

ARTS

The Decree Presents Short Fiction by Four Graduating Seniors

FICTION

Every Time It Rains

By Vanessa Gore

At 8:00 am I watched the bright, sunshine yellow trucks back into the driveway. They were as bright as the Wal-Mart smiley face, but they only brought tears to my eyes. They were moving trucks and they had come to take my best friend away. It was 11:02 before I got up enough courage to meander my way towards the depressing sight. It was the Friday after school let out for summer vacation and two weeks before my 12th birthday. I knew that it was going to be the last time that Jamie and I would be friends the way that we knew it.

I shoved my hands into the pockets of my favorite cut off jeans; they were worn and faded, and at that perfect stage: broken in and comfortable. I shuffle kicked my way over to the scraggly scrub oak that straddled the property lines. I climbed up to the sixth limb, and stared in the window. This was the tree that I always sat in when I was waiting for Jamie to come out. I could see into her window, so I knew when she was on her way down. Whenever she got grounded, I would climb the tree, and we would use dry erase boards to write back and forth to each other. When her parents found out about that, they took her board, so we made up symbols with our hands, and even learned some sign language. Now I sat there alone and watched as the movers, in their slate blue overalls, made their way to the empty dresser across the room. One of them saw me and made a friendly gesture of tipping a hat. I replied with a half-hearted smile, just because my parents had taught me that it was rude not to respond. Suddenly I heard a chipper voice from underneath me.

"Bonjour! That's French for hello," Jamie chimed in her intelligent voice.

"I know. I saw 'Beauty and the Beast' too."

"Are you going to sit in that tree all day, or do you want to walk to the corner store with me?"

Her voice always sounded like that of a grown woman. She never used slang, never cut off the endings of words, and never left out letters in the middle of words. On the other hand, I was born and raised in the Texas south and did all those things.

"I reckon," I said.

I stepped down to the third branch and jumped. My hands and feet hit the sun-scorched and dusty Texas desert. I stood back up, slapped my hands together, and shoved them in my pockets, and we started our stroll toward the store.

"Day's the day, huh?"

"Yes, it is. I can't believe it. I'm so excited. I've never been out of the country."

We lived in New Braunfels, Texas, where the population was 27,334. It was founded as a German colony in 1842. It was about forty-five minutes from San Antonio, which was where Jamie's dad worked. In fact almost everybody who lived in New Braunfels worked in San Antonio, except for my folks, who own their own Ma and Pa restaurant. Jamie's dad was a marketing advertiser for some big company in San Antonio. The corporate office had heard so much about his accomplishments that they offered him a chance to work directly with them over in England. This promotion offered a very nice raise and yearly trips to France, Italy, and other places, on the company, of course. On top of that they gave him a four week paid vacation to tour Europe and "Get to know the place" before they moved in.

I had never seen Jamie so excited in all the time that I had known her. Every time she said the words "Europe," "move," "travel," or "queen," her eyes lit up like a burner on a gas stove. She blabbed on about how "Europe was going to be her backyard" and how she was going to get to see London, and Big Ben, and Buckingham Palace.

"I'm even going to visit the Eiffel in Grand Paris, and ski the Swiss Alps and see all the castles of Scotland and Ireland." The only castle I had ever seen was the one that Jamie and I made at the beach last Fourth of July. We won second place in that contest.

"My father said our house is like a countryside estate, with three stories!"

"Three, wow."

"Yes, and did you know that they drive on the left side of the road over there? My father said that he'll buy me a scooter to ride. Everyone rides a scooter over there."

I knew she was using the British term for a Moped, but I couldn't help but smile to myself as I thought of all these British people pushing their way through the streets on a child's play toy. It brought me comfort to think of them as less than perfect.

