big hearts.

CLAIRE

Ethan's not an artist!

JACK

(grabbing a slice)

I didn't say that. (short beat)  
Wanna split this piece?

CLAIRE

(flustered)

Uh, no, I'm... I'm done. I need to go, um, write a book, write a report.

JACK

It's Friday night. What's the rush? I rented Mary Poppins.

CLAIRE

Um, that's okay. You can watch  
it.

Claire gathers her books and hurries out. Jack sits back  
with his wine.

JACK

Oh, Ethan. Be afraid. Be very  
afraid.

INT. CLAIRE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Claire sits at her desk, trying to read. She looks at her  
closet, then looks over her shoulder at her closed door.  
She nibbles at her nail, distressed.

Later...

The room is dark. Claire lies awake in bed. She gets up,  
tiptoes into the closet, and shuts the door. A light goes  
on inside.

INT. CLAIRE'S CLOSET - NIGHT

Behind the sheets at the back of the closet, a small lamp  
throws a soft glow.

We see a montage of close shots: a palette of paints,  
fuzzy slippers, the corner of a canvas propped on boxes,  
a brush making strokes through thick layers of colors,  
Claire's face looking intent and happy.

The shot widens to show Claire painting in the small  
alcove of the closet. Her head obscures the canvas.

EXT. SMALL CITY PARK - DAY

Claire and Audrey sit on the swings.

AUDREY

You mean he knows?

CLAIRE

I don't know. I think so.

AUDREY

How would he know?

CLAIRE

Well, I did take some of his  
paints. And a canvas.

AUDREY

He has so much stuff he  
wouldn't miss it. He's cute,  
but he's not that smart. But...  
what if he does know? What are  
you gonna do?

CLAIRE

I don't know. I hope he doesn't  
tell my mom.

AUDREY

Claire, they're practically  
married. They sleep in the same  
bed. When you do that, you have  
to tell each other everything.  
It's the law.

CLAIRE

Great. Jack ruins everything!

They both twirl sullenly for a few beats.

AUDREY

How come your mom won't let you  
be an artist? I don't get it.  
She works at an art gallery.  
Her boyfriends are artists. And  
her friends, too! Why can't you  
be one? You're so good...  
better than anyone in fourth  
grade. Probably even fifth!

CLAIRE

(hopeless)

Because she says they live  
crazy lives, and she doesn't  
want me to be crazy.

Audrey starts making "crazy" faces and sounds, and Claire  
joins in. They laugh hysterically.

AUDREY

I wish I could be an artist.  
It's fun to be crazy. Maybe you  
can teach me.

CLAIRE

To be crazy? You already are.

AUDREY

No! To be artistic!

CLAIRE

I don't think I can. You have  
to see art before you can make  
it.

AUDREY

Huh?

CLAIRE

It's like... I dunno. It's just  
how your eyes work, I guess.  
Everything I see makes me want  
to draw or paint. The whole  
world looks like art. To me...

AUDREY

The whole world?

CLAIRE

Just about.

AUDREY

Show me.

CLAIRE

I don't know if I can.

AUDREY

C'mon!

Claire sighs and looks around.

CLAIRE

Okay. See those trees? And the  
tangled up branches? Doesn't it  
look like... a spider web?

AUDREY

Mmm... not really.

CLAIRE

See, this isn't gonna work.

AUDREY

It will. Try!

Claire looks around the park, her eyes squinting and jaw working with effort. She seems ready to give up, when her eyes open wide.

CLAIRE

Look! See those little kids in the sandbox? They have all different color jackets and hats on. And they're acting all loopy. I think they look like clowns. Jumping around on a big cake. That's how I'd draw them. Do you see it? Can you?

AUDREY

(focusing)

Yeah! I do!

CLAIRE

See. That's called inspiration. It's what real artists have. They see art everywhere.

AUDREY

Wow. That's awesome. (long beat) So... when you see a booger hanging out of Brian Menger's nose, is that art?

