

A Reason To Rain

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I've always hated the rain, for reasons I'll tell you about some other time. But, today the rain is appropriate. Today the rain is the only thing that feels right deep in my soul. It makes a hollow sound, which mimics the hollow feeling in my heart, as it thrums like distant drums on the tiny white coffin in front of me. Cold on my face, mixing with warm tears that won't, that can't, wash the guilt away.

He was only six weeks old, his older brother four, when their daddy left us. We struggled for several months on our own, trying to make ends meet. Our living quarters were two small rooms, which smelled of old cigarettes and rancid garlic, in what used to be a motel hastily transformed into small apartments. The ancient gray carpets were threadbare and stained and a large faded brown area on a prominent wall looked like old blood. I wondered if someone had been murdered in that room, or if they had just gone mad and taken their own life as I had often dreamed of doing since coming to this place of aching silence.

I worked at a local bar until two each morning, plodding along trying to come up with enough tips to pay the rent and buy a few groceries. Each night I dodged drunken men who grabbed at me wanting to prove, that they were the answer to my numb heart. I knew that something needed to happen soon. We were taking one step forward and two steps back each week as I fell deeper in debt with no prospects. With no car, and no friends, or contacts I was left without many choices for employment. So, the dark, smoky bar filled with hopeless, helpless people looking for ways to forget their painful lives was it for now.

On a cold November night, when I was at the end of my proverbial rope, he called. He missed us and didn't think he could live without us. He was sorry for the affair and sorry for hitting me again. He didn't know what had gotten into him and wanted us back. He was stationed in Las Vegas now and would send us bus fare to come to him as soon as possible. My heart soared. He did love us. He wanted us back. We would be a family again. I couldn't wait to leave this painful memory and begin somewhere new. With all that had occurred in the last year and a half we didn't have much to pack; a few clothes, my older son's blanket and the baby's little brown bear but, I started getting things ready for our bus ride from South Dakota to Nevada.

The trip was long and exhausting, but I knew it would be worth it when we could all be together again. He would finally love the boys. They needed a dad. He had told me he was sorry for all that had happened, so I just knew it would work this time. I wanted so desperately to believe him. Just for a chance to be a normal family.

We arrived at the bus station in Las Vegas in the middle of the night. He had sent a friend to pick us up "He will come get you in the morning to go to the base" the friend said before he left us alone in this unfamiliar place. Once inside the hotel I realized that we had left two small rooms in South Dakota for two small rooms in Nevada. My heart fell as I looked around to see the old worn carpet and stained walls of our new prison. The sounds of people pretending to have fun, doing things that they would never tell their families about, echoed in

the halls outside the room.

It didn't take long to find out why he had sent for us. He had not been completely honest with his superiors on the air base. He had told them his wife and children were with him and had received additional compensation for housing and care of his family. There would be a base inspection soon and his deception would have been discovered. He didn't have the money to pay back since his gambling problem had become exponentially worse in this place of endless temptations.

He hadn't missed us. He didn't want us back. There was a showgirl in the picture now and he had decided that he really cared about her. I didn't know what to do now and my heart had begun to harden with this new slap in the face.

We found a trailer, in a small run down trailer court, where the boys and I could stay. He wasn't there very much at first, but when the showgirl decided that she wanted to move on he came home and brought his anger and rejection with him, now he would take his new frustrations out on us. It didn't take long for his anger to begin exploding through his fists again. It was ok as long as I could keep the boys out of his way. He reminded me that I didn't deserve any better and should be glad that he had sent for me since I was still so ugly that no other man could ever want me.

I wondered why we had come here. How stupid I had been! Why did I put us in these situations over and over? Now I knew that I couldn't depend on him for anything and needed to do something to take care of my boys. His money was going to the casinos and we had no resources on which to rely.

After calls to all relevant distant family and friends had netted nothing I went to the base commander and the chaplain. "Sorry", I was told, "we don't have the resources to help". Angry, I confronted 'him' and threatened to turn him in to the police. He laughed. I threatened to sell my body if he wouldn't take care of us and he told me that I should do that. He didn't want it anymore and he didn't care how the little brats ate. I wasn't twenty-one, so I had no legal options in this limited place. Decisions needed to be made.

After months of struggle I finally decided to drop the phony pride and just do what I needed to do to take care of my children. I wasn't quite sure how to achieve my objective. I certainly wasn't a practiced prostitute and wasn't sure how to dress, or prepare myself. I didn't even know where to go to pick up men. His trusty friend came to my rescue with all of the information that I would need to achieve my goals.

By that night I doubt that anyone who had ever known me would have recognized me. Shaking and sick to my stomach I stood, dressed in practically nothing, with makeup so thick that it felt as if it might crack, stiff as a post on a street corner waiting for a car to stop.

