

Rainy Wedding

by Carrie MacKillop

For Round 8 of our contest, we asked you to send us original works of fiction that begin with this sentence: "She closed the book, placed it on the table, and finally, decided to walk through the door."

She closed the book, placed it on the table, and finally, decided to walk through the door. Her son lay dying on the other side, his blue, pale skin in stark contrast to the bright red blanket on his bed. His gray eyes looked at her dully as she entered the room. She withheld the tears that wanted to come every moment and smiled cheerfully.

"Today I get married, right?" he said with a smile.

"Yes, sweetheart. Today you get married."

When the boy became ill and had to miss his first day of kindergarten, he had asked what school would be like. She started a ritual that day, explaining to him in detail everything he was missing, so that he, and she, could experience the life he would never have.

In the last few months, lying in this bed in this room, he had gone through every grade, graduated from high school, went to college and graduate school and gotten a job as an architect. He met his fiancée when she lost her purse on a rainy day while he was at a meeting in Manhattan. She told him of a fairy-tale romance, the day he asked for her hand in marriage, the house they were planning to build.

"What's the weather like today? Is it sunny?" Her son, though only 5, had lived 30 years in this bed. He worried that the caterer would be late, that his tuxedo wouldn't fit, that his Uncle Charlie would embarrass him in front of his new wife.

"No, it's really cloudy. There's a good chance of rain around 4."

"But that's when the ceremony is!" he wailed. "What are we going to do?"

"It doesn't matter. It will be beautiful no matter what."

She told how the bride's father had built a floor under the tent that morning, to stave off the two feet of water that had developed in the backyard after four weeks of steady rain. She told how the maid of honor had stopped on the way back from getting her hair done to buy mud boots for the wedding party. How this was the rainiest spring on record. How it rained during the whole ceremony, drowning out the father of the groom while he read from the Bible. And how his new wife, looking as stunning as ever, had her best friend cut off her dress at the knee in the middle of the reception because it had soaked up so much mud and water.

"She's awesome, isn't she?" he said gleefully. "I'm really lucky, aren't I, Mom?"

She stroked his hair, taking in the small, thin features of his face, thinking of the life she and her husband had laid out for him before he was sick, all the world their little man would devour. "You are so lucky, sweetheart. And so is she."

As he eased into sleep, she thought about what the next few days would hold. She knew she didn't have much time, to get him to his first child, and that child's first day of school. She knew what he would ask when the baby was born. "Will he get sick, Mommy?" Of course, she would answer no.

Last Seen

by Cathy Formusa

"The nurse left work at five o'clock." He sauntered his words at me like he was king of the street.

"How do you know, Pablo? Maybe you went cold — had a flash, you know, blacked out and when you woke up you thought it was five?" I was pushing him now, just to see how sure he was.

"I like her." He lowered his head humbly for a moment, then abruptly continued in a strength I hadn't ever seen or felt from him before. "She brings me coffee sometimes, at five o'clock. It was five o'clock when my angel in white brought me coffee. And she smiles at me, my coffee angel. No starbucko never done that for me, but my angel does at five o'clock, she left at five, and I saw her!" Pablo karate-chopped his right hand, slicing the air between us to make his point.

He smelled so ripe in the afternoon's August heat, I let it go. I handed him a few bucks and continued my search for her killer.