

A RAINY DAY

I was wearing rubber boots and a slicker. And I splashed in every puddle on the way home. I wasn't afraid of getting sick. When I got home, I changed my clothes. My mother made us hot chocolate. That warmed my insides. I was prepared for a lot worse weather. But this was enough of a challenge for now. It was late October. And I was getting used to being back in school. My sickness was a faint memory. And I had no more dark eternal nights.

There was disaster on the horizon. As sure as the cock crowed at the break of day, I knew it. But I couldn't let it bother me. That was all part of life.

I was starting to adjust to the balance in my experience. Things had been totally out of control for so long. I had felt that one little upset would provoke a relapse. I needed to accept these minor tragedies so that I could adapt to the vibrancy of life.

Rainy days meant a whole set of new rules. They were often marked by a sense of regret. A picnic might have to wait. Or we might get called in from playing. Our parents didn't want us to get wet. The rain could also make simple tasks into chore. We couldn't get a firm grip on a hammer. Or we'd slip and slide on the ground as we tried to catch our footing. A particularly bad storm would flood the creeks. Bridges would get knocked out. Vehicles would get stuck in the mud.

I tried not to think about the rain in that way. If I was prepared, I could enjoy the lovely exuberance. I loved the idea of a massive river pouring down on me. My raincoat would protect me. I had watched tourists at Niagara falls catch an intimate glimpse of the falling waters while they sported long rain coats. I would one day take this excursion. But for now I would satisfy myself with a massive rain.

I was sitting in the kitchen. At this point, there was only a light rain outside. It created a visible pinprick pattern on the window. It reminded me of the cosmic arrangement of the stars. The distant lights played among each other to convey a message about the universe. I stared at the form of these drops and tried to make sense of the revelation.

I was being given the opportunity to peer into the inner-working of creation. I needed to comprehend this lesson. My personal awareness encompassed only a tiny part of this elaborate design. The ancients spoke to the sky in naming of the constellation. I read this grand volume as if I was turning the pages of a sacred text. There was something entirely chilling as I watched from the threshold of this outer space. This was much greater than seeing my place within the whole order of things. I was observing the forces of the universe from the creator's perspective.

As the rain became greater, it blurred this vision. I did what I could to try to remember what I had seen. I wanted to know more. The full nature of this understanding remained out of my grasp. My life blended back into the scheme of things. And I couldn't retain all aspects of this revelation. I could witness great things, but I didn't feel born for greatness. I wasn't a Caesar. I didn't have the acuity of a Galileo. I became enchanted with local geometries.

When the rain subsided for good, there were still traces of its magnificence. Spacious puddles worked their way up and down the path to the road. The plants were covered by wet kisses. And the air had that sharpness that intensified the vitality of life. I went outside and smelled the lovely bouquet.

I had initiated a temporary compromise with these ominous forces. Since my recovery, I

was learning to navigate my way through treacherous waters. I was unsure where I fit in the overall map. I just made my way forward.

On some really nasty days, I wasn't at all prepared for rain. It had started out as a beautiful morning. I rose to greet the day. Even my walk to school was a joy. While I was in class, the dark clouds collected around us. I had no time to adjust. I thought that I could sneak between the raindrops. But it only became worse as I ran home.

I shook off the rain as it got in my hair. It was only a dousing. I had hardly left the school yard when I realized that there was no way that I was going to make it home dry. It was too late to turn back. I couldn't seek cover. But I continued running.

My clothes started to get wet. But they weren't completely soaked. So they offered a some protection against the weather. And my shoes were all right. There was a little mud on them. I could clean that when I made it home. I kept going.

The rain was only coming down in spurts. I kept up my pace. I felt a little lucky that I was on the tracks. It didn't seem quite as bad. I just had to make sure that I didn't slip. I never felt so fleet as now.

There was something entirely mythic in my struggle. And it became even more epic since I had accepted the challenge to make it home unscathed. I obviously thought of myself as uniquely blessed. I could confront the storm-giver on his terms. I refused to accept a surface understanding of the inclemency. He was doing what he could to disrupt my solace. I would have none of it.