She continued her stories and planned adventures until we rounded the corner and headed inside Pete's convenience mart. It looked like a broken down, four-by-four-inch wreck on the outside. What purple paint was still there was faded from the Texas sun; the two gas pumps that rested in front of the building were the old fashioned kind, you know, the kind without the card swipe, the ones you still had to go inside to pay for. The E was missing from Pete, and the

R in mart was all but gone. The outside didn't matter much once you stepped inside. It was an entire mall all in one building. Old Pete had everything. He had clothes and hats and grocery aisles that seemed to go on for miles. He had a small eating area, and an Icee machine, which is where Jamie and I spent half our time and over half our allowance on during the summer. It even had indoor bathrooms. Most passersby would look at the place and say it was just like any other convenience store, but the locals knew that it was a lot more than that. It represented tradition, and the small friendly town ideal. He had owned that shop for thirty-five years. We all knew Pete, and Pete knew all of us.

"Morning there, young ladies" Pete said with his cigar still suck in the corner of his mouth. "What brings ya'll out this way on this dry, blisterin' day?"

"Cleaning solution, sir. My mother is trying to get some last-minute chores done before we head to the airport."

"Oh yeah, that's right, ya'll are heading out today, ain't ya? Well, best of luck to ya, missy. You won't forget old Uncle Petey, will ya?" He gave her a wink and handed her a key chain that read, "I got this at Pete's in New Braunfels Tx."

"Just in case," he said. He followed up with his deep belly laugh, and raspy hackle.

"Thank you, sir, and don't worry, I won't forget." Jamie gave him her smile that lit up the room, the one that showed all her teeth and caused heads to turn for miles. I promise you that when the sun hits that smile it was like a lighthouse on the coast drawing in ships from all over the sea.

"That was quite nice of him, don't you think so?"

"Simply precious."

Jamie grinned, shook her head at me and headed for aisle five. I straggled along behind her, staring at the floor, my hands still in my pockets.

"This is it. My mother has to have this particular brand. She won't clean with anything else."

She smiled and gave a chuckle.

"Will you miss me?" I asked as she reached past me to grab the cleaner. Her head spun around like a pinwheel. She gave me a crooked grin, a wink, and followed with, "Every time it rains." Then she skipped down the aisle towards the check out counter.

Those words felt like nails through my eardrums. They burned a hole straight through my heart. It's Texas for goodness sakes, ain't ever no rain here. We get rain three times a year, four during an el nino year. I imagined that this must have been how Jesus felt when Judas stepped in to the garden. At least He knew that it was coming. I was shell-shocked, it was as if she had had tossed a live grenade right at my feet, and I just stood there dumbfounded. *Come back here* my head screamed. What do you mean? Why? How? My blood was boiling and my soul was crushed. I didn't know whether I wanted to sit down and cry a new connection to the San Antonio River, or if I wanted to charge at all her perkiness like a bull

Rewarded Nosiness

By Margaret Parrish

In the summer of 1969, I joined Jack in his self-appointed job of spy and undercover agent for one adventure. For a week my brother Jack and I watched the house across the street where Mrs. Day lived. The story was that she came here to be closer to her son who had been sentenced to two-years in the local correctional institution for robbery. The money had not been recovered and it was believed that Mrs. Day either had the money in her possession or knew where it was hidden. The day she moved in, we watched as if she arrived in a Cinderella carriage made with dollar bills. We guarded the moving truck until the last item was unloaded. The last item off the truck was a tall slender wall shaped locked chest with a luggage-designed base where the money had to be stored because of all the silver locks that surrounded the structure. It took four men with bulging blood vessels in their forehead, arms, and legs under the weight of the chest to move it up the walkway in much the speed of an inchworm on a warm sunny day. Mrs. Day moved into the neighborhood on a Monday and she was invisible to all until the day Jack and I set fire to her house. It was an amazing light show.

Visions of the chest contents simmered and boiled in our minds. Jack was convinced that the money was in the chest. He plotted the many ways to spend it buying spyglasses, dark shades, camouflage uniforms, and all the required accessories for a spy agent. I on the hand had seen Mrs. Day in her head to toe Barbie doll outfit with matching hat, suit, jewelry, and shoes and knew that she had spent the money on her wardrobe collection which I would like to examine.

Mom had forbidden us to bother Mrs. Day within the next two days. Being six years old, Jack's concept of time was that anything longer than now was too long to wait. Mom said it was his red hair and freckles that made him curious,

to a red carpet.

