

Growing Pains

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CAPSULE STORIES

Her daughter is ill again, the usual, recurring ache that seems to have no cause. In vain, she's been for allergies, watched as the doctor drew traces of dust into her daughter's skin and then applied traces of dairy, animal hair. She's seen her daughter poked and prodded, stethoscopes held against that pale back now covered in a scatter of freckles, the cold wand of the ultrasound pressed against her daughter's beautiful rounded stomach. That same stomach that she once tickled as she changed a dirty diaper, now hidden behind a pair of loose ripped jeans, an eagle's head buckle to hold them in place. The child that's now a teenager, the traces of the baby she once was visible only to her mother's worried eye.

Her daughter is lying on the bed, a hot water bottle clamped to her waist, bent into a fetal position, missing only a thumb inside her mouth. She stands at the door, hovers, unable to soothe her daughter's churning insides, a pain so sharp, it's sent her home from school early after a visit to the nurse. She wishes she knew more about her daughter's daily life, if there are other children that are unkind to her, if she finds the work she's assigned by the teachers too taxing. If she's anxious about having to speak in front of the class, twenty-four pairs of eyes watching her every move as she stands before the blackboard, her carefully compiled assignment clasped in a clammy hand. When she asks her daughter these questions, she meets a stony wall of single syllables and there's a tenseness in her daughter's eyes, warning her about pushing too close. She can handle this, her daughter's eyes say, she's okay, let her be.

But her daughter's not okay, this much she's allowed to see. The regular cramps unrelated to her cycle. The piling up on the school's report card. Is it a spiraling