CLAIRE

No. That's his lunch.

They laugh hysterically and start swinging, kicking their legs to go high.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Clair, Jack and JENNIFER, late 30s and polished, finish dessert. Jennifer and Claire get up to clear.

CLAIRE (V.O.)

Mom was home when I got back. I was so glad to see her. We had cookies and tea and she told me all about her trip. She met a woman who paints birds on wood from old barns. It doesn't sound like much to me, but if Mom likes her, she must be really good. That's why her gallery is one of the best in New York. Everybody says so. A magazine even wrote a story about her once. I put it in my scrapbook.

For supper, Mom made my favorite... roast chicken! We all had second helpings. Jack made a chocolate cheesecake. He makes pretty good desserts, but I don't make a big deal out of it. His head's big enough already.

Jack gets up and pours a mug of coffee. Jennifer washes the dishes. Claire dries and puts them away.

JACK

Okay, back to work for me. I paint better when you're home.

He gives Jennifer a squeeze and heads out of the kitchen. Jennifer hums contentedly as she washes.

JENNIFER

Honey, don't worry about drying. You should finish up your homework. We were gabbing all afternoon and I don't want you to fall behind. How's your long division coming?

CLAIRE

Okay. I really don't like math,  
though.

JENNIFER

I know you don't. But it's good  
to learn. You'll need it when  
you're grown up.

CLAIRE

I know.

They work quietly for a few beats.

JENNIFER

Here, just do the silverware  
and then hit the books.

CLAIRE

(after two long beats)  
Mom?...

JENNIFER

Yes?

CLAIRE

How long is Jack going to live  
with us?

JENNIFER

Oh, I don't know. (short beat)  
Maybe a long time.

CLAIRE

Oh.

JENNIFER

Is that okay with you? Do you  
like Jack?

CLAIRE

He's okay. (beat) Do you love  
him?

JENNIFER

(as if realizing it)  
Y'know... I think maybe I do.

CLAIRE

Oh.

Jennifer smiles at Claire, then starts to tackle a pot. Claire carries a platter to the table. She sits and aimlessly dries it.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Mom. (short beat) What was my father like?

JENNIFER

(off guard)

Gee, what's with all the questions tonight?

CLAIRE

I dunno.

Claire looks expectantly at Jennifer.

JENNIFER

I'm very tired, honey. It was a long trip. Maybe some other time. Why don't you get started on your homework?

CLAIRE

Okay.

Jennifer returns to scrubbing. Claire lingers a moment, then leaves.

INT. CLAIRE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Claire lies in bed, reading by a small lamp. Jennifer pokes her head in the door.

JENNIFER

Just five more minutes, okay. And then lights out.

CLAIRE

Okay. I'm almost done with this chapter.

JENNIFER

Sounds good. See you in the morning. Sweet dreams.

CLAIRE

'Night, mom.

Jennifer closes the door. Claire reads for a few seconds, then closes the book and turns out the light.

She lies in the dark, her eyes open. Jennifer and Jack's muffled VOICES and LAUGHTER can be heard O.S.

After a minute or so, Claire gets up. She tiptoes across the dark room, goes in the closet and carefully shuts the door. A soft light appears under the door.

INT. CLAIRE'S CLOSET - NIGHT

Claire holds a brush and stares at her painting. The canvas shows a man's face in an expressionist mix of heavy paint, color, and texture.

She sighs, ponders, and strokes some paint on the face. Then she dabs at the eyes. She quickly gets a rhythm and becomes lost in painting.

She steps back, trying to decide what to do next. She looks intently at the canvas...

JENNIFER (O.S.)

Sometimes inspiration needs a little help, doesn't it?

Claire gasps. Jennifer's head pokes through the sheets.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Can I come in?

