

Your Hair, Your Weight

by Maryanne Stahl

You were a difficult child, they said, a picky eater, fussy about your shoes. You were always sneaking off after dinner to read, sitting on the sidelines drawing while the others played kickball. You didn't know how to be part of a team.

Was it any surprise your relationships didn't last?

Your first husband left after two years, the second stayed for twenty. "Your mother has problems," he told the kids. At the dinner table, he taught them to make fun. He taught them to be alert to the signs: "She's going to cry again."

Though he hit you, like the first one, like your father, it was because you provoked him. You never knew when to keep quiet. Except for the times you drove him crazy because you wouldn't talk.

Even as a baby, you cried in the middle of the night. Cried and cried though you weren't supposed to eat for another four hours.

Now, alone, you show up at a family event, and everyone tries to be civil. But it isn't easy--for anyone. "You irritate me," your ex says. And when you mention it to your aunt, she shakes her head and wants to know why.

"Is it your hair?" she asks. "Your weight?"