He resented my impetuosity. Others would simply accept their fate. I wanted to penetrate the inner chambers of Olympus. I was skulking around in the hopes of unmasking his majesty. I wanted to learn his secrets. I was rivaling the gods. No master would allow his subjects such leeway. He was ready to punish me immediately.

Under different circumstances, a sympathetic Diana would be pleading my case on high. But I had uttered blasphemy against the lot of them. Even she would pull back her powerful bow to take me down. Indeed, these raindrops had a way of piercing my being. They became more and more incessant. No god could take my pleas to heart. I had deserved the terrible judgement.

There was a sense of deep regret that pervaded me. I did not slow my pace. But I felt dejected. I had run up against an opponent too formidable to oppose. He had soaked me to the bone. And his allies taunted me. I still wouldn't back down. He couldn't do a thing to me inside.

At that moment a massive lightning bolt raged down upon the earth, and the air exploded with a stupendous crack of thunder. This was his answer. But I did not take it to heart. Let him destroy the house. He would never get my soul.

I found a towel and dried off. I changed my clothes. My skin felt all fresh. I found comfort indoors. Outside, the storm continued its madness. The master had lost his charge, and he was expressing his upset. I delighted in my independence.

"Come, and get me!"

I slept soundly. I hope that the pursuit would end with the morning light.

When I awoke the next day, the noisy activity of my dream suddenly came to halt. I was in a world of gloomy haze. The darkness of the overcast skies cast a pallor over the morning. I did what I could to motivate myself. I didn't want to get out of bed. I wanted to get deep into the

dream of the previous night.

There was a leaden feel to the day. It weighed me down as I made my way to school. There were spurts of rain. Then it would temporarily subside. This was the punishment for my pride. I needed to know who was boss. I could learn to love the rain.

The rain brought with it a promise to get rid of all that afflicted us. Its constant flow was our baptismal cleansing. The filth that impeded our progress was washed away by the incessant rains. The luscious stream was a gift from above. It trickled down on us and brought us to life. Without these waters, we remained in our inert state. The rain gave movement to the world.

The rain brought us back to our origins. It broke things down to their elemental form. It infected us with desire. We could not control ourselves beneath its outpouring. We ran wild in the spray. We returned to the mud. We became part of the earth.

The earth took the impressions of water and recorded its embrace with the heavens. Everywhere the rain marked the ground. The currents carved out pathways to express their intent. The rain spoke to the land. It made the soil feel its rich power to make things grow. The rain renewed itself again and again.

These waters spoke a language. They expressed separation and coming together. They taught us how to belong. They eroded the temporary and made constant the eternal. The rain was our connection to paradise.

When man was cast out of the garden, the rains never stopped. He found his existence in these waters. He learned how to survive. The rains entangled vegetation. They brought forth the crazy abundance of plants. Life reached deep into the ground and took hold.

Here was a purity that could never stand apart from itself. The rain gave the body its reality. It could not observe the world from afar. The rain mixed everything together.

The rain grew torrential. It knew nothing else but rain. Nothing could not avoid this omnipresence. It was raining everywhere in the world!

The heavens let loose their fury. The water poured down without any restraint. The mighty towers were crushed by the interminable downpour. The world could not hold out against the rain's insistence.

Nothing could slow the rains. They offered their majestic edict. The watery truth spoke to their might. Who dared to question their authority? The accorded the rains their rightful place. Everything was water!

Even the desert was only absence of rain. Its extreme doubt made it exempt from this lovely fecundity. It envied the rainforest's wealth. The desert begged for a tempest.

I had suffered from the lack of rain. My thirst worked its way down my throat. I felt its sharp pain. It shook me from the inside. I was cut off from my sustenance. I begged for rescue. My saving grace would be a storm that would fill me with its sweetness.

I raised my hands to the sky. I pulled down the clouds. The rain pelted the ground. It refreshed the arid land. It turned the desert into a raging sea. I hoped the rain would never stop.

The rain offered me the needed relief. When I was sick, I could not have imagined getting all soaked. But now it only excited me. I wasn't afraid to immerse myself in the water. I loved being all wet. Fortunately, I could come inside and warm up.

