

Red River, Green Eyes

In his life, Abraham had never felt more alone. His wife had died, and now his little daughter, Eva, was lost somewhere in the woods. The local teenagers called it, "The Endless Forest," because it stretched past the state border. A search party was gathered immediately; more than a hundred people, enthusiastic to help out, searched for eleven straight days in the freezing forest but could not find a clue. With the winter days passing quickly, fewer and fewer people came to look for the little girl until one day only Abe and the sheriff were left. The town's community had mutually agreed that Eva was gone. Although she was not officially pronounced dead, on the 40th day of her disappearance, the town's people held a wake in front of Abe's house. Despite the strong wind, every man, woman and child lit a candle and placed it on Abe's lawn. Everyone mourned there that night, except for Abe himself. No one could find him. His phone was dead and his home was empty. They had seen him go home last night, gloomy but safe.

"He'll turn up. You remember how he disappeared after Helen's passing? He's probably drinking in Hadwick." Said Sheriff Oliver Joyce.

"Is it safe for him to be alone right now?" asked his wife, Olivia.

"He's a grown man. He knows what he's doing."

And they were right. He knew.

He knew the search party could not help him find his daughter because she was not their daughter. They were not invested in the whole situation. And he did not blame them. They had their own lives and worries. So after he came back on that night before the fourth day, after his daughter was pronounced dead, he waited for everyone to go home, put his jacket on, gathered food and water and set for The Endless Forest.

His home was nothing more than a prison with furniture and he could not stand the comfort of it.

His goal was to find Eva, dead or alive. If she was alive, he would bring her home and continue with their life as before. His imagination ran wild, forming past memories into fantasies for the bright future. In it Eva was all grown up, and he was a happy old man who needed to be taken care of. If she were dead though, at least he would not worry, and he would know for sure that she was. Certainty, even for something bad, was better than wandering in the depths of doubt.

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Abraham could never forget the day Eva was born. It was a cold January morning and Helen was covered in different bodily liquids. But there was something else covered in the same bodily fluids he touched with great privilege and joy- this wet crying little ball of flesh, he would call his daughter.

“Have you come up with a name? Should we write her down?” the nurse asked trying to go through all the dry bureaucracy.

Helen looked at her husband, then she turned to the nurse and said “Eva”.

The nurse passed Eva to the father. At that moment she stopped crying and opened her eyes. They were green. Just like Helen’s. Just like his.

“Do you know how rare it is for a baby to be born with green eyes.”

“It’s true” said the nurse “most people who have green eyes are not born with green eyes. They develop in time.”

“This is unusual then?” asked Helen.

“This is special” whispered Abe to the baby in his hands.

On that cold January morning Abe changed. He did not believe in change, but it was something that happened to him. The very same day he went home and cleared the bar from the half-empty bottles. He became a milder man, one who stayed home. His tantrums and hatred rants grew shorter and declined in occurrence.

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After three days of searching, his water was gone, only one chocolate bar was left in his now empty backpack. It was a Great Chip, Eva’s favorite. His feet were swollen, his eyes

were red and his lips-purple and fingers were blue. He had lost his matches, and his flashlight had died on day two.

The sun was setting, inviting the fourth day of his individual search. Abraham tried finding a cave to keep warm. He couldn't. Only trees that covered the sky in the most part.

In the evening, in the cold wind and the howling of the wolves. He thought of giving up. He had no idea where he was and how he was supposed to find his daughter. For the first time, he thought about his own life. Was he to die here? He had to go back. It made no sense of dying in this forsaken forest, only to be found by a search party all rotten. What saddened him was that he now realized that he would never see her again. The eeriness of the situation was tough, but the fact he would never exchange glances with Eva struck to his bone marrow.

He lay his head on a stone and tried closing his eyes but was too tired and cold to do so. Clattering teeth was the only thing he could hear. He curled into a ball and waited.

All of a sudden, a woman in a blue mantel appeared from behind the tall oak trees surrounding the stone he was on. At first, it was just a smooth face with pale blue skin and bright green eyes. Her long hair streamed over her shoulders and the wind blew it behind them. The woman then came out from behind the trees. Abe, stretched on the big rock, could now see her clearly. The surprise of this encounter opened his eyes. The long tunic covered her whole body for the exception of her bare feet. Her arms were long and swung around her as she shortened the distance between her and him.

“So good to see you after all this time” she said.

Abe pressed his eyes and blinked at the blue figure in front of him.

“What?”

She covered her face and laughed.

“You must be tired.”

Abe made no objection to that. In fact, he was so tired his body felt like a part of the rock. She gave him her hand and helped him up. Still holding him, she started walking towards the trees. From where she came.

