

## Artistic Imitations

*"Life imitates art far more than art imitates life."*  
- Oscar Wilde

*She was just a kid.*

Raising her brush to the blank canvas, she used to paint long, bold strokes. She selected bright colours from the beautiful array upon her palette and transferred them onto the blank canvas. *A masterpiece.*

To paint was to encompass the beauty of the world. Her paint was her life's blood.

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The threshold had creaked under the weight of her boot as she pushed through the flyscreen door and into the overwhelming stench of stale alcohol and poverty. The room was entirely darkened, aside from the timid flicker of a dying bulb hidden behind its lampshade. As Madison Doyle stepped across the floorboards cautiously, she reached her hand to clasp the grip of her Glock 22, her index finger just hovering over the trigger. She halted and scanned the next room. The carpet was splattered with an abstract arrangement of red and yellow stains. She inhaled deeply. She stepped into the open. She removed the gun from its holster and held it firmly in her grasp, aimed at the first figure that caught her eye.

A boy. He watched her through a dark mop of shaggy hair with frightened, beady eyes. Steadfastly, he clutched a zip lock bag, his knuckles blanched from the extent of his grip. His lip trembled as the incomprehensible notion of death stared him squarely in the face. Madison lowered her mark, as her colleagues moved in on the scene from behind her. Only metres away, a balding man with a swelled paunch was shoved onto his knees and cuffed with his hands behind his back.

*"Don't youse cops touch ma boy!"* He yelled, spit flying from the corners of his mouth.

The boy hesitantly averted his gaze as his father's efforts subsided and his body became leaden and inert. His eyes brimmed, an innocence that rolled down his cheeks as transparent beads, priming an unscarred canvas. Madison stepped toward the boy, returning the gun to its holster upon her hip as she did. She sat beside him and held his hand.

*"Everything will be alright,"* she cooed, *"we're here to protect you."*

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Madison Doyle was considered nothing less than an exceptional officer. She was a protector. And maybe she had liked it, for a time. The feeling of soft hands in hers, thanking her for her service. The relief of a pulse beneath scarred skin. Familiar faces that turned down their gaze at the first sight of her. The dissatisfaction in closing an incomplete case file. The corruption of selfish colleagues. The pain of tough knuckles connecting to her jaw. The taste of blood. The stench of raw meat and copper. The tears of a small child. The stares. The mockeries. The abuse. The weight of the bodies that fell into her hands.

*She was just a kid.*

She brought her brush to the faded canvas. She hadn't painted for a while, but an artist requires her muse. First, she had dipped the tip of her brush into a glistening crimson. Then she painted a long mark across the canvas. She considered it a moment – the starkness against pallidity – before directing her brush for another stroke.

As she painted, she longed for her previous outlook of the world; an innocent lens obscured from the violence she had witnessed. *A clear canvas.* Had she once believed in the beauty of humanity; the painting composed of various textures and hues that conveyed an admirable presentation? Once... maybe. But she had since come to realise that the world itself is a *cruel* place compiled with *cruel* bodies. Her perception could never be the same. It was an innocent self; lost to the horrors she had seen and deeds she had done. The *cruelty* of adolescent realisation had brought a knife to the painting and slashed the canvas.

Her radio received a dispatch.

*“Suspected drug trafficking sighted. Several witnesses have confirmed sightings of a suspicious individual, a young man, Caucasian, dark hair.”* The transmission sounded through her car, *“Last seen turning into an alley at the intersection of Dawson and Clayton Street. Approach with caution.”*

An empty static relayed until she clutched the switch.

She inhaled deeply, stepping into the open.

She saw the figure, his abstract at least. But he was nothing more than a shadowed contour. And as her finger hovered over the trigger, she realised she felt no guilt in watching a faceless man fall.

He collapsed at the end of her gun. She watched his eyes behind a dark mop of shaggy hair, they now gazed lifeless and unseeing. Steadfastly, he had clutched a zip lock bag that had fallen out of his grasp. His knuckles were blanched from the extent of his grip.

*A painkiller.*

Madison lowered her mark, letting her arm fall lowly to her side. Her lip began to tremble as the incomprehensible notion of death – one she had seen countless times – stared her squarely in the face. As her colleagues moved in on the scene, she stepped toward the body, returning

the gun to its holster upon her hip as she did. When she reached it, she lowered herself gingerly to her knees. Her colleagues regarded her silently from a distance. She brought her hand to caress his limp neck. The absence of his pulse echoed in her ears as her touch lingered on his cold, young body.

Her eyes brimmed, an experience that rolled down her cheeks as transparent beads, varnishing a scarred canvas.

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That night she allowed her gaze to fall upon her *art*. An intricate piece of details, but they had faded with time. Carefully, she lifted her silver brush. But she considered a moment. Maybe longer than a moment, before lowering it. Her painting was already complete. *A masterpiece.*

There would be no more crimson brush strokes upon her canvas.

There was already blood on her hands.

*He was just a kid.*