

1ST PLACE
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A Formal Introduction

Jane's favorite color is lime green. Art History is her preferred subject in high school. She loves the scent of lilac and the taste of sushi. She wears tiny, multicolored, metallic accessories in her hair that glint in the sun when she walks. Her walk is poised and confident, reflective of her utter aplomb. When she speaks, it is usually in stentorian booms. Watercolors and acrylics are her dearest friends, because she is certain that she will eventually attain artistic superstardom. She believes with complete certitude that her pieces will one day hang in museums with elaborate French names like the Musée d'Orsay. There are always numerous paint stains covering her clothing. Jane possesses a distinct belief both in her ability to govern her life and in herself.

One day, Jane's walk visibly loses its confidence. It transforms from a bold sway into a reserved, self-conscious stride. Her attendance becomes progressively more erratic until you can hardly ever see her in the hallway. She no longer wears her vibrant lime greens, only mute grays and charcoals. The intensity of her mysterious detachment grows to enormous heights, before she stops speaking altogether except to answer teachers in a tone no louder than a whisper. When the Art History teacher asks the class about Picasso's Blue Period, their eyes turn to Jane expectantly for the answer. She is silent. Perhaps most disturbing is that she has ceased painting entirely. Her clothes are pristine, not a paint stain to be found. In class, you notice scars on her wrists and decide to approach her.

"Jane, why have you stopped painting?"

She informs you that it is none of your concern and politely requests that you not pry in the future. You, however, are persistent, and she relents.

"It's my father," she tells you in a barely audible voice.

She goes on to inform you that her father has been sexually abusing her. "Jane, you have to tell someone about this. What are you going to do?"

To your astonishment, she tells you about a plan to commit suicide.

You tell her that that isn't her only option, that help is available. When you've finished, she angrily says that you have no right to interfere in her life and walks away.

Once, it seemed Jane was confident enough as to control the entire world. Now, she feels she has so little control of her life as to be forced to end it. Once, her voice was like lightning bolts, loud and thunderous. Now, she is imprisoned in silence about the one thing it is imperative not to be silent about. Once, she was on the path to becoming a master artist. Now, paints and vivid colors are things she has forgotten.

You realize that when she said you have no right, she was right. You have no right *not to* inform someone. Keeping secrets is often justified by respect for the person one is keeping them for. Respect, however, is synonymous with value. If one believes that someone is valuable, they will do everything imaginable to ensure that their life is preserved.

Being entrusted with a secret is like baby-sitting and being entrusted with the care of a child. The child may beg and plead for something the entire time, but the baby-sitter wouldn't provide the child with what it desired if he or she knows that it is detrimental to the health and well-being of the child. This is because the well-being of the child is important above all else, even above getting into the child's good graces.

That day, you visit the school counselor and tell her everything. She sends you out and calls Jane in. On your way out of the office, she passes you with an icy glare and you begin to question your decision already. Jane leaves school, and you are never informed of what happened.

You wonder endlessly about the correctness of your choice. You wonder about Jane's whereabouts, and about whether or not she is happy.

At breakfast one day, you read the newspaper over your scrambled eggs and flip through the calendar section. There, on the first page, is an announcement for an exhibit of Jane's paintings. It is in a museum with a French name you can't pronounce.