Abe had no intention of following her. He did not know her and although it hurt him to admit it even to himself, she scared him. But the strength in his body had been brought down to a minimum. He had no strength to oppose what she was doing; thus he followed her.

So, they walked and walked. Abe grew more tired with each step. But the woman did not let go.

“Where are we going?”

She did not respond. Abe noticed the wind had stopped, the wolves had gone quiet and the blanket of leaves was now completely covering the night sky.

After, what seemed to be an eternity, they reached a streaming river. Seeing the red color of it, Abraham dropped to his knees. The woman let go of his hand and stood beside him, looking at the thick color of the river too.

“Is this blood?”

“No.”

He crawled to the edge of the land. He saw his reflection in the redness of the water. It was not him. It was not the Abe who left his house alone on a quest to find his daughter. In the water was the image of a light blue man with long green hair and horns above his eyes. The man fell back, scared with a palpitating heart.

“What have you done to me? What are those?” He shouted at the woman, pointing at the horns.

She shook her head.

“I have done nothing to you. This, what you see, is only you.”

Abe stood up and grabbed his horns. They were coarse and cold. Although, this was the first time he had seen himself like this, the horns felt like they had always been there. This, too, scared him.

“You brought me here, what is this all supposed to mean?”

She just stood across him in silence. Tears started pouring from his tired eyes:

“Have you seen my daughter?”

The woman did not answer. She walked slowly towards the water. Moving, she dropped her tunic and went in the red water.

“Follow me. This is the end of your quest.”

He had nothing else to lose. He had no idea where he was, he did not know the naked woman in the red water, he was not the man that left his house. Might as well follow her and see what she meant by “quest”. Beat down, tired and annoyed, Abe took his clothes off and followed her into the water.

The river swallowed him whole with its freezing stream pushing him down. His head went underwater and he saw the blurry lines of his surroundings. Floating in a state of fatigue, his thoughts were with Eva. Where was she? Would she try and save him, like he was trying?

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The day Helen died was the second time Abraham changed. The difference was that then he believed in change, and it scared him to death. He filled his bar with full bottles of vodka, whiskey and gin. His neighbors would hear him shout at the empty air around him from his porch. Eva would spend some nights locked in her room. He knew he was scaring her, because to her tiny soul he was no longer dad but a tired looking man with an unshaved face and long matted hair.

More and more often he would wake up and find his daughter talking to herself in the back yard. “Get back in the house, you are too damn close to the forest” he would scream to the little girl in the red jacket. And she listened. One afternoon he woke up grumpy.

“Eva, bring me my bathrobe. Eva!”

But no one answered. He got up and half-naked ran to the back yard. The silence swept him. “Eva!”

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Abraham was woken from his cold dream by the even colder morning. He looked at his fingers-blue and stone hard. Trembling, he took out the chocolate bar and bit down into it with much rage. Today he must be heading back home. He hoped his last strength would carry him there.

The search was over. He felt he had let himself down by not going through with it but also knew that he would help no one by dying alone in the woods. He promised himself when he got back, if he got back, to move from the town and settle somewhere big. Somewhere where his troubles and worries would get buried in work and strangers. He wanted the last year erased and forgotten. He had lost his wife, turned back to his darker self and then lost his daughter. All was his fault.

As he shoved his breakfast in his mouth, Abe heard a noise from behind the trees.

“Is it the pale blue lady? No, she is in the river” Abe was still in his dream.

From behind the oak emerged a big brown bear. “That is it” he thought “This is how I go”.

The bear stood on its back feet and gazed at the man. He did not move; he stared back. He had heard of the bears but had never encountered one. What does one do? How does one react? Does he play dead?

The bear moved slowly towards him. He laid the chocolate on the ground and moved slowly up the rock he was on. The bear took it with its big paws, sniffed it and ran into the nothingness of the forest, carrying the rest of the chocolate bar.

On the way back home, Abe’s mind was no longer preoccupied with the fatigue. He acknowledged he was not thinking rationally due to the fever and the pain in his feet, but he could swear that the lady and the bear were the same thing. They came in the same manner from the same place and disappeared just as mysteriously. Abe was passing by a river when he saw a floating bright red object in it. It was stuck between two rocks. The man dropped everything and jumped in the water. Shoveling with his hands intensely, he reached the two rocks and remained silent in the bubbles of the stream.

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When Abraham entered town, all wet and barely shuffling his feet, people came out of their shops and homes to greet him. But they quickly let him pass once they saw what he was holding in his hands: the pale blue body of his daughter, Eva.