"Let us go, silly," She hollered with her angelic sounding voice.

"I'm coming."

Once we were outside again, Jamie proceeded to tell me all the capitals of all the countries in Europe and how far her house was from the Queen's. She explained to me the parliamentary procedures, which made no sense to me. I was happy that I passed 6th grade Civics and Economics last year with a C+. The whole way home. I stared at my tennis shoes, the ones with the blue and green shoelaces that were more worn out than my jeans. My mind kept running over and over the words that she spoke earlier at Pete's. Every time it rains, every time it rains. They seem like such cruel and harsh words to say to someone you called your best friend. Just as we reached the edge of my house. I had mustered up enough courage to confront her about it when she looked over at me.

"Are you okay, Nadine, what is the matter?" I looked up and stared into her ocean blue eyes, took a deep breath.

"Nothing, it's just hot out here, tell me about how cool England's coast is again." I couldn't bring myself to ask, I was afraid of what might happen, and I didn't want anything to ruin this day. I wanted to remember our friendship just the way it was.

Once we got back, Jamie skipped the cleaner up to her mom. Just as Jamie came out the door, Melanie came around the corner. Melanie was a friend from school who lived four streets over. We talked some during the school year, but she always went to visit her grandmother in Florida for the summer, so we were never really close buddies.

"Hey, Mel." I raised my hand and gave a big, plane flagging wave.

"Oh, hey girls. What's up?" Her voice sounded like that of one of the chipmunks off the old cartoon.

"Nothing really." Jamie jumped in as she made her way down the steps.

"My family and I are just finishing up our packing for our big move. Our flight for England leaves tonight."

"Really? Already? Wow! I bet you are excited" Melanie's voice always seemed to get higher when she got excited. I never understood how that was possible, but it happened just the same.

"Yes it is. I have just been telling Nadine all the grand, and marvelous things that I will get to do once I am over there."

"How cool, I would love to hear..."

"Are you coming to my party?" I forced my way into the conversation. I didn't want to hear about Jamie's grand and marvelous plans again. I wanted at least three minutes of the day to be about me. Besides, Jamie had not said one thing about not being around for my birthday, which was only two weeks away. I thought that this was a perfect way to remind her just in case she forgot.

"Yeah, I'll be there. When is it again?"

"June 24th starting at 5:00. I am having a sleepover and a pizza party, so bring your stuff

and come hungry. My mom said we could rent movies and stay up all night if we wanted. She is going to let us sleep in the living room so we won't wake her or my dad up." I tried to play it up the best I could, but I knew I was no match for Buckingham Palace. They both acknowledged my existence for a brief moment, and Jamie started in on her splendid adventures. Melanie ooohhed and awed over every word that dripped from Jamie's lips. Just as Jamie got to the part about Paris, Melanie glanced at her watch and squeaked.

"Aaaahh, I am late, my mom is going to kill me! I was only supposed to be gone for fifteen minutes, I was on way to the corner store. I got to run, but I hope you have a great time over there, take lots of pictures, okay? See ya later." Jamie turned to me, gave me one of her crooked smiles and we turned and headed for my house. For the remainder of the afternoon, we sat on my front porch sipping ice tea, me reminiscing about the past, she chatting on about the future.

Finally I heard the sound, the sound of death. It was the sound that was about to kill a dearly loved and treasured friendship. It was the sound of the last moving truck's doors slamming shut.

"Looks like the moving trucks are full up." My heart sank as those words slid over my tongue.

"So it appears." Jamie's eyes stayed fixed to the ground.

"I reckon' this is goodbye then."

"Oh no, never say goodbye." Her eyes were warm and sincere. "Goodbye is forever, always say see you later, or bye. Bye is casual and promising for the next time, goodbye is final. It is what you say at funerals and people you will never see again. It will always be bye between you and me."

I wanted to believe her. I think she believed it herself. I am sure that she intended to write, but I couldn't figure out when she would have time between her trips to Paris and tea with the Queen. Nevertheless, I amused and comforted her, just to put her mind at rest.