The river had been inspired by this tumult. In its depths, it found even more power. The waters were triumphant. The drowner had been lured by the attraction of the river. She only

wanted more and this made her go out of her depth. She could no longer control her desire. It overcame with its fragrant appeal. She could have found rescue. But she stayed down just a little too long.

I had felt all the terrible consequences of being submerged too deep. The waters were too much for me. I lost control only because I wanted to control more. I embraced the potent seduction offered by the whirling currents.

The deluge gave the world all the torment that resulted from too great an embrace of the tantalizing waters. Its eventual goal was to end the reign of a people overcome by their pride. How could a flood overtake all the earth? This was a place that had come from the waters, and it was returning to its origins.

Water had a uniformity to its movement. Once the power took hold, the wave would travel endlessly. The liquid flow offered none of the resistance of solid matter. The intent was propagated throughout. A great idea became even greater. The waters spoke of nothing but this grand plan. If only man could speak with such authority. A Neptune used these waters to his advantage. His cantankerous moments resulted in storms. He spread his moodiness through the great waves. He had no concern for those who suffered under his onslaught. When the sea was evil, it was merciless. Men aspired after this majesty. But they feared its merciless application.

The wild animals of the seas fed off the restless energy of the oceans. But none could harness anything close to its full power. As the waters extended over all the earth, the dominion had no rival. It claimed every bit of dry land. t

Where man had first marveled at the intensity, now there was nothing but terror. He could not fight against a ruthlessness that had no limits. The deluge was rigid in its assertiveness.

The swirling currents twirled around and around as they built up steam. Massive waves rolled across the planet. Nothing could slow the motion. There was no hesitation. Each part combined with every other part until the mass was gigantic. The greatness folded into itself. It engulfed the heavens. There would be no point of escape. The waters rolled over themselves as they built up greater and greater onrushing streams.

The earth reverberated with the rhythms of great ocean. The gods would never be able to contain these forces. There was a chaos that resisted the divine whims. Out of these enfolding vectors, the watery planet achieved a new identity. This was beyond the petty jealousies of Olympus. This was a jubilation for the ages.

In contemplating this flood, I understood the cruelty of the waters. But I could not help my admiration. That was the same wonder that had attracted me to the river. I could see how all of this connected. Was the gentleness of our nature due to our efforts to strike out against the liquid harshness? Or were we simply applying our will in a concerted fashion? We could not easily escape our guilt. The river reminded us of how we had tried to harness the uncontrollable. Just as we seemed to make peace with the waters, another flood would rage. There could be no flow without this fury. This was how the movement got going.

I wanted to fight back against this monstrous fate. How had I endorsed the contentiousness of the oceans? I needed to emerge from the river. I couldn't let myself drown.

The flood spared no one. I hated to contemplate such tyranny. For all my fear, I marveled at the unity expressed in its exuberant declaration. I felt nauseous. I was truly sea-sick!

The deluge had clued me in to the grotesque nature of our pride. The waters were all about this self-admiration. And this indulgence only led to self-destruction. It was so confusing. There was a purity in the ocean. It spoke with one voice. But the voice would not allow for any other sounds. I was becoming silenced by the experience. I needed to scream out.

My words were wet with intent. The waves turned inside of me. I had come from the sea. It had nearly destroyed me. But I still wanted to descend into its depths. Poseidon had cursed me for good. I did not want to be his watery bride. I needed to remain on dry land. I valued what the deluge had left behind.

I contemplated a light rain. It would tease me with its promise. I would want more. But all that it did was mist. Everything at a distance was covered in a fog. This was all uncertainty.

I had thought about the great waters. They had such appeal for me. But when I explored their motives, I saw nothing but cruelty. This was not pleasant. I wanted to escape myself. I hated my desires.

The light sprinkle was just enough. It cooled me down. But it did not make me cold. I immersed myself in its constancy. It allowed me to remain on solid ground. It did not make impetuous puddles everywhere. It enveloped the world in a haze. s

I loved how the rain transformed my vision. It was like a stained-glass image. There were so many facets to the reflection. I could see what I truly desired. But it was so transitory. My satisfaction was just outside my grasp.

