

A child still too young to articulate himself seems to us not quite human. He can't tell us how he feels, nor what he's thinking. When we look into his soul through those big clear eyes, we make the mistake of looking not through a window, but a mirror, missing the water for the reflection. We endow it with meaning that's entirely adult, in part because we forget so easily what it was like to be that child, way back when, everything in the world was a curiosity, at once carrying the potential for unknown delights and unforeseen harm. At some point along the way, we forget why we laughed and why we cried. Though perhaps we see him now and share in his contagious laughter that bunches up the new wrinkles around his eyes, but how do we respond to his irrational fear, when he won't stop crying for seemingly no reason at all? Do we forget those hazy days when we too were so small and the world was so big? Or do we remember how we felt, as he does now, laying in the bedroom, at once contained by and protected by the eggshell walls and the popcorn ceiling. Wondering how long ago was it that mother got up while looking down at you with that indescribably warm expression, and opened her mouth from which soft songs poured out, but then walked out closing the heavy door behind her. Did she look back at you before the door sealed shut? Did she see the expression on your face, the one you made when you understood somehow but couldn't say it, couldn't even explain to yourself how you felt or understood it, but you had this sinking feeling that you were all of sudden left to your own devices, defenceless against the hostile forces of this vast domestic world? Did she see you watching, eyes wide, reaching pitifully for the door across the room, a high-pile ocean away? You didn't ask yourself these questions, but you felt them, somehow, just as you felt the fuzz on your head waver and the warmth you took for granted get carried away with the wind that comes in through the window across the room. Where a uniform whiteness seems to be the source of all that might hurt you. The curtains dance about autonomously, tuned to the breeze that's covered your skin in goosebumps. You can't seem to find any rhyme or rhythm to their motion, no pattern like anything man-made. And whoever this mysterious energy belongs to, it's everywhere; you look, everywhere you turn about in your once so comforting nest of bedding, it mocks you with its every place present. Over there and up there, on the ceiling and every wall, uncountable shadows indistinct move in a way you've never seen before. Erratically and inexplicably faster than anything human that might bring you comfort or salvation. And despite being everywhere, you can never manage to track those shadows quickly enough to even try to begin to understand and predict them, for you catch something creeping somewhere over to that side and you dart your eyes in the direction of, but just as you do it fades, and then there again on the other side another, and gone. You try as you might, faster and faster but the dark billows only closer still, never seeming to touch you, but you can feel it, somehow, that it's only a matter of time until it does, that you are in grave danger. So that familiar feeling crawls, a chill up your spine. Inside your chest a pressure rises, your vision blurs. In recent days, you've been getting better at keeping it down, because you noticed mother's words losing their patient warmth, maybe from her kindred spirit being worn down by this boy who keeps crying wolf, but it's not like I can help it now, I'd prefer her exhausted embrace over this incomprehensible hell. And I just pray to those blinding heavens that she's secretly waiting behind that door, so when the damn bursts open, she'll come running back to hold me.