Claire barely nods. She looks frozen in place. Jennifer walks up and looks closely at the painting.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

This is very good, Claire. The thickness of the paint gives it a lot of soul. And the dry wash background is light, but still holds the image. Who is it?

CLAIRE  
(nervous whisper)  
It's supposed to be my father.

JENNIFER  
Oh!...

CLAIRE  
(after a beat)  
See... since I don't know what  
he looks like, I just started  
painting your boyfriends. And  
that's what all the layers are.

Jennifer looks at the canvas.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)  
I thought the painting would  
tell me when to stop. I thought  
I could paint the right mix of  
layers and... and find him.  
(beat) It's not working though.  
It's just a goopy mess. It was  
a dumb idea.

JENNIFER  
I think it's a brilliant idea.  
It's very creative. I can see  
it now. There's Jack's blonde  
mustache. And Sergio's big  
ears.

CLAIRE  
See Tommy's eyelashes?

JENNIFER  
Oh boy, I forgot about Tommy.  
Yikes. And there's Glen's mole.

CLAIRE  
(giggling)  
I always thought it looked like  
a fried egg.

JENNIFER  
(laughing)  
It did, didn't it?

CLAIRE

(after a beat, tentative)  
Are you mad at me?

JENNIFER

Why would I be mad?

CLAIRE

Because... I'm painting... But I know you don't want me to be an artist. I know you don't want me to be crazy.

JENNIFER

(laughs)

Too late. We're all a little crazy in this house. (short beat) And I want you to be whatever makes you happy. (hugs her) Besides, I had a feeling you were up to something.

CLAIRE

How? Did Jack tell you?

JENNIFER

No. Does he know about this? These are his paints... Did he give them to you? Did you ask--

Claire shakes her head.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

You know it's not right to use other people's things without asking.

CLAIRE

I know. I'm sorry. But... then how did you know?

JENNIFER

Because you're my daughter, that's how. (beat) And besides, who do you think hangs up your clothes when you leave them on the floor?

CLAIRE

Oh.

JENNIFER

Good thing you don't want to  
work for the CIA.

She winks, then puts a hand on Claire's shoulder and  
guides her toward the painting.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

C'mon. Let's take a look. This  
line is very nice. Solid and  
fluid. The colors are just  
beautiful. And the layers are  
so rich.

Claire looks at Jennifer, beaming.

JENNIFER

(after a long beat)

You know, your father liked to  
use thick paint too.

CLAIRE

He paints?!

JENNIFER

Well, he did. He was very good.

CLAIRE

Can I see some of his work? I  
bet he's in the musuems. Do you  
have some?

JENNIFER

I think I have a few sketches  
somewhere. But I... There are  
no paintings, honey. He cut  
them all up. Every one.

CLAIRE

(deflated)

But... Why?

JENNIFER

Well... He wasn't a very happy  
person.

CLAIRE  
(quietly, after a long beat)  
He died, right?

JENNIFER  
(emotional)  
Yup. Just before you were born.

CLAIRE  
Oh. (beat) Did you love him?

JENNIFER  
Yes, very much.

CLAIRE  
Do you think he would love me?

JENNIFER  
I'm sure of it.

She pulls Claire close and looks at the painting.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)  
You know, you father's eyes  
were green. A deep forest  
green. Here, let's make it.

Claire mixes some paint on the palette.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)  
That's right. Now just a  
smidgen of red. There. Give  
that a try.

Claire delicately adds the green to the eyes.

CLAIRE  
They're beautiful, mom.

JENNIFER  
They are. (short beat) You  
know, there was something else  
that made your father's eyes  
special. Little flecks of gold.

CLAIRE  
(gasps)  
I have flecks of gold in my  
eyes!

JENNIFER  
Uh-huh. You do.

Claire begins mixing colors on the palette.

CLAIRE  
I know how to make that color,  
Mom.

JENNIFER  
I know you do, honey.

Jennifer watches Claire blend and paint, as the scene  
FADES OUT.

THE END