I could live with this compromise. Its gestures were almost juvenile. It wanted to let loose. But it was afraid of what might result. So we could only taste the storm. The great torrent held back.

I was fine with this limited expression. I had thought about the rancorous passion of the great storm. The hesitancy was pleasant. It could sustain me. How would the world ever allow such a balance? It could last temporarily, but the battle would again assert itself. The sun would beat down on oppressive days. And the ugly storms would make their bluster known.

It was as if I was being kissed by heaven. Each gentle caress prepared me for the pledge of love. A massive downpour would cheat this surreptitiousness. I didn't want to destroy this tenderness with a forward advance. I accepted the assurance as sufficient. That would be enough for me.

The soft touch was so wavering. I could only imagine that I would eventually be taken advantage of. I didn't have an umbrella. I didn't mind the occasional rain drops. But I didn't want to get all wet. I was being seduced by the uncertainty. It made me let down my guard. I wanted to stay outside and revel in the experience.

I had made all this effort just to sustain this feeling. I was giving the benefit of the doubt to a lover who had deserted me before. I had experienced nasty winds, inclement cloudbursts, and incredible blizzards. Why would the same forces ever restrain themselves? I had accommodated myself to these forces. Was I being shown any mercy?

It happened to me every time. I would let the weather do its work. And it would eventually do me in. My illness had been of the same nature. I had embraced the liveliness of the river. And its wonder infected me. No wonder I was always holding back. I didn't want to suffer from the effects of some outside force. Bundling up was never enough. The haughty wind would do it utmost to make me suffer. It would strip through my clothes and chill me to the

bone.

I was not giving up. I would not let mistrust govern my actions. If the friendliness of the moment was overwhelming, so be it. The rains had not violated our agreement. So I accepted its gift. I was glad that I could rejoice in something so simple.

When I returned home, I felt gratified. My skin tingled. I was elated. I had given of myself and received ample reward for my efforts. There was no reason to believe that I had been betrayed. If tomorrow was subject to a heavy downpour, so be it. I could enjoy the present and do my best to make it last. I would need such a victory for what would follow. I was being spared, and I knew it. I had entered into such a fragile accord. My partner was a lot more powerful than I. But I had held my own.

The rain showers brought the flowers with them. How could I relate this splendor to the nasty torrent that could easily uproot any plant? I did my best to comprehend the apex of the natural world as it confronted the immense power of a physical outburst. The flowers were sustained by the rains from heaven. They were made stronger by the radiant sunlight. But too much of a good thing would rot the essence of these showy creatures. Their flamboyance was without precedent. A field full of wildflowers was dizzying. I would follow the colors all around as they spun me in place. I only wanted to run free in the field.

The flowers took the vibrant magic of a spring breeze and contained it in their lively movement. If they could, they would just walk off in the field. Thus, their lofty intent was embodied in their spry form. They were made to bounce along in the wind. This was how they sustained life.

I loved the cycle of rebirth that the flowers implied. They responded to the changes of climate. They used their seeds to renew their mission. They loved their connection to the earth. The flowers found a continuity that gave meaning to the chemistry of the planet. The inorganic came to life in the whispers of living forms. And the rich hues taught the artist that the mix of color proceeded from a grasp of the chemical makeup of the world. This was the hidden architecture that documented the earth's history. Each minute shift indicated the dialogue that the plants had with the surrounding environment. These changes portrayed how the roots enable the depths of the planet to speak. The components were broken down and recombined. The aspirations were greater than any stone edifice. The flowers beckoned to heaven.

I understood a more fundamental harmony in the legacy of the flowers. The flowers served as a link between the arrangement of the heavenly bodies and the structure of the earth. More than the simple connection to the sun, the flowers observed the sense of longing embodied complementary orbits of the different galaxies. The intricate arrangement of the flower's parts reflected a meditation on the unity of each stellar system. The composition of the earth's core was a response to the planet's interaction with the rest of space. The flowers took this past and related it to a future that was projected by the gesture towards the heavens. This went way beyond the sun. That gave the flower its personality.