It didn't take long. I don't really remember what he looked like. I think we agreed on a price and he began to drive out of the city. I became more and more uneasy as the lights of the city grew dimmer. He stopped and began to unfasten his belt. I became terrified and began to shout "No No No No". With that, he reached across the seat, pushed the door open and roughly shoved me out.

As he drove off and I gasped for air rising to my feet I realized that I had screwed up again. I couldn't do anything right. As the hot tears began, I could feel the layers of paint melting and running down my face.

It took me all night to walk through the desert back to the city that now seemed like a familiar old whore with her own cracked face full of paint and glitter. Her ugliness masked for some by the hopes of people who think the answer to their dreams is somewhere under the next neon sign or feathered boa.

I finally reached a small convenience store on the edge of town. With my high heels in my hand and bloody feet I was a sight. Two ladies of the evening who thought me a comrade roughed up by an angry john rushed to my side to see if they could help. I confessed my flawed plan and humiliating defeat in a rush of shame and tears. How could I look anyone in the eyes again? I didn't know whether I was more ashamed that my plan hadn't worked or the fact that I still had no money to buy my babies food. Much to my surprise my two new friends pooled the few dollars that they had and bought a few groceries for me to take home to my kids. These troubled souls knew more about pain and suffering than most and yet were so ready to help another with no promise of repayment now or ever.

I made my way home and because it was now full daylight, I cleaned myself up and began to prepare some food, so that I could surprise my boys with breakfast. When I was done I went to the bedroom door and as soon as I touched the handle and pushed the door open I knew. My oldest son looked at me and said "He won't wake up Mommy".

The room was cold. My already heavy heart grew colder. I stumbled to the crib and saw my baby's eyes staring at me from somewhere far away. His hands were reaching out as if he was returning an embrace and on his face a faint smile lingered, frozen for all time. His little brown bear sat alone in the corner of the crib, no little arms to hold him again. I grabbed my baby and was suddenly unexplainably transported outside of the trailer where I heard the agonized screams of someone yelling, over and over "My baby. Help Me! My baby."

Our neighbors came rushing to my aid and 'he' finally managed to make his way outside. Time stood still. In a fog I rode to the hospital in the front of the ambulance, 'You Are So Beautiful to Me,' by Joe Cocker, playing loudly on the dashboard radio. Sights in slow motion, fragrance of gardenias and smells of pizza forever engraved on my memory. And, the vision of my baby's distant stare permanently seared on my conscience.

I knew that I had not been there when my sons needed me. I didn't deserve to be a mother. I knew that my baby had been taken from me for my evil thoughts and actions. How could I live with the guilt. What use was I?

The police had questions. Where had I been? Where had 'he' been? And then later, the doctors with their diagnosis of SIDS, what is SIDS, I had never heard of SIDS. No one could even explain to me what SIDS was.

The next few days were a disturbing jumble of grief, guilt and trying to remember why I shouldn't step in front of a passing truck. Would I ever stop feeling numb? Would I ever have a purpose again? His family took over and in their odd unfeeling way, tried to take care of

things.

I arrived at the viewing and saw the fruits of their labor. The room was baby blue with gold gilding. The flowers were beautiful and so were 'his' sisters in their lovely gowns. My baby was in a small white coffin with blue velvet blankets and white silk embroidered pajamas that I didn't recognize. Posing in the coffin was a pristine white teddy bear which I had never seen. Somewhere in the back of my mind I wondered where the baby's 'Teddy' was. 'His' whole family stood around the coffin posing for pictures with the baby, laughing and carrying on as if they were at a summer family reunion. I longed to lift him from his poorly staged eternal prison and disappear out a side door, but instead I staggered outside, arms empty, weeping and realized that it was raining.

The next day we woke in the morning and prepared to go to the cemetery. I was still numb, my mind couldn't seem to focus anymore. I didn't know if I would ever feel purpose again. The sun was shining and I heard the lonely sound of a morning dove in the distance. "This is so unfair," I thought, "that this day should be so beautiful".

As I walked through rows and rows of silent graves, decorated with small white crosses and protected by a large marble angel whose wings were spread wide, in the green shaded space that would be my child's eternal resting place I saw the sky begin to darken. I was holding a small rose bud. 'They' had wanted me to lay the rose bud on the tiny casket that held my baby before they lowered it into the ground forever. I didn't think that I would be able to let go of that rose bud. And, I didn't know how I could ever say good bye. Then, suddenly, I saw the face of my older son looking expectantly at me. "Mommy, are you ok? They wouldn't let me come see you. I cried and cried, but they wouldn't let me come. Can I come with you now?"

Standing with my son, tears mixing with the rain that drummed against the tiny white casket, my heart softened. I looked at the small warm hand in mine and knew that we would be ok, my purpose for this moment, clear.

Publication Date: September 28th 2009