

## “Raincoat”

Bradley. Bryan. And Kendal... Keith. Kent. Michael. And Malcolm. Bradley,  
Bry...an, Kendal, Keith...Kent. Mich...Michael, and Malcolm. Bradley, Bryan, Kendal,  
Keith, Kent, Michael, and Malcolm...

I like when it rains. I don't know why, because it's not raining, but I know I like it. My friend Michelle says it may rain today, so I believe I'm in a good mood. These days I keep to myself; I'm aware that I'm not a people-person, yet everyone says I'm such a lovely woman. I'm a lovely woman? Well I don't know for sure, but Michelle refers to me as lovely when we meet. We have tea parties—Michelle and I—this is where she calls me lovely. I want to blame my ruffled blouses and pleated skirts for such a title—perhaps, it is my love for jewelry, or the many crowns I wear. Michelle always compliments me on such things, so I don't have to carry this burden of my loveliness entirely on my physical alone. We parlay for a spell or so eating crumpets, sipping tea, and discussing the philosophies of Oprah Winfrey with a passion that borderlines the devotion of a cult member. Michelle and I play chess. I taught it to her, or she taught it to me—I don't remember, but I do know I quite like it. How lovely. We also snack on Tocrine and Memantine. Michelle doesn't like them, and I suppose neither do I, but she serves them to me, just one of each, and so I gather a lovely woman would never deny her host. She doesn't eat them, but I gather she's had her fill and only brings them for me. We talk about the rain too. I tell Michelle how much I enjoy to sit outside while the great creator instructs the symphony of nature; it reminds me of something I cannot remember now, a world away perhaps, and I smile. I don't think Michelle likes the rain. She's always talking about staying dry and raincoats. Her furrowed brow disturbs me greatly, and I feel myself getting agitated. Beside myself sounds much better—lovelier. Sometimes I get so ang...beside myself that I do not even want to finish my tea...I do love when it rains.

An unfinished sweater loiters in my favorite chair. I notice it sometimes, but other times I do not. The pictures of strangers decorate the walls, smiling faces meant to spark a cell or two into action, but I do not entertain them long because they make me beside myself—sad even, and I am always happy with the promise of rain. I gather a few of my favorite things: My Nancy Drew, My iPod only plays one song, but that's quite alright, it's my favorite song, and a green scarf. I reach for the fine silk and a portrait of a lovely young woman catches my eye. She is in fact very lovely. Much lovelier than I, and for a second, I almost remember, but what? She is joined by seven beautiful boys; they all smile as if all in on a secret code I cannot crack. How lovely. I want to enjoy their beauty for a little while longer, but the pitter patter of soft raindrops upon my roof alerts me that I'm tardy for the rain. Oh how I'd love to mix that beauty with my envy and conjure memory, but the rain may not last long, and I will be even more beside myself if I miss it. Out of habit, I suppose, I grab my last item, Kleenex, and I shuffle toward the door. Michelle meets me at the door. Is it time again for tea? She again speaks of raincoats. I do not understand, yet I tell her I have my scarf, and that I'm only going to sit. I tell her only my toes will feel the cool touch of rain, but she insists that I watch the rain from my balcony. I am in no mood to fight, and so I retreat. This pinch of defeat feels ever so familiar.

Upon the balcony, I await the heavy pour. And it comes. It is not as lovely from the balcony. I can still smell the wet grass, but it is faint—as is the sounds of the croaking toads down below calling to me to come and play. I stretch out my hand and the droplets—like

magic—revive me. I had a mother. I feel silly assuming that the claim is not obvious, but I did. She also loved the rain...A drop of water bypasses the partition above me and hits my cheek. I hear a laugh, and it is my own. How long it has been since I laughed. I stick my head ever slightly forward and allow more droplets to hit my face. Seven to be exact. It is the seventh that brings all blur into focus, and I jerk in response. Bradley, Bryan, Kendal, Keith, Kent, Michael, and Malcolm. Ah!