I wanted to discover what allowed the flower to observe a more extensive vision of the universe. It could only study the cosmos from its fixed vantage point. But it reached out into the heavens and tried to comprehend the placement of each star in the larger network. In so doing, it was able to characterize its own rootedness in a more profound fashion.

I came to recognize the foundation of my own place on the earth. I walked in the field

and was inspired by the freedom of the wind-blown meadow. I needed to race faster than the breeze. The molten core of the planet demonstrated the need to contain the pulsating energy of the universe.

There was a challenge issued by the earth to the rest of creation. It was voiced in the boldness of the flowers. They made the plea instantaneous. It was the explosion of color that emanated from the flower. This was more shocking than any firecracker. Nothing artificial could attain this combination. It represented this understanding of the orbits within the cosmos.

The gravitational pull of the earth concentrated these currents of energy that ran through the constellations. It folded its power back into the folds of time that encircled the present. Each layer was a testament to a further level of recognition and understanding. I could hold a flower in my hand and understand this great mystery. I was ready to take a journey that was propelled by my race across the field of wildflowers.

The rainy season gave way to colder weather. At that point, it was no longer desirable to get all wet. I still did what I could to fight it. When things got really bad, the weather would bite right through me. I would be facing ten foot snow drifts. I never became lost in the snow. But it was too much to abide.

At its worst, I felt that there was no form of escape. Summertime faded permanently from view. There would never be a time when I could completely avoid this frozen terror. I felt so isolated as the wind whipped up the snow and blew it towards me. It shook me all over. I did what I could to resist. But day after day of the same extremes wore me down. I lost my nerve. I would hide under the covers in order to eke out another sliver of heat. Then I would be face to face again with the blizzard. I imagined that my bed was in a field of snow. I would escape only to get thrown right back in it.

My body did what it could to counteract the continual effects of the weather. I had grown more resistant to the freeze. I did what I could to ward off disease. But a slight cough would develop into a chest cold. I would again be down for the count. My fever would knock me out. I had been through so much worse so I did what I could to bounce back. I relished the extra rest that the flu gave me. When I got better, I would have to jump up and throw myself back into the absurdity.

It was another snowy day. I could barely get my footing as I worked my way towards school. The railway tracks hardly offered their familiar respite. I was trudging ahead with such effort. I needed wings to fly over this. But I was getting buried deeper. Would there be no deliverance?

My pace was constant. I applied my will as I pushed forward. It didn't seem enough. I felt as if I was going nowhere. I hadn't lost my sense of direction. I could still see the familiar trees. But they were just sitting there in front of me. I seemed to be getting no closer.

What was the white deliverance? I wanted the snow to take me away. I closed my eyes. The whiteness became brighter and brighter until the snow disappeared. I was in a wonderland. I could feel the wondrous heat. My eyes were heavy. I could feel sleep coming over me.

What was I doing? I was still deep in a drift. I was becoming overcome with a snow mirage. It had lulled me into delirium. I needed to make it home.

I clawed my way through the snow bank. It countered my every movement. I didn't have enough to get me any further. I wasn't going to be left out here by myself. But I had little energy

left. I wanted someone to pluck me up and just drop me inside my bed. Instead, I was getting buried out here. I couldn't give up. I couldn't let the snow have the better of me.

I was heading through waves of snow. I would submerge only to come up from air. I was bobbing back and forth. I had found a rhythm. Then I would get caught in a rough patch. I was skidding on the slippery snow. I couldn't get me traction. I did my best to balance. I remained on my feet.

The lights of the house were just ahead. But the route still seemed interminable. I pulled the house towards me. I maintained my progress. Little by little, I closed in on my destination.

I could hardly draw much comfort from my victory. I would be back in the middle of the same nastiness. And here would be day after day of the same thing. Even as the snows finally melted for good, it was difficult to find much consolation in the result. I would have more years of the same thing. I wanted to reach a city where snow ploughs could guide my way. I was not made to battle the elements. I needed to hold on to spring with more vigor than ever. Did my body still have enough left?

Our house always felt too crowded. I couldn't wait until I was old enough to escape this feeling of confinement. If I had a disagreement with one of my sisters, the experience seemed to linger for the rest of the day. There was nowhere to get away. I took a deeper comfort in my struggles with the weather since they had nothing to do with anyone else. Even if I did come into a busy house, I was affirming my independence by the immediacy of my triumph. It has nothing to do with anyone else.

