Jerry’s bedroom. I took off my dripping jacket and dropped it on the mat, then moved down the hall as noiselessly as I could.

Renata was at her window, looking out through the black square. In the light from the lamp on the dresser I could see her reflection, but the rain drops rolling down the glass changed her features. They were blended into one another, creating a softer, smoothed out Renata, except for her mouth. It was still in its stitched, straight line. Her arms were crossed against the pink material of her chest.

I could see my own reflection, too, the distance and light and wet glass distorting my image so I looked like a bigger version of myself, filling the doorway.

I listened to the silence of the house, closing my eyes. When I opened them and looked around the room I noticed that the closet door was open, and something was different, but I wasn’t sure what it was.

My eyes moved from the empty hangers back to Renata’s reflection, and when I took my first step into the room, I saw her shoulders flinch, and I knew that she could see my image, there in the window. As I watched, the stitches that held her mouth started to loosen, unravel the tiniest bit.

And as I walked toward her, my sneakers moving faster and faster, making tiny, damp, mewing sounds on the bare wood floor, I saw my mother’s arms unfold from across her chest and rise, opening, as if caught in an unexpected, upward current of air.

Activities

1. We are given some indication by the narrator that Renata knew what her daughter was going to tell her. Reread the story carefully and identify all of these clues.

2. Using evidence from the story, write a description of the narrator’s relationship with her mother. Look for evidence to show how this relationship changes as the story progresses.

3. Imagine that you are a director who is going to film this story. Write a profile of each character to help you select a cast for the movie. Consider their physical characteristics, as well as personality characteristics and behaviours.

4. Research and prepare a school display on the topic of sexual abuse. Include the following information in your display:
   a) the legal definition of sexual abuse
   b) statistics to show when it occurs, where, and to whom
   c) local agencies and services that can help victims of sexual abuse.

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