

Green Eyes

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A rumor.

That's how it started.

So and so said it to him, and he passed it along to her, and then she passed it along to me and I dropped my books in the hallway.

"We're all leaving," she whispered. "Tonight."

I carry anxious energy with me the whole day, aggressively tapping my foot in class and biting my nails into stubs. The other students who know seem restless too.

After school, I run home and slip through the front door quietly. Our golden retriever, Klaus, scurries towards me with a playful bark, and I silence him with a quick belly rub before dashing to my bedroom.

My room is painted a deep olive, a sharp contrast to the dull gray that coats every wall in existence. Mother hates my room, but I hid all of the gray paint and Mother would rather tolerate the green than spend money fixing it.

I throw my backpack off my shoulders and flip it upside down, dumping out all of my school supplies.

Time to pack.

I'm throwing in a final pair of socks when I hear the familiar footsteps of my mother.

"Ellie? I'm home!"

I know this routine.

Next, Mother will open my door. She will ask me how my day was. I will reply with, “Good.” She will give me a hug and begin to cook supper. We’ll eat at 5:00.

Mother opens the door.

“How was your-”

“Good!” I shout as I shove the backpack into the farthest recess of my closet.

I turn around with a fake smile. “Good, yeah, hi.” My heart is racing, and I can tell Mother is unconvinced by the innocent act.

“What are you-”

“Where’s my hug?” I singsong, opening my arms wide and throwing myself against Mother. She tenses for a moment, then relaxes and her arms melt against me, drawing me close.

When she steps back, Mother holds me at arm’s length, searching my eyes. I look straight back, defiant. *There is nothing wrong. This is the same. The same as always.*

Eventually, Mother seems to relax. “I’m going to make supper. Be ready to eat by 5:00.”

“Of course, Mother,” I say politely.

Mother smiles and leaves the room, throwing one quick glance over her shoulder before I am able to shut the door and drag out the backpack again.

After throwing my hair into a messy ponytail, I turn towards the window. *It’s time.*

I slip through the open window with ease. As soon as my foot touches the ground, however, a loud, startling bark stops me in my tracks.

Klaus.

Klaus stares sadly at me from the living room window, his paws propped against the glass pane. He barks again, and I find myself moving, quickly, quickly, away from the house. I duck

low with my backpack tight around my shoulders, crawling through our perfect flowers and landscaping.

I'm knee deep in dirt when I am hauled upwards. Thrown off guard, I scramble to regain my balance and turn to face...*Mother*. She has dirt on her pencil skirt, and she wipes it off with a slow finger. She doesn't even seem to notice me, though she was the one who grabbed me.

"Mother, I...I can explain..." I trail off, stumbling for an explanation. *We're leaving. The students are all leaving. I'm not going to be trapped in this meaningless world anymore.*

Her gaze turns to focus on me. She says nothing.

"Mother. I'm leaving."

Mother blinks.

I turn around. I don't need a response. I need to meet up with the other students before they give up on the stragglers.

"Wait."

I turn towards Mother, who spoke. She watches me with eyes that contain more emotion than I've ever seen from her. I can't even begin to interpret the meaning of that gaze.

Mother steps forward and grabs my hand. I almost pull away, but her touch is so gentle I freeze.

"Be careful out there, okay?"

And with that, Mother turns away, walking towards the house and brushing off her skirt one last time.

Something...catches in my chest as I watch her. My single mother, leaving her only daughter to just...walk away.

She doesn't understand. She can never understand.

She can never understand what it is like to be raised in a meaningless world, where everyone is the same, and every life is the same, and every day is the same. She can never understand how...how *trapped* I feel in a life like this, knowing that *I* will be Mother some day, working at a desk, coming home, making supper and serving it at 5:00. Every. Single. Day.

She can never understand.

Except...maybe she never wanted this life either.

I think of that look she gave me, the one I didn't understand.

Maybe...there's still life left in my mother.

"Mother!" I dash towards the house, grabbing the door handle just as Mother begins to close it from the other side.

"*Mom.*" I pull open the door and step inside, feeling traitorous tears pooling in my eyes. "Mom, I..." I trail off, then offer a hand, unable to explain or speak or do anything other than let tears trickle down my cheek.

"Come *with* me."

Mother stares at my hand for a moment, eyes wide with shock. Then, her gaze travels up to meet my green eyes. Her eyes are green too, glistening with tears of their own.

"Ellie, I..."

"*Please.*"

A sigh. A moment of uncertainty.

Then, fingers brushing mine. A squeeze.

We step towards the front door, fingers intertwined.

"Ellie?"

"Yeah?" I respond quietly, tears choking my voice.

“You know what? I’ve...actually always liked your green room.”

I laugh with a sob and meet Mom’s gaze.

“Really?”

She nods as we step out the door. She traces her finger down my nose.

“It has always reminded me of your eyes.”