"Alright then, see ya later, and don't forget to send a postcard."

By 4:23 the moving trucks were loaded, and all the suitcases were packed. Jamie's mom was sweeping out the last bit of dirt left behind by the movers, and her dad stood there meticulously peeling the letters of their name off the side of the mailbox. Her parents called for her to load up. I walked her to her driveway, savoring the last moment of our friendship. She gave me a sluggish hug, said a casual bye. I'll write, and hopped into her parents perfectly clean, white Suburban. Her dad cranked up the car and started to drive off, Jamie rolled down the window and shouted, "Every time it rains, Nadine. Every time it rains." I said nothing. I stood there and watched as their car headed for the airport. She gave a quick glance back and a pageant girl wave and turned back around. Her eyes were fixed on what was before her. I raised my hand to wave, and whispered goodbye to my best friend. I found out two weeks later that it rains almost everyday in England.

Dad said he got his noisiness and his 'do it or die' stamina from my grandmother on my mom's side of the family. Why once when granddaddy got stuck in the muddy ditch, when he looked back at neighbor's new cow, grandma pulled off her dress as to not get it dirty and pushed until she was red-faced like Santa's suit to get him out so that she would not miss the high noon tea party at the neighbor new house. Grandma had to see for herself the in-ground swimming pool they had done for their grandchildren when just last winter the furniture company repossessed their bed while they still slept in it that morning. Anyway, Jack had it bad and this summer I decided to live on the wild side with him.

Our imaginations got the best of us as we lay in bed at night and gazed across the street in the light of day. Jack began to plot on how to get inside the house so that we could rummage the chest contents. Every neighbor in the community had jingled the house telephone at one time or another and the voice on the other end of the line was not pleased with Jack's snooping and intruding behavior. For me, each time I tried to sleep I could see the strain on the faces of the men straining under the weight of the chest. What could have been so heavy in the box? No one moved into the house but Mrs. Day. Surely there was no body in the chest for I knew the men could smell the stench of rotting flesh and that would leave stains on the Barbie outfits. That's how they catch the killer on TV. They cover the body in the most unlikely place and when it gets hot and sweaty and the smell gets in someone's nose and the end. Okay, it must be the money from the robbery.

We were up early the next morning. On hot days like today, mom baked early in the morning to save the air conditioner from running so long at midday. The smell of the buttery cake batter with real vanilla extract filled the house. Jack and I sat down to a breakfast of bacon, eggs, and hot biscuits to use for eating the sugar cane syrup

that always sat in the middle of the kitchen table. We did not want to go visit too early because if our charm failed, then cake at 9:00 am in the morning is not always welcome. The minutes seemed like hours as we waited for the morning to pass. At 11:00, Jack and I charged out the kitchen door, stopped at the sidewalk, looked both ways for oncoming cars, and scurried across the street like two innocent good neighbors.

At Mrs. Day's front door, Jack gave a knock. There was no answer. Jack knocked again. This time he decided to supplement the knock with a friendly introduction.

"Hello. It's Jack and Daisy from across the street and we brought you chocolate cake," said Jack.

We waited for while and Jack knocked again. No answer. We slid down the front door with our backs against the wood surface and decided to give Mrs. Day time to get to the door in case she was all the way on the other side of the house. After much time passed, and our knocks went unanswered. Jack unwrapped the cake and stuck his finger in the chocolate frosting. He always ate the frosting first. In minutes nothing was left of the cake but the smear of chocolate from our tongues licking on the wax paper.

Suddenly the house began to vibrate and shook as if an earthquake was trying to escape. Blundering sounds rattled the walls as if some type of power surge exploded. The door we were propped against was ajar. A gentle push on the door and we were inside.

A long dark hallway guided us to the hull of the house. The glow underneath the door at the end of the hallway extended an invitation for us to enter and we accepted. We stepped inside a prism of color rays exuding from the now open chest the movers carried on moving day. Pipes of various lengths, cords, and buttons lit in every color of the rainbow lined the lucent black wall.

"Wow! A spaceship," said Jack with

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