

On the one hand, it seemed so simple. There was a new baby, Isabelle Eva, who looked like she had just arrived fresh from heaven: perfect, alert, hungry, a fierce and tiny angel. There was nothing to do except love her, this pearl of a granddaughter, born on a full moon to my son, Clay, and his wife, Tamar. The rush I felt when I saw her was pure, primordial, an animal love I'm certain is biological. And because Clay and Tamar had recently moved from Paris to Washington, D.C. to be near my husband, Hugh, and me, not only was I privileged to be present the night of Isabelle's birth, I got to see her, hold her—love her—nearly every day. I could track the subtle, minute changes in her as she woke up to this world.

That was the one hand. The other hand struck the day Isabelle Eva turned four weeks old, when Clay announced that he and Tamar had decided to leave Washington and return to Europe. One month later they were on a plane bound for Paris, and I went from being a new grandmother *in situ* to one who lives across a vast ocean from my granddaughter. I was wild with grief.

Margaret Mead wrote, "The closest friends I have made all through life have been people who grew up close to a loved and loving grandmother or grandfather." In part, she attributed the strong bond between grandchildren and grandparents to the fact that "they were united against a common enemy—the parents." Although devastated by Isabelle's sudden departure, I refused to give up on having a close relationship with her—or with our "common enemy," for that matter. Even at my most bereft, I recognized that in time my broken heart would find a way to bridge the distance.

But first I needed solace. I took comfort from my husband and my friends. And I sought refuge in the place I always turn to: books. Surely, poets, novelists and other chroniclers of the heart would have wise words to console me. Surely, gifted writers must have tackled one of life's most profound yet complicated identities—that of grandmother, a role that is as primal as parenthood, yet stirs unforeseen conflicts and expectations within families that can blindside you and set you spinning. I searched and searched for literature on the subject and was astonished to find: *nothing*.

Yes, there were plenty of self-help books, plenty of humor books that reinforced the cultural stereotype of grandmothers as devoted and doting as puppies. But I could find nothing literary that began to evoke the complexity of the passage to grandmotherhood, not to mention the exquisite joys—and difficulties—of the role itself.

Where, I wondered, were the *real* stories? The working women, the non-doters, the grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren or being kept from them by angry adult children? Where were the stories of women grappling with the role, trying to figure out just what sort of grandmother to be in a world that differs in so many ways from the world in which our role models—our own grandmothers—lived?

When I couldn't find books that conjured the cracks as well as the wonder and, occasionally, the absurdity of my new status, I decided there must be other women with nuanced feelings about being a grandmother and so I started asking around. I tracked down writers whose work I love and put out feelers: Were they grandmothers? Did they have something to say on the subject? One contributor's response was typical: "This essay will force me to explore and articulate

emotional areas I have avoided.” Suddenly, there were stories and more stories. Out of this rich tapestry, *Eye of My Heart* was born.