

Dancing in the Rain

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Into every life a little rain must fall.

The rain splashed down on the cold window pane, splashed down on my forehead against the glass. I'd fought with Susan, over something insignificant, but we'd both said such hurtful things. We could never be friends again after such calculated ugliness; or at least not friends the way we'd been before.

I had smelled the coming storm. The clouds had darkened and brooded outside the school windows and cast a grey light. The wind among the thrashing branches had brought the smell of soil and rain to me. I had gotten caught up in the whirlwind of fury and let all of my pent-up feelings about Susan get away from me.

The storm had passed. I was calmer now. But the rain continued to fall like the teardrops that had so recently run down my face. How could she have said such things to me and how could I have maddeningly returned them? I quietly slipped on my raincoat and just as quietly turned the doorknob to go outside.

"Where are you going, honey?" rang out from the kitchen.

"I'm goin' to Susan's, mom," I lied.

"Be home for supper. We're having pork chops and green beans."

"Okay." She knew I hated green beans. I started out the door.

"Alexandra?"

"Mom, I hate when you call me that."

"Alright, Alex," she said with dripping sarcasm.

"Yeah?"

"Don't forget your galoshes."

"Okay." She knew I hated galoshes too. I left them sitting on the porch, where I'd put them after school.

I flipped up the hood of my coat and headed out into the wet, hazy greyness. The rain was supposed to wash everything clean, but it hadn't. The gutters choked on the dirty water and the leaves and debris. The buildings weren't any cleaner; now the dirt ran in streaks down the sides.

The rain pattered against the slick surface of my coat. When I walked under trees the rain fell in giant comforting plops. I liked the sound the rain made on my coat and on the sidewalk. I sloshed through puddles, half wishing I'd brought my galoshes so mom

wouldn't know where I'd walked. My shoes would dry eventually.

I looked carefully around to make sure no one saw me at the dead end flanked by vacant lots and old, unoccupied houses. Nobody lived on that block so the danger of discovery was not great, but I had to be sure. I parted the long branches of the unkempt weeping willow and ducked nimbly through.

Most people thought the end of the street was bordered by an irrigation ditch, which was true. If anyone had known it was here, they'd forgotten the bridge that hooked a dead-end street with the back of Susan's family's ranch. The bridge more than halved the distance between our houses which aided us both in getting home faster than the conventional route when time was of the essence. It served as a meeting place when we could only disappear for a few minutes without our parents' notice. And it was my place to get away, to be alone.

It was just a series of planks, really, one after the other. No rails, because it wasn't more than a ten foot drop. The bridge seemed unrestricted to me, no rails, no boundaries, only the leafy trees and vines that formed a canopy above. Still the rain slipped through, softly dripping on me.

I pushed back my hood and turned my face up to the sky. I stood awhile, letting the water course down my face and neck. I could feel cold streams weaving through my hair to touch my shivering skin. Droplets found the gap between my neck and collar, and tributaries of rain seeped under my clothes.

Below the bridge, the water gushed violently in the ditch, and I watched it rush by until I felt dizzy. I sat down on the edge of the bridge, my legs swinging loosely. My head felt cold and heavy under all my wet hair. My lips quivered from the air that seemed colder than before. I stood and began to pace to keep myself warm. I didn't think to flip my hood back up; I was already wet.

The wind smelled so good and fresh. I threw my head back and spread my arms wide and thanked Nature for the rain she'd sent. I curtsied deeply and started to dance an old ballet routine from the lessons I'd had years ago. The steps came back to me sketchily and I improvised what I could not remember.

And then in my reverie, a dark figure appeared, seeming to melt away from the grey mist beyond the bridge, and joined in my dance. I stopped short.

"Who are you? How did you find this place?" I said. Had Susan told someone about the bridge?

"Who are you?" the blue-jean clad figure countered.

"I asked first."

"I'm Eric Ward. My parents just bought the Jarvis ranch." The ranch adjacent to Susan's.

"Alex Benefield. How did you find this place?"

"I found it a few days ago, when we first moved in. I was exploring."

"Oh."

"Not many people come here, do they?"

"No. Just me and Susan."

"To dance in the rain?" he said with a smile.

I smiled back in spite of myself. I felt anxious that someone else had discovered my private place. "Yes," I said and laughed a little foolishly.

We stood a moment, measuring one another, the rain dripping off our noses and clothes. I looked up when the rain began to pour harder. The sky had darkened even more.

"I guess I'd better get home," I said, remembering mom's admonitions.

"Me too," Eric said.

I turned to go and then turned back. "Eric?"

"Yeah?"

"You won't tell anyone, um, about this bridge, will you?"

"I won't tell." And for some reason, I believed this person that I didn't even know. Maybe he understood that the bridge was a private place and didn't belong to just anybody who wanted it. "I won't tell," he continued, "as long as I can come here whenever I want."

I nodded. It was a fair price to keep my bridge a secret.

The rain pelted against me as I ran home. I recklessly splashed through mud puddles, enjoying the shock of cold water against my chilled skin. The wind whipped at my long hair but most of it lay plastered to my head. The door opened as I clambered up the porch steps. I arrived breathless and soaking in the doorway of my house where mom stood, arms akimbo.

"Alexandra, what have you been doing? You're soaked to the skin. You're going to catch cold. How did you get so wet?"

"I was dancing in the rain."