

Kissed by Rain

By Wes Braswell

There was a terrible storm the night before I left home, yet it was the only day in years I would find any peace. It wasn't my choice, but it was my wish. My mother and I could find no common ground anymore. No matter how many times we said it to each other, the words "I love you" had lost all their meaning. We would fight and scream, stubborn as we were, and all that was left between us were the broken things we had thrown to the floor in our anger. The day I would leave, I wouldn't even see her face. Just her husband's as he told me to pack a bag and dropped me off at the train station one last time. I did not know then it would be the last time I would see him again; he would die young at fifty-one. Later, I found out he wanted to keep me home, and he would blame her for sending me away. That was what taught me how it could be simple to confuse what is right for what is best. Was it right to send me to my grandmothers at the age of sixteen? I don't know, but it certainly was for the best.

Inside me there was turmoil I could not reconcile, anger that I could not find a place to put. I thought it needed a place to be exiled, and if I could only find some person or faith to hurl it at, I would find peace. Until at last I found the only thing I had total and complete control over; my body. And I threw every ounce of my rage at it until it almost relented to me. Twice.

Then it rained on that last night in Discovery Bay. Storms are rare in that little place California forgot, though the ones that visited us were always furious. "Furious as I am," I think I remember saying to myself, and I stepped out into the maelstrom. I hoped the storm would carry me somewhere far away, where no one knows my name. And if not, maybe somewhere my father lived. Perhaps the wind could tell me what his real name was on the way out of that hole of isolation and cornfields? My fury tore me up from the inside, and all I remember wanting was the storm to do the same to me from the outside.

Yet when the rain fell on me, it was a sensation I could never have expected. Each cold drop numbed where it landed all the way to the center of my being, and became a warm balm for my frayed nerves. A kiss, unlike any I had felt before or since. Hundreds given to me in moments, the intensity of the sensation brought me to my knees. I felt the warmth that I was always told I would feel in their churches. A love that sprang forth from a well inside that pit of hatred and poured out from me in the tears I shed on the sidewalk. I cried, and screamed, and thanked the world that the only one who could hear me was the storm.

"I love you," I said to the rain, to the wind.

To myself.

For the first time in a long time, though, the words felt true. As the storm cradled me with arms of the wind and washed me clean of all my wrath. Cleaner than I had ever felt before, I stood up and walked across that hollow town in the eye of the storm. They were the first steps I ever took on my own on the path to healing. And whenever the storm comes back to check in on me, I take a walk with it to show it just how far I have come.