On the other hand, I was proud to be part of such a big family. It may have been too much for my mother, but we all seemed to hold it together. I should have never felt afraid among this boisterous group. They did their best to look out for me. I was drifting away. Too much had happened to me.

I found comfort in all their company. And they tried to be encouraging. Sometimes, Elizabeth felt that it was her duty to make up for my mother's laxness. She had hardly been appointed for the task. Anyone else could do just as well. But that never stopped her. Her stubbornness made the house doubly oppressive. But I dealt with it. I had the support of everyone else.

I had already recognized Liz's interference; however it clearly brought home the point for me that I couldn't sustain myself in this environment. I would need some kind of radical break from my family. Danny's restlessness served as an example for all of us. We didn't have to continue the way that we had been. We could get out once and for all.

Once Danny had graduated, he would be ready finally to spread his wings. It wasn't as if he had a lot of opportunities. But there wasn't much for him here. He couldn't lead the sedentary lifestyle like John. He wanted something else for his life. And when he had made his decision, he wasn't going to look back.

He teased me, "Aren't you tired of getting wet all the time?"

He knew that I was.

"Don't tell me that you're heading off to the desert. You'll die of thirst."

"I'll bring a big canteen. It'll take care of me.":

"For a day or so."

"I can take little gulps."

"That doesn't sound like you," I got him back.

I imagined Danny threading himself across the desert. They would have to send out a search party for him. I wanted to get to him before he got lost. I would be lost without him.

He went out to play with Bobby. Bobby had been restless up to that moment. He became all playful when Danny caught up with him. This was one of my favorite moments on the farm.

As spring made itself known, I was reminded how we were coming to the end of the school year. Danny had already made noises about his intent. Tom had been committed to going to Montreal. But he couldn't get up the nerve to do it on his own. In a few months, he would have no excuse. And there would be nothing that could stop him. He and Danny were more than ready. Neither of them had clear plans. They were going to let things come as they may. I don't think that I could have headed off without a clear direction. But I wished both of them the best.

Bobby had been barking all day long. He could sense that something was wrong. The day was finally upon us. Danny would be leaving tomorrow. Bobby would no longer have his pal. The dog could sense that something was not right. The very thought of their separation hit me hard. I felt that wry twinge.

I watched Bobby jump up and down. I couldn't get out there and quiet him down. Only Danny knew that secret.

When the day arrived, Tom and Danny had their bags packed early. When I went downstairs, they were just finishing breakfast. My father was going to take them to the train. It was a fair day. They deserved a little glory for their send off. We were all in tears. I didn't want Danny to go.

"I'll be back soon, pal. Make sure that you write me."

"And you're going to write me back."

"I'll write you back."

I didn't believe him. He would get too caught up in the deep aspects of living. I just needed his assurance.

Tom gave me a big hug.

"I'll beat back the monsters before they make it here to threaten you!"

"That's just what I need. A hero!"

He was like a big teddy bear. He was the eyes and ears of the farm. We would have to carry on without him.

As the car rumbled down the gravel road, I had trouble holding myself together. The beauty of the day was giving way to cloudiness. Bobby let out a wail as they turned onto the main road and finally disappeared. He understood what was going on.

I heard the lightning crackle. A crow cawed. I saw a lightning flash. I shivered. It grew much darker. Then the rain came down. Nothing could restrain the feeling. My tears had already subsided. I was witnessing a more solemn response. Tom and Danny would survive. But there was so much that remained unknown. They anticipated the world that awaited me. But I would still have time.

I needed to find joy in the present. I had my health. I had survived a long year. I would have to make up for the loss of two of our members. The house would need to continue on. I could lend my help where it was needed.

My mother was facing a deeper truth. She was giving a part of herself to the world. She

had taught her sons well. They still had a long ways to go. They would have to take shelter from far worse storms.

