

—DRAWN

by Daniel L. Naden

How did it start?

I sit here with Teresa and Anna, huddled in the remains of our apartment, and I wish to hell that I didn't know. Around us our building is in ruins, walls and ceilings collapsed, two-by-fours poking jaggedly through the debris. Outside the noise of chaos and destruction continues. How did it start? Was it bad luck? Bad choices? I don't think it really matters now. I just want to hold my wife and my baby and wait for it to be over. When I close my eyes, it all replays. I see the day my daughter was born.

It was ten months ago.

At 12:03 PM, following nine hours of labor, Anna Marie Cooper came into the world, pink and bloody and squalling with gusto. In a flurry of activity, the nurses swabbed, tested, and weighed Anna, wrapped her up in a neat little bundle, and set her into Teresa's tired arms. Against the backdrop of the buzzing fluorescents, with IV's and wires tangled every which way from the odd collection of equipment surrounding the bed, Teresa and Anna looked like a gift of angels. Mother and child: the Renaissance painters never did the subject justice. It was like light had come into the world and settled on them.

Teresa looked as beautiful as I had ever seen her—an aching grace and peace that tugged at my heart more deeply than I would ever have imagined possible. Anna was a delicate flower, cradled in Teresa's arms. Tiny fingers clenched into little, chubby fists. A perfectly round face with a dimpled chin, a classic button nose and a shock of black hair. Her eyes...

Anna's eyes.

Well, that's where all of this really began.

Ordinarily, when babies are born, their eyes are a deep, dark shade of blue. They don't usually get their natural eye color for a couple of months, sometimes longer. Anna's eyes were auburn, a rich, almost-coppery color, shot through with flecks of black and irises that opened into pools of night. When she looked at you with those eyes, you couldn't look away.

I stood beside Teresa, both of us looking at our baby, and we were spellbound. From a distance, one of the nurses was saying how sometimes babies are born with unique eye colors, assuring us that Anna's eyes were perfectly ordinary. While we listened to every word she said, neither of us ever looked up from Anna and her perfect, enigmatic eyes.

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We were *drawn* to them--we simply could not look anywhere else.

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Time passed for us like it does for all first-time parents. A lot of sleepless nights and hectic days, rotating through feeding shifts and messy diapers. We had smiles and laughter and tears and scores of other emotions that new moms and dads go through in the earliest stages of their children's lives. But even from the beginning, there were hints of the shadow to come.

The mobile for Anna's crib had been a shower gift. It was fairly typical--a collection of dangling moons and leaping cows on a carousel that could be wound up to play a lullaby. It was designed to be secured to the headboard by a clamp with a thumbscrew. At three months old, Anna had been giving us a bit of trouble with bedtime. She could keep herself awake crying for quite awhile. Teresa thought if we set up the mobile, it might distract Anna and help her fall asleep. Anna had been fussy all day, so by her bedtime, we were ready to try it out. I dug the mobile out of the closet and screwed it onto the headboard of Anna's crib.

Anna started crying as soon as I set her in her bed. I wound up the mobile, flipped off the light and pulled the door closed, waiting outside and listening.

Almost immediately, she calmed down, evidently fascinated by the new sound and sight. Every now and then, she whimpered, but seemed to be done crying. As I walked away, I heard a clatter and Anna started shrieking.

I opened the door and hurried to her crib. Anna was tangled up in the mobile, screaming in fear and anger. She didn't appear to be hurt. I scooped her into my arms as Teresa appeared over my shoulder.

"What in the world happened?"

"The mobile fell on her," I replied.

Teresa arched an eyebrow at me.

"I put it up the right way," I told her. I was whining and not hiding it well.

We examined the headboard. The base of the mobile was still firmly in place. About four inches from the top, the plastic arm that held up the mobile had snapped off. I picked up the part that had fallen into the crib and examined it. The break matched the headboard piece exactly.

"See!" I said, sounding petulant. "It's broken. She must have pulled it down."

Teresa regarded me again, this time with a smirk. "Do you know how ludicrous that sounds? She's a three-month-old!"

"I don't know," I replied, deadpanning as best I could, "maybe she jumped..."

Teresa groaned in mock exasperation. Together, we tucked Anna into her crib and kissed her good night. I deposited the pieces of the mobile in the trash dumpster outside. We didn't think of the incident again until three months later when things began to fly around the apartment.

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In retrospect, we should have known.