

"The Lifetime of a Raindrop"
Holly Hansen

The radio is humming in the kitchen, too far away to hear the words being spoken. The sound wafts from the open door and makes its way through the living room. I stare at the ceiling from the floor, listening to the murmurs. I like the cadence of voices more than the words themselves. Words are meaningless. We say things that we don't mean, and then we hurt people. Words are insincere.

The room is swathed in colors. Evening sun swoops in through the windows like flocks of birds. There are dozens of light catchers hanging in the windows, and they put the sunlight through some sort of beautiful metamorphosis. The glass beads live for this moment: to do that which they were created for. They have a purpose. A lot of things have a purpose. A raindrop prepares itself up in the clouds for an entire lifetime before it finally descends to earth; an entire lifetime spent solely to fall and to shatter.

I could hear the front door opening. The footsteps coming from the hall had a familiar weight on the floorboards. My view of the ceiling was interrupted when his face came into my vision, hovering above me. For a moment, he hesitated before lying next to me on the floor. A sigh emanated from his lips, telling me a story of work that day. I moved my head so I could see his profile. The dark, unkempt stubble on his jaw, the purplish shadows under his eyes. The ripples on his forehead certainly weren't there before.

"I'm sorry," I said.

He turned his head and looked at me questioningly, but I could tell he knew what I was talking about. He knew what I had done to him. I put those wrinkles on his forehead, the shadows under his eyes. But it was his fault for staying with me.

"Nothing to be sorry for," he murmured and returned his gaze back to ceiling. I always liked his voice. It was reverent, like a prayer. The way he spoke was respectful, acknowledging that I was a person just like him. I always tried my best to listen to what he would say, but the lull

of his voice was hard not to notice. He didn't mind when I wouldn't listen, though. Everyone would tell me I was a horrible listener; that I was so caught up in my own little world I couldn't focus on what's really there. I always assumed they were right. But he would tell me that I was a good listener. I just listened for different things. He would tell me that I heard things that no one else will ever be able to hear.

I liked waking up and seeing his face on the pillow next to mine. Before we got married, I used to scream at night because I felt so alone. I didn't mind being alone during the day, but when darkness came, my mind would be filled with terrible things and I would wish for someone to be beside me. There were nights when he would get up to go the bathroom, and I would wake up screaming for him because I felt so alone. He always came back, though. He would whisper nice things to me. He would just say meaningless things until I fell asleep again. Sometimes, he would think I wasn't listening, and he'd say some things he'd never tell me if he thought I was listening.

"You crept up on me," he would say, brushing the hair out of my face. His dark eyes would reflect the moonlight coming from the window. "A wild girl, sitting on a park bench with a balloon tied around her wrist. My parents told me not to marry you. They said you weren't right in the head. I thought I could make you better." He would sigh heavily and look away. "But I guess I was wrong."

He did make me better, though. I hardly ever screamed at night, and I was happy. I was happy the day we moved into this tiny house, littered with mismatching furniture and dusty smells. We painted the walls with beautiful murals. I would sit at the window in the evening and watch the diamond on my finger make rainbows in the light. When he noticed this, he strung light catchers in all the windows and we would lie on the floor in the evening. "I'll love you forever," he would say. And we'd look over at each other and smile, because we were so happy. We didn't do those kinds of things so much as time went on, though. His smiles became fragmented, only half of what they used to be. But I was still happy. I was happy because he was there.

I like the cadence of voices more than the words themselves. Words are meaningless. We say things that we don't mean, and then we hurt people. Words are insincere. He said he'd love me forever, but he's gone now. I woke up one morning and he wasn't there. I screamed because I felt so alone. I expected him to come back into the room and whisper that everything was fine. But I screamed and I screamed, and he wouldn't come back. I heard the doorbell ring, and I ran through the house to the door in my socks and underwear, hoping it was him.

The men at the door told me that he was dead. They held out a piece of paper with his handwriting on it:

"I thought I could fix you. I ruined myself instead. I'm sorry.

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