I love the rain, and I know why! I am no ordinary lovely woman, I too am a mother. Planting my roots in the suburbs of Seattle, I rejoiced in every rainy birth of my seven sons. I remember. The clouds of dementia cannot stand amongst the smoky colored clouds of the Almighty. The loudness of confusion is a whisper to the thundering voice of My God. Oh, and how I remember. The lingering sweater is for Malcolm, my little explorer who's shooting a documentary about the last of the polar bears this winter. I remember.

It is funny how in the commotion of the rain, I find clarity. As sins are washed away in the righteous blood, it is my confusion that is lifted in the downpour. These pictures on the wall begin to talk, and I remember every face—every voice. Again I smile. I remember. The Grand Piano that resides in the foyer of my living room, that has been a stranger to me in the sun, is now my sister as I remember our entire life together, playing for audiences big and small. The green scarf, a grand heirloom passed all the way down from the hard hands of a slave to the soft hands of a lovely woman—all lovely in spirit. I remember my sons. All of them. The smiling faces that bled cheer, the outstretched arms that bid love and protection, and the many “I love you” that oozed honesty. I remember everything in the touch of rain...

Oh, this thing called memory. She is peculiar, no? She is a white elephant to a peasant, and I feel her weight ever more. Yes, I remember the pleasures, but also the pains. I remember the smiling faces of babes turn into the scowls of men, annoyed of the burden I've become. My forgetfulness, once a pastime joke, becoming topic of great disdain. I regretfully remember lovers becoming strangers, children becoming oppressors, and paid workers becoming family... I hate Nancy Drew. Why can't I put more songs on my iPod? Oh memory, yes I remember Turkish Delights being exchanged for an endless parade of pills. Brain scans becoming as native as taking a shower. I remember tears at the drop of a hat. Waking up in foreign beds that were only foreign to me, afraid under the arms of a loving husband, made a stranger by a feeble mind. Oh yes, I remember love deferred. I remember sons bearing sons and daughters, who don't visit—too busy I told myself before the end of the storm. Under the mystique of rain, I remember the pain on pen and paper as I was made aware of episodes of murkiness where I scared my grandchildren—a scapegoat for my loneliness—their busyness. In the rain, I remember it all, and I think perhaps it is they who have Alzheimer's; it is them who have forgotten me. Have they forgotten the many diapers I changed, the boobos I kissed better, the home, I alone kept? Oh yes, I do remember.

I'm not at home. I look around and I, again, am in a foreign land. In my clarity, I understand I've been put away. My breathing races with the rain, and my heart is not far behind. I have been abandoned. Today is my birthday! The rain has become a drizzle and my dark cloud looms slowly. This is all familiar. I will surely go mad any moment now. Raincoats. With my knowing restored I can panic, I can pant, and I can scream. Michelle will return, but she will not be alone. Michelle is not my friend, but my doctor. The rain coat in which she spoke, and speaks is a strait jacket. She knows the power of the rain, and I will need to be subdued. I will run, I will hit, and I will try to escape. Oh sweet dementia, cover

me once more. Wrap me wholly in this new life of loveliness. Delusion comfort me, so that I will not face the many pains of knowledge. I pray, oh Lord, to stop the rain. I cannot take it any longer. Do not leave me to suffer in chains of man and memory.

I feel the room begin to spin and only the lovely woman and her sons are in focus, but I am gone. I hear the door open, and I know Michelle has come for me. Hands all around grab at me, and I fight. I smell fire and wax, I feel eyes and hands upon me, and I hear "Mom." My mind deceives, I'm sure, but my eyes do not. Bradley, Bryan, Kendal, Keith, Kent, Michael, and Malcolm. The faces of men, once boys, return to me. Their names engraved in my subconscious. Their faces read knowing, yet disdain has been evicted. Oh memory, you are peculiar to an old woman. How you give and take away. Kendal takes a Kleenex and wipes my eyes, and then my lips. Bryan and Michael help me to my feet while Bradley relights the cake and sets the table. Malcolm hands me a small polar bear, which comes with a hug, and Keith and Kent begin a jaunty "Happy Birthday." It seems today Alzheimer is the only thing forgotten. The rain has stopped, but my memory continues. There is peace. There is love. There will be no raincoat for this lovely woman today.