

How I kept my mother alive

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I must have been in my thirties already, when on a cloudy afternoon, I decided to pee my pants. Just because I wanted to re-experience what it was like to cross a line.

To do what you shouldn't.

It was wet and warm and later it got cold.

Afterwards, I had to lie down to be able to peel off the tight, clammy jeans.

When I was about eight I pooped into a plastic container from my mother's kitchen and buried it in the garden.

Later I wanted to dig it up, to see what happened to it after some time in the ground, but I'd forgotten where I put it.

Around the same time, I used to sneak handfuls of crisps, chocolate bars and biscuits to my room.

I stuffed all of it in my mouth, swirled it round and round my tongue until the flavours wore off.

Then, instead of swallowing it, I spat the gooey stuff in little containers in various hiding places in my room. Tiny drawers in my doll house. A jewelry box I got from my grandmother. A pencil case. The boot of a barbie-car.

Next I had a full day of work ahead of me.

I had to count all the tiles on the floor of the living room.

I had to open and close all the doors in the house, with both hands.

I had to sing a song before brushing my teeth, a commercial for toothpaste.

the same song every night,

I had to breathe out when I saw fat people, I had to breathe out when I saw old people, I breath in when I saw people I wanted to be.

Of course I was dizzy all the time.

In bed: the final chore. I had to pray and the prayer was always the same:

it began with asking for world peace. He had to know I was not selfish.

Next, I prayed for the animals and nature in general. This part of my prayer was more genuine.

Finally, after I thought I had showed enough altruism, I allowed myself to pray elaborately for my mother.

I prayed that she would live another night. Another day.

And then I needed to whisper 'amen' fifty times.

Amen, amen, amen,.....

If I lost count, I had to start all over again.

Even though it took forever to finish it, the prayer was the easiest part of my secret life, my daily duties to prevent my mother from dying.

She wasn't ill, or anything, but neither was my dad, who did disappear one day.

One day he lived, the next he didn't.

They told me it had been an accident, but never explained what kind of accident.

For some reason I was convinced he fell from a stairway.

And even when a classmate at school said my father had committed suicide, I still couldn't shake the image of the staircase, because I had no idea what suicide looked like.

I remember the day my mother discovered the mouldy pieces of chewed up food in the hiding places in my room.

She had lined up all the boxes and drawers and cases next to each other and just looked at me.

And I remember feeling so relieved.