

A Memory

BY: KATIE LOVE

“Hello Babushka.” That was my mom’s daily greeting for me. You see, a babushka is a type of head covering. Coming home for school, I would see her bald, fuzzy head propped on the couch and cover it with my hands—thus the nickname. It was a love gesture. She did it to me when I was a baby to help me sleep. Now, if someone touches my hair in the same way, I fall asleep immediately.

“Does it bother you if I do that?”

“No, I think it’s relaxing. Like I’m your pet.” Then she pats me on the head. It’s funny how her voice sounds like mine now. Maybe I’m misremembering.

Examining her head, I comment: “It looks like you’re starting to grow hair. I see stubbles.”

“Oh good. Mary told me hair can grow back another color after chemo. No gray this time I hope.” My mom’s hair had started going gray in her thirties, which at the time seemed ancient. “How was your day?”

“It was fine. Algebra quiz went well.” I’m already unloading my backpack on the wood floor with a loud thud. It’s heavy and I have the straps low, so it’s murdering my back. Back spasms were vogue at my middle school. “How are you feeling?” I’m concerned. She looks flushed today. I’ve never seen that before.

“I’m feeling okay,” she claims, though we both know that’s not entirely true. “Could you refill my water and replace the straw? I dropped it.” She gestures to a green straw on the floor. I pick it up.

“Sure. Do you want anything else from the kitchen?”

“No thanks. Grab your snack and bring it in here. We can read for a while.” We’re working our way through Harry Potter. We started one day when I was home sick with the stomach flu since we were both tired of watching T.V. We alternated reading aloud, relinquishing when one of us was too nauseous to read any more. A few months later, we are trudging our way through the third book. I had read all of them twice already, but I’m enjoying reading them again. It’s become our thing.

I return with the food and water. “I love you,” I say. I’m saying that often. We’d always been an affectionate mother daughter pair, but now I’m saying it territorially—like please God, don’t take her away. She means too much to me.

After a brief remission, her ovarian cancer has returned. I know that’s bad, but I don’t know statistics. It’s actually really bad. At this point though, there’s just a vague fear. Some mornings I wake up with my heart pounding and my pillow blotted with tears. I avoid the thought of life without her in my waking moments, so I’m having nightmares about funerals and abandonment. She’ll get better, we tell ourselves.

It’s just me, my mom, and sister at home. Often my grandmother helps too, but this afternoon it’s just me and my mom. “Where did we leave off?”

“I think I marked the page...”

Heal