

Storm Clouds in My Umbrella

by Colleen E. O'Keefe

Outside, the rain is streaming down with spurts of lightning accompanying the storm. Even though I am deep inside my home, I feel far from safe. My unsteady arms brace myself on both sides of the bathroom sink, my knuckles turning white. I steal a glance at my reflection, but I jump back as a roll of thunder crackles. A bottle breaks from the other side of the door, and I hear someone curse.

Hesitantly, I bring my eyes back up to the mirror, which has a crack running straight down the middle. I take in my reflection, split by the broken glass. A bruise is blossoming on my left cheek, and my eyes are red from the tears that are slipping out. My hair is messy, my complexion poor and my body shaking. My lip quivers, so I bite it down to prevent a sob from slipping out. Tired of looking at myself and tired in general, I clamp my eyes shut and sink to the floor, settling on the cold, off-white tiles.

On the other side of the door, I hear screaming as my mom and her boyfriend fight. The front door slams, and I tense, glancing at the bathroom door to make sure it's locked. It is, so I let out a deep breath and lie down on the filthy floor. I try to sleep, silencing my mind until the peace of slumber steals me from reality.

In dreams, I can be anything. The possibilities are as clear as the skies and as broad as the horizons on either side of me. I can be in worlds of blue and pink, green and yellow, with creatures of all sorts all around me. It never rains in my dreams, not like it does at home. Today, I am in a forest; the colors tinted a hazy red. I am surrounded by creatures from books, like unicorns and centaurs. Nothing is restricted in my dreams, not even me. Most nights, I wish that I did not have to wake up and face my ongoing nightmare.

Unsettled, I roll over in the grass and decide to get up. Flowers sprout at my fingertips, and further in the meadow, I see deer and fairies dancing about. Not wasting a moment, I join them, laughing as they bump their heads playfully against my sides and flutter around my ears. I blink and reopen my eyes to new scenery, a new life, and the dream plays on.

A sudden pounding wakes me from my sleep. The false security from the dream evaporates instantly hidden away behind doors and beneath beds for me to find another time and I push myself against the wall as thunder shakes the house. My mom calls my name as her fist berates the door for standing in her way, but I don't move. It's not until I hear a key click in the lock that I begin to cry, and the storm washes over me.