

HOLDING ONTO TEDDY

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I'm holding onto Teddy. I just thought I'd warn you ahead of time.

Best I remember, you didn't even ask before you took away my blanket. You just did what you assumed was best for me. I was too little to prevent your protecting me. After all, the blanket was pretty well reduced to a rag. And it held far too much DNA. Tears had mingled with saliva. Runny noses contributed fluids to the corner I usually chewed. Other fluids will remain unmentioned. But they were there, breeding diseases most likely dangerous to a growing toddler. Perhaps the overall mixture was the source of the smell I found so familiar and comforting.

At least, until you decided it was time I grew up. It mattered little that the blanket comforted me while I contributed the tears. I would need to find something else to chew when trembling from my nightmares. It was time I faced my world without the familiar, the well-known thing of yesteryear. One day my world was complete. The next day, you took my sense of security and left me comfortless. I was too small to stop you. But had I been able, I would have.

Was it really necessary for them to also take my crayons? It was incremental, of course. At first, I was allowed to scribble to my heart's content. I used colors guided only by my imagination. They never really knew the treasure concealed in the messy sheets they discarded. I'm sure they never believed black daffodils could conceal fair maidens from fiery striped dragons. I would've shared with them, had they asked.

They never asked. They just made sure I knew the importance of using color "correctly." The world needed to be represented like everyone else viewed it. Others could hardly be expected to put forth effort to understand a nonconformist. And what was with the whole 'staying in the lines' thing anyway? Who made the rules that guidelines could never be crossed once created? Was the person who put them in place somehow superior to everyone who might follow? Then the lines gradually became finer and closer together. They became too complicated to accommodate my crayons.

So I conformed. I was too young and timid to defy them. I switched to washed out colored pencils using real world colors. Those drawing tools could be sharpened and sharpened. But I never really got the point. They took away my unbridled creativity and left me bereft of joy. I was too small to stop them. But had I been able, I would have.

God never asked me before He took away my parents. He just assumed I could survive without them. Maybe He wanted them with Him more than He felt I needed them here. He just drew forth their souls, the ones in which I had risked and vested my love. I just wish we could've at least discussed it first.

I was never even asked about the timing. I tried so hard to stay awake. But fatigue had me in its grip when God took my father. My mother asked me to complete a chore she had left undone. So I wasn't there either when she breathed her last. I never got to tell her I obeyed her till the end. I hated that.

There's that whole promise of eternal life. Other than blind faith, I've got no way to verify that assurance. But I hope it's true. Otherwise, God just decided what was best for me without asking. Otherwise, He took away my only source of unconditional love and left me lonely. If I'd been able to stop Him, I would probably have tried.

But I still have my Teddy. And I'm neither small nor helpless now. It's largely irrelevant to me that others find that strange.

In so many ways, Teddy's a perfect companion to one who's lost so much. He never asks more of me than I can give him. He isn't demanding of me in any way. Even when I'm not sure if God hears my prayers, I know Teddy does. No matter how stupid I behave or how selfish my tears might be, my bear listens patiently. He never pulls away when I draw him close. And never once has Teddy rejected the love I've bestowed upon him.

I think I feel so close to him because we've shared losses. Teddy knew my Momma and Poppa well. They first introduced us as friends. Teddy's seen and understood every drawing I ever made and discarded. He never once insisted on more realism. And Teddy shared that blanket with me on many, many occasions.

I've decided I'm big now. I can make my own decisions. I was too small to save my blanket. I was too frightened by authority to save my crayons. I was too helpless in the face of death to save my parents. Now all I have left of my childhood is my oldest remaining companion.

So I just thought I'd warn you ahead of time. I'm holding onto Teddy.