

AN EXCERPT FROM “SANDMAN”

“SO WHAT’S UP? YOU dragged us down here and now you act like you don’t want to talk.”

“I didn’t want to talk in front of David, Dad. And what do you mean I dragged you down here?”

“What your father means is that you asked us to come, and now you seem a bit preoccupied.”

“I asked you—”

“Dragged us—”

“—asked you down here to ask you a question.”

“And that question would be?”

Rick looked at his parents; Wesley, a bear of a man with a round, amiable face and salt and pepper hair, and Jennifer, a blonde with intelligent eyes, sharp features, and a tall, slender body. They were all seated in Rick’s office, in the den, with the door closed.

“When I was a kid...did I ever do something that confused or shocked you?”

“Everything you did confused us,” Wesley said. “You were a kid, we were first time parents with you.”

“No, not regular kid stuff. I’m talking shocking things.”

“There was the time when you were 3-years-old and pulled down your pants to your ankles and took a piss, hands free, at the carnival.”

“What?” Rick said, shocked.

“Jen, you remember that?”

“How could I forget?”

“Pulled your pants and diaper all the way down to the ankles and was free as a bird. No shame whatsoever,” Wesley chuckled.

“Glad to give you a laugh, dad.”

“So what did you drag me away from a football game for?”

Jennifer cozied up next to her husband, and Rick moved his chair to sit directly in front of them. He was suddenly very serious.

“I’m going to show you something...very shocking. And I want you to take a long, hard look at it, okay?”

Wesley shrugged.

Rick handed over a large square sheet of paper, folded. Wesley took it from his son slowly, curious at the somber look on Rick's face. Jennifer leaned in as Wesley opened the drawing. She gasped.

"Whoa!" Wesley said, holding the picture in both hands at arm's length.

There was a man and a woman in the drawing, naked on a bed in a room. The man was on his back with an erection. The woman was straddling his face, her head thrown back, her eyes closed in ecstasy.

"Why am I looking at this?" Jennifer exclaimed. "Is this porn?"

"Mom! Dad! Look at it!"

"Why would I want to look at something like that? Get that away from me!"

"Mom!" Rick barked. "Both of you! Look at it. Look at the drawing."

Wesley looked at Jennifer, and with mouths wide opened, looked down at the picture again.

It was night by the shading in the drawing. There was a large window with the drapes pulled back. A moonbeam hit the woman squarely on her face and bosom. There were large bright stars in the sky, and trees and a far-off cabin.

Wesley said it first.

"Is this the lake house? Our lake house at Big Bear?"

"Yes," Rick said, with a great amount of relief in his voice.

"Who are those people—?" Jennifer started, but then stopped. "Is that... is that you and Katrina?"

"Yes," Rick said more quietly.

"Why am I looking at this?" Jennifer insisted.

Rick leaned forward and hissed, "David drew this."

"What?" Wesley barked in disbelief.

"He. Drew. This."

"I don't understand," Jennifer said.

"Remember when I went to the lake house a couple of weekends ago, when David stayed with you?"

"Yeah..." Wesley said.

"I had to go to the office this afternoon to do some work and I had the babysitter stay with David. She called me on the phone in tears, scared out of her mind. He was in his room, quiet, drawing. She said she was on her cell, talking to one of her friends. She admits that she was on the phone for

a long time, but that when she got off the phone she couldn't hear David, so she went to check on him. She says he was on the floor with a bunch of pictures that he had drawn, and that he was drawing this when she walked in the room."

"What?" Jennifer shrieked. "She's a lying little bitch! My grandson would never draw anything like this."

"He did, Mom. He did."

"I don't believe it," Jennifer said, standing up, a hand on her hip, her other hand balled into a fist.

"That's not all," Rick said. "She said she called his name after she saw all the drawings on the floor, but he didn't answer. So she bent down in front of him. She said that she reached out to lift his face, so that he would look at her, and when she did she said that his eyes were white. All white. No pupils. No irises. No nothing. Just white. His eyes were rolled up in his head. And then..."

"And then what?" Jennifer asked, sitting beside Wesley once again.

"She says she blacked out."

"She fainted?" Jennifer said, disbelievingly.

"She blacked out...and dreamed that she was in the room, this room, watching me have sex with Katrina."

Rick fell silent, and Jennifer turned to look at Wesley, who was already looking at her.

"She said when she came to, she was on the floor and so was David, asleep. She said she called me right away."

The room fell into silence.

"There's more," Rick said.

"More?" Wesley repeated.

"This isn't the first time this has happened." Rick looked up to see his father, usually so jovial, now suddenly serious. "The reason I had to move David from Sunnyvale was because he drew a picture like this, and his teacher fainted. And then quit."

Now it was Jennifer's turn to stare incredulously.

"The principal called me to the school and basically told me that Sunnyvale no longer wanted David there. That he had drawn a picture of a world on fire, everything burning, with naked men and women and children in the street, dying and screaming. The picture looked like the one you're holding. It was as detailed as that."

“I don’t know what part you want me to believe, son,” Wesley said. “That a girl watched you and Katrina...doing this...or that your 5-year-old son drew a picture of you doing this.”

Rick pointed to his father. “You’re thinking the very same thoughts I had, Dad. There’s no way, no way in hell, that a 5-year-old boy could do this. Could make these drawings. He was not there, dad! He was not in the house, in the room! He was with you and Mom! So how the hell does that little boy upstairs know what his father was doing miles away from him, days ago. Look at the detail! Art students don’t draw as well as this!”

Rick sat back in his chair and tears came to his eyes.

“I’m afraid of my son,” he whispered.

“Richard Emmanuel Ford!” his mother said. “That boy upstairs is your son! And if I’m hearing you correctly, you weren’t around when he allegedly drew these pictures, so you don’t know if he did or not. Do you really believe that your son did this? Really?”

“Mom, you’re not saying anything I haven’t thought myself. Which leaves me with no other choice. You’re going to come with me, and I’m going to show you something. And then after I show you, you tell me, the both of you, if you’re not afraid. If you don’t look at my son, your grandson...differently.”