The thunder made the house shake. We had not seen such a storm in a while. I assumed that the boys were already safe. My father would soon be returning home. He had offered them his blessing. But he would be very reserved in his send off. He wanted his sons to be strong. There was enough in the world to bring them down. They needed their constancy. They couldn't become weak.

He had already tamed the wild city. He gave the boys a few tips. But he didn't want to feel as if he was ministering fatherly advice. They were already beyond that point. They needed to keep their eyes open and their wits sharp. It wasn't a time for feeling sorry for themselves or thinking that they were damned in their task ahead.

Each one could look out for the other. There were so many excesses in the city that could distract a young man. If the boys found work and applied themselves, they could have the prosperous life that they deserved. Times were tough. Not everyone was able to find their dream. The city could eat a person alive. They would be face to face with the forlorn. Once a person gave up hope, there was no blessing to be offered by a spring rain. The grime would eat you alive. I was too young to contemplate such a fate for myself. I only wished that Tom and Danny could hold on.

By the time that my father arrived home, the worst of the storm had passed. The house was a little less crowded. But we were still all bunched in here. It was driving me crazy. I wanted to go outside.

The rain had made the air fresh. There was a lovely feeling all around. It felt untouched. It was no longer so humid. The sun came out. But it was not too hot.

I kept walking until the house was distant from me. They were all inside. I was ready to hit the road. I wondered what it would be like to keep walking along the tracks. What would be my eventual destination. I had watched legions of men ride the rails. Times were indeed desperate. My brothers had left school with all the promise of the new world. But the city was overstocked with these young lads who hoped that they could get by on a prayer. The dark city nights crushed their dreams. All the desperation only made the grit more corrosive.

It only took a little while before the excitement would wear off. No rain could wash off the stains left on the soul. I didn't want my brothers to succumb to the city's ills. But what did they have to sustain them? They were both hard workers. They had proven that on the farm. They were not coddled by the banker's hours. They would be up before dawn ready to effect their plans. But the city wasn't so yielding. It knew how to break young men. My brothers would get caught up in this bizarre logic. It would be difficult to learn a different approach.

Life on the farm followed clear cycles. A man could measure himself against the lessons of the seasons. Sure, it had its own cruelty. But it was never a fickle lover. Even if a bad crop n could wipe a man out, he might be able to hang on if his neighbors lent a hand. There was nothing like that in the city. Wayward hands quickly reached into a man's pocket and picked whatever good luck that he had. My brothers needed to be wary of such bad omens.

For all my concern, I needed to continue on with my life. Danny and Tom were here in spirit. But they had made their getaway. It made me feel more confident about myself. I knew that my own strength was real. I could let myself become caught up in my imagination. I needed

to maintain my good health. It was going to be a long battle before I was out of here for good.

When I got back in the house, I could hear Elizabeth sternly lecturing Violet. Violet simply looked out the window and ignored her older sister. Liz wasn't all that sympathetic. She had all my mother's worst qualities, and very little of her understanding. I didn't want to think badly of any of my family members. In many ways, it wasn't Liz's fault. She tried to do her best. She only reminded me why I found Meg so difficult to endure.

I couldn't take all this clatter. The racket seemed louder than a thunder clap. It was fortunate on beautiful days that I could escape this place. I could take a book with me and find refuge under a shady oak. They were in the midst of baking. And there were more than too many cooks in the kitchen. I hadn't found a place early on so I was the odd girl left out. That didn't bother me in the least. I knew that no one would be upstairs. So I rushed up there to be by myself. I contemplated a time when there would be no one else up here. The room would still echo faintly with our creaking. But the muffle would become so inaudible that it would reinforce our absence. I listened closely for what the room might tell me. It was keeping its secrets to itself. The book was out on my brothers. They had carried the magic with them.

John had made a home for himself in the barn. So he could deal with the silliness that went on in the house. Scott and Jimmy were too young to let it get to them. I could savor moments like this. No one would come looking for me. I wasn't averse to helping. Many days, I would be the first one in the kitchen. I would grab the broom and start working. Today, was different. I was no longer sad. My sadness had developed into a more profound inquiry about my state. I could hear the raindrops on the roof. The calm had been temporary. I was glad to be inside. I was warm and pensive. That suited me just fine.