

Green Eyes

When I was small I had the world's worst stomachaches. They would come to me at night. It would start with nightmares that left me in a sweat, and when I awoke it was to a tormenting reality of aching cramps. They were pangs of agony that contorted my body until I was reduced to a tight fetal ball. When I could no longer bear it I would go looking for my mother, and I would always find her in the next room.

She would follow me back to my bed and slide in next to me, enveloping my small, squirming body into the warm fortress of her arms. She always knew how to make the pain go away. She would rock me gently, and whisper into my ear, and stroke my back, and the cramp would melt away. Before the next one came she would pull away and fix her eyes on me, channelling strength from her bright green eyes into mine. In the morning I would wake on the other side of darkness to find her still there, lovingly teasing her fingers through my hair. I clung to her, knowing that she could caress all pain away.

As I got older I started calling for her less and less. I was told that I had reached an age when it was no longer appropriate to wake my mother up in the middle of the night for such trivial pains. At first I didn't understand why I had to struggle alone when I knew that she could make it go away. Instead of waking her up I stayed in my bed, clinging to my pillow and writhing each cramp away. I had to handle my own problems. I had to wipe away my own tears.

But that was hard to do. In my clumsy way I grew up and began to seek comfort elsewhere. I read book after book, trying to crawl in between the pages and bury my head in the spine. I listened carefully to my favorite songs, hoping that if I listened hard enough they would eventually start to murmur soothing words. I lunged into the arms of my friends. They provided temporary warmth, but they pulled away too soon, and I had to let them go.

My sister could still go crying to my mom. She was quite young. She would run towards those bright green eyes, and they would bend down at just the right moment to see her. I could see my sister settle her head against my mother's chest. Her heaving sobs subsiding as she started nodding along to the elegant baby talk my mother reserved for scraped knees and tumbling falls. My sister would soon forget about the cut and go back to play. My mother would turn around to give me a knowing smile, which I would half-heartedly return.

One night I was lying in my bed, staring at the phosphorescent stars that glowed on my ceiling. A thick darkness had draped my room hours earlier and was refusing to let in any hint of dawn. I slowly got up to open the curtains, stumbling over the binders and clothes that littered the floor. When I got back to my bed I realized that my mother was standing in the doorway, crying.

I knew that she had been having a hard time. There had been just too many deaths. They came, one after the other, a succession of bullets aimed at her heart. She had been our tower of strength, but she was crumbling, waiting for the next death, thinking of her own. And now she was there. In my room. Crying. Loss was everywhere.

She crawled into my bed and curled up against me. She had grown smaller in the last few months and my arms wrapped easily around her frail body. I rocked her back and forth

rhythmically as I repeatedly assured her that everything would be alright. I felt strong as I pulled her closer, letting her sobs sink into my chest. She had come to me for comfort. She had come to me so that I could hold her. As morning crept through my window my mother's whimpering quieted. She looked up at me, her teary green eyes searching my face. They stopped. They settled on my steadfast brown eyes; she had made it through the dark.