

When Morning Comes

It was the crying that finally woke John. Not because of the noise, he could barely hear it, but because of its difference. It was crying unlike anything he'd ever heard before, not the angry sobbing that Mary used when she was too upset to speak, or the anguished wailing she used to denote sorrow. It was quiet, resigned and tired, and it was the closest thing to weeping that John had ever heard.

The noise had slowly seeped into his head, and before he knew it John was wide awake, moving his leg into Mary's part of the bed to be sure she wasn't there. It was a pointless movement, done mostly out of habit. The noise was coming out of the empty bedroom.

This surprised John. Before when their child had cried, it was not his screaming that had awakened John, but Mary's movement as she got out of bed to comfort him. That night, however, things had worked in the opposite manner, and he had slept as Mary crept out of bed, only to have her weeping wake him. For a moment John wondered what he should do. Should he go to her, or should he roll over and go back to sleep? If he went to her he would be unable to do anything constructive, he knew that, and would end up standing over her, watching her, and he had to go to work in the morning. She knew that. The clock by the bed read two a.m. After a few moments he rose and shivered, then picked up a pair of shorts and a t-shirt from the floor and put them on.

All this time the quiet crying had kept on. John followed the noise, through the door of their bedroom, down the short hallway towards the empty bedroom. It was a slightly chilly, fall night, and as he walked down the moon-lit hallway he was gratefully aware of the deep-pile carpet. Mary had insisted on it, and though he had

been sorry to see the wood floors go, he had to admit that the carpet was warmer. He also knew that it masked the sound of his feet, and he cleared his throat to let Mary know he was coming. The quiet noise stayed quiet, even as he moved closer to the source.

At the door John paused and cleared his throat again, but Mary didn't seem to notice. She was sitting on the floor with her knees drawn up to her chin, her arms clasped around her legs, her t-shirt pulled over the top of her knees and her face down. John stood for a moment, uncertain of what to do, then walked quietly into the room, ducking under a Sesame Street mobile as he did so. Mary still didn't look up, she just kept on crying quietly, and John stood over her, still unsure of what to do. For a moment he felt as if he were pulling away from her, from himself, and he noticed the way her shoulder blades stood up under the thin t-shirt, the way her hair curled at the back of her neck, and it seemed to him as if she were someone that he didn't know, let alone the woman he'd made a child with.

Much later John would remember that moment, that fleeting vision of Mary as a stranger, as the moment at which he realized that he didn't love her. It wasn't that he didn't care about her, he did, but he didn't love her, and caring is nothing like loving. He wouldn't remember it as the moment love had died, simply as the moment he realized it was gone. And though he would go on living with her, making love to her, caring for her, he would never forget that moment.

"Love," he told his brother, once, years later, while they were drunk. "Love is like a child." He paused, partially out of shame, and partially to be sure of what he was saying. "As soon as it is born, it begins to die." John firmly believed this, and he loved his brother, and everyone else in the bar, as he said it.

Mary's shoulders shook with the quiet power of her sobs, and John reached down and began to pat her softly on the back. For a while Mary continued to cry, and John continued to pat, and Mary's crying got quieter, and softer, until the only way that John could tell she was still crying was through the vibration of her back. Finally even that stopped, and John turned his pat into a small circle that

encompassed the area between her shoulder blades.

"I didn't mean to wake you," she said.

"I know," John said, and below them they heard the refrigerator begin to hum. It must be early, he thought, and then wondered why.

"I just woke up, and I felt like coming in here," she said, without moving from the position she was in. "I don't know why." She sniffed and looked around. John pulled off his t-shirt and handed it to her, and she blew her nose. He was grateful that she had moved.

"Do you miss him?" he asked.

"All the time," she said, and she lowered her head back onto her knees. "For a while I used to wake up and think I heard him crying, and before I remembered I'd be half-way out of bed. But then I just went back to sleep. This was the first time I came in here."

"And you saw the crib?" John said, trying to be helpful. Mary had been the one that found him, while he'd been at work, and John had always felt a little bit guilty about that. He also felt guilty, and a little bit oafish, about how quickly he'd gotten over the loss.

"Yes," she said.

"And you cried."

"No," she said. "I mean, I cried when I saw the crib, but it wasn't because of the crib. I cried because I felt nothing."

"I don't understand," John said, and he stopped circling Mary's back. He half expected her to reach back and grab his hand, but when she didn't he stood up straight and wrapped his arms around himself.

"I just felt so empty," she said, not moving. "I cried because I knew it was just going to go on, and I'm going to become my mother, and you're going to become your father, and our children, if we have more, are going to become us. That's why I cried."

John didn't say anything. He walked to the window and looked at the backyard. There was a single tree, and John had held Todd at that same window and had pointed at the tree, promising to build him a tree-house. It was a big tree, and it would have held a good-sized tree-house.

"I'll be all right in the morning," Mary said from behind him.

John still didn't move. He heard Mary rise, heard her knee-joints crack, and heard her pad quietly behind him.

"It will be all right in the morning," he said.