

“How The Rain Falls” by Caleb Holm – Awarded Second Place

Photo – Painted Lady

I hate this. I absolutely hate the feeling of paint on my skin. It feels as if I am being trapped, slowly encased in clay that will harden at any second. Petrified. I cannot even move until the stupid ‘artists’ have finished with all the paint and the stage crew refuses to dim the lights even though it shines directly into my face and eyes. I am not even allowed to move my head! I feel so exposed. Every single time the brush stokes against my skin it feels as if hundreds of thousands of insects are crawling up and down my back. These people poke and prod and smear and scrub me as if I am a prize or some sort of artifact about to be put on display in a museum. That is probably all I am to them, just another canvas that they govern. The idea that these idiotic artists are making good money for their ridiculous “modern art” pains me to no end. This looks like something my three year old could have done. Zale, he is the reason I do this and the reason I will keep on doing this. I breathe out and I count to ten, then I start over. Anyone can do or withstand anything for ten seconds, so I take it ten seconds at a time. I will do anything for Zale and if it hurts me, so be it. I will grit my teeth, and wait for it to be over.

Finally, they are done with their painting. Huh, they decided to add tears this time, how fitting. But they will never see a single tear fall from my eyes. I am strong. They’re starting on my hair now, I don’t absolutely hate this part. It takes me back to when I was just a little girl with no worries. During those times every night my mother would run her fingers through my long, dark hair and sing to me about the ocean and all her secrets, she would sing of its power and grace. This is where I came up with Zale’s name, Zale means “power of the sea” in Greek. Every morning my father would make breakfast and my mother would dress me up in my school uniform and put blue ribbons in my hair. I would dash out the door, kiss my mother, and then my father would drive me to school. That is how it was every day, until the accident.

I was put into the foster care system along with my little brother, Dylan. I never saw him after the day they separated us. I was only seven years old but I can still remember his little two year old voice screaming, “Rain! Don’t leave!” I remember that was the first time I broke. Wells of sorrow burst forth as rage. I went at the social workers with teeth and nails and I felt like an animal. They had to get three men to hold me back and I believe that one of the social workers ended up in the hospital. I haven’t seen or heard of Dylan since. He still haunts me in my dreams.

I was placed with some woman who only took me in for the check she got from the state. She was an alcoholic. Every night she would come home drunk and she would smack me and the other girl, Sylvia, around for a little bit. I was there for nearly two years and I made sure to stay at the top of my class. My parents always said that to succeed you had to stay smart. I helped Sylvia keep her grades up as well. One night the woman came back and grabbed Sylvia and started to choke her. This was the second time I broke; it was worse. I flew at her and I hurt her so bad; she was dying. My mind came back and I called for an ambulance. I had to run and tried to bring Sylvia with me, but she was too scared to move. I had terrified her. I had terrified myself. I couldn’t stay so I told her, “Cunning wins, and you are cunning. Stay that way.” I then let vowing to control my rage.

They’re calling me onto stage now. I look at my hair and notice the small blue ribbon and smile to myself. I’m pushed out on to the catwalk and it’s time for my job. I walk and glare fiercely at everyone that dares to meet my eyes. This is the only part I like, scaring the people who sponsor these stupid events. After that initial fear in their eyes fades however I hate it. I lose control. But I never let it show. After walking up and down the catwalk, I take my place next to the other models and stand still.

I managed to avoid being found for about a year but, of course, it wasn’t going to stay like that. At ten years old it’s hard to stay of the grid. I was caught breaking into a store for food and immediately was put back into the system. I was a minor and Sylvia testified that the woman was abusive so I got off without trouble, but because they found me I was sent to a new guardian.

She was an old woman. She didn’t treat me horribly but she didn’t really care for me either. Indifference was still much better than any of the other situations I was in since the accident. I was a year behind in school but I caught up quickly and managed to reclaim my spot as the top in the class. I stayed with this woman for seven years and even managed to skip a grade. I was bullied by the popular kids because I was from the poor side of town and yet I was smarter. I was determined to make a way, a name for myself. Then I let my walls down. One person was all it took for my life to completely derail. He was Blake. He was my boyfriend from junior year and we decided that we weren’t going to college, so that we could be together. I was stupid enough to go through with it

The contest is over so I go backstage and shower after they take some more pictures. It feels so nice to have the paint come off. I feel free and clean, but vulnerable. I change and head out the door to my second job as a bartender while the rest of those airhead models go to the after party. Although, I can’t really judge, not after what I gave up for a boy. I thought it was love. Now, I know for sure that it wasn’t. It was just my broken self, clinging to someone who promised they’d always love me and wouldn’t leave me.

I’m at the bar serving drinks and thinking about Blake. We were living our lives and had even got our own apartment. I thought we were happy. Then I became pregnant with Zale and as soon as he found out he left. He never gave

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me a hint he was leaving. I went to bed one night and when I woke up he was gone. I'm about to cry so I ask my coworker Elena to cover for me because I need to go home early. Elena and I don't know much about each other but we both know neither one of us has it easy, so we help each other out when we can.

I'm leaving for home and walking through the cold November in the Bronx. As I'm getting closer to home the tears are getting harder to hold back, but I can do it because I am strong. I run up the stairs that lead to my apartment; the elevator hardly ever works during the winter. I reach the apartment and thank Mrs. Mortellini for watching Zale, who is now sleeping. As soon as I close the door I break down and sob. I can let go now because I am alone, and I cry. Suddenly I hear a noise, a small voice says, “Mommy?” I was too loud, I've woken up Zale. He sees me but he doesn't say anything. He runs over to me and just hugs me, and I hold him. He is my world and I do everything for him.

Pain doesn't leave us. Tragedy and difficulties are a part of life that don't go away. But as long as we can push through it and as long as we have something or someone to endure it for, we can make it. We will find the strength because love can motivate us and drive us to do anything. I, Rain Eärendil do everything I can, no matter the pain or cost, for Zale.