



Anecdotes

Kathryn Mockler



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The Boy
Is Dead

THE BOY IS DEAD

The boy is dead, and we will spend the rest of the story trying to find out why and what happened and how it affected the people in the boy's life.

The boy came from a white middle-class family (his mother Protestant, his father Catholic) who were indifferent to him because he had a facial disfigurement from birth. As soon as he came into the world, he was not what they had anticipated. So they treated him more like a pet to keep fed and watered, which they did adequately.

While he is somewhat missed, his parents were able to get on with their lives fairly quickly after his death because they simply had not paid all that much attention to him when he was alive.

His parents had the boy because they thought it would strengthen their relationship, even though neither of them really had an interest in children. The boy had no siblings. His Catholic grandparents lived on the other side of the country and never got to know their grandchild. The boy's mother told him his grandparents took no interest in him because she refused to baptize him Catholic. His mother claimed she wanted the boy to make up his own idea about religion when he got older, but the boy knew the truth—she was ashamed to bring her disfigured child into the church.

Nonetheless, his Catholic grandparents sent him Christmas cards and modest birthday gifts. Once the boy's father took him to see his grandparents, but his father was really interested in visiting an ex-girlfriend, during a time that came to be known in the family as his mid-life crisis. The boy watched TV

for the entire trip, and his grandmother cooked him frozen supermarket lasagna every night. Even her store-bought cookies tasted bad.

The boy felt unloved—although he never told anyone how he felt. Not even the school counsellor who was later arrested for sleeping with his students. In elementary school, during recess, the boy often hid in the bathroom so he wouldn't have to face being alone in the yard with all the other kids who had managed to form friends. The boy had often wondered how people formed friendships since he was pretty sure he didn't like a single person in his life and couldn't imagine voluntarily spending time with anyone. No, he did not play video games. No, he did not read. No, he was not creative and would never be great or one day appreciated. He was just a bored person who was terribly alone. He didn't like TV either but watched it because it gave him a good excuse to fix his eyes on something other than the ceiling.

His parents had threatened him with a psychologist, but he knew they would be too preoccupied with themselves and their own problems—their affairs, their jobs that they hated, their worries about money—to do anything about it. When his mother said “psychologist,” the boy would nod and put his arm over his eyes. They wouldn't take him to an appointment, and even if they set one up, he wouldn't go.

The boy's father hated fat people. Every night at the dinner table, he would talk about the woman he worked with. He called her fat and a loudmouth and a busybody. The boy thought his father didn't like the woman because she reminded the boy's father of his mother (the boy's grandmother).

When the police found the boy's body in the river—bloated and decomposed, almost unrecognizable, the boy's parents hadn't even known he was missing and couldn't remember the name of his dentist. Oh sure, his mother cried when she

realized she wouldn't be someone's mother anymore, but she wasn't affected in a really significant way. She had liked the idea of being someone's mother—just not this boy's mother. She felt a sort of relief upon hearing about his death, like when you are fired from a job you hate but still need the money. There's that twinge of regret and wondering if you did everything you could to keep the job, but then the next morning you wake and realize this was the best thing that could have ever happened to you. The boy's mother felt like a reset button had been pushed on her life that said: *Start Now*.

To ease her heavy burden of having to be the boy's mother when he was alive, his mother had taken to drinking vodka every night. The boy's father left when he was five, and from that time on, the boy and his mother ate their dinners in separate rooms. His mother sat in her yellow chair in the living room and the boy sat on the couch in the den. The two rooms were attached, with the TV in the middle. They could watch the same program without actually having to sit in the same room and face each other. They did this night after night, hardly speaking, watching game show after game show until his mother passed out and the boy put her to bed.

After the boy's father left, there was a string of babysitters. On three occasions, the boy was molested. He told no one. He felt ashamed. He felt it was his fault. The molesters knew that such a shy and withdrawn and disfigured kid would tell no one. He was the perfect target. And they were right.

The boy's childhood was spent avoiding people. Once he got into high school, he focused on his classes. He wasn't particularly smart and didn't get good grades, but he always did his homework because it was a decent way to pass the time. He could have taken up smoking but didn't because the smell reminded him of the smell of his mother.

The boy had a death wish but wasn't in danger of killing

himself, because he feared pain. He feared directing pain at himself but wasn't particularly afraid if pain happened to him or if the pain took him by surprise. Once he accidentally smashed his arm through a glass door and didn't feel the pain because his arm went numb. He didn't even know he was cut until he saw the blood. Instead of harming himself, the boy found compromising situations to insert himself in, hoping something would happen to him that would accidentally render him unconscious or dead.

With his death wish in mind, the boy set out to the secluded part of the park on a Wednesday in the spring in hopes that he could attract a creep who might take him away in a car. What he found instead were trees and chipmunks and a couple making out by the stream. "None of this makes sense," the boy said to himself. "Why do some people get lucky while others have such a hard time?" The boy didn't care about the other people who had a hard time. He only cared about the hard time he was having. He walked away from the couple and sat by himself on the swing. A small child asked the boy to push him, and the boy said no and walked away so he could be by himself with his thoughts.

You might be disappointed to know that the boy was not in fact murdered. He actually tripped on a tree root, hit his head on a stone, and fell into the river, where he drowned because no one saw him. Since his parents had not reported him missing, no one was looking for him. Everyone just went on as they always had. The boy lay in the river for days because the weather had been bad and no one was walking along the trail, or if they were, they hadn't bothered to look at the river in the particular spot where the boy had lain. Someone might have ridden by on a bike, but they would have been going too fast to see the boy's body in the water.

We're not to feel sad for the boy because he would have

rathered be dead than alive. He didn't feel pain as his head hit the rock. It was like the glass door—he was in a state of shock and then everything went black. He didn't even have time to scream. But had he had time to utter a sound, it would have been the word *now*.

I wrote this story about a boy in the hope that you would find it more interesting than if it had been written about a girl with the same experiences. Really, this is a story about my family and me. Many details have been changed, but most of it is true.