**Rain**  
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CMN 238 – Paperback Hero  
Assessment Task 1  
Short Story Draft  
  
When I was four, my mother dressed me in a pair of tiny gumboots and let me go outside after a storm had passed. I was to stay where she could see me and to jump in one tiny puddle that had formed on our front lawn. Maybe she had been baking or the phone began to ring, but she had rushed inside and left me to my own devices. She wasn’t gone long, but it was enough for me to run to the much larger puddle in the gutter on the street to make bigger splashes with my tiny gumboots. The moment I jumped into it, my boots sank into the wet debris and I fell forward in a panic, my feet slipping out of the boots and my hands catching my weight on the sharp, jagged bitumen. It wasn’t until I actually saw the blood from the grazes on my palms that I began to cry, but tiny drops of rain began to speckle to road. Some of them landed in my open hands and I stopped crying, mesmerised as the tiny droplets washed away the blood and the pain. I didn’t even notice as my mother rushed me inside, leaving my boots in the puddle. I only broke out of my trance when the rain stopped running down my hand.  
  
Even though I was in high school now, I still had the same child-like fascination with water that fell from the sky. And before the sky had gone dark, I caught a glimpse out the bus window of some clouds and found myself hoping even just a shower would brighten my walk home. My friends always walked me to the end of my street where, as we said our goodbyes for the day, I felt as though I was being watched by something I couldn’t see. But this wasn’t uncommon and once I felt sure my friends were out of earshot I spoke to the empty street.  
‘Okay Toby, you can come out now.’ I said, smiling to myself. Tobias was the closest thing to a friend I had for a boy and he was usually waiting for me as I walked down my street. The only time I had ever asked my friends about the way Tobias liked to meet, one of them had told me it was the creepiest thing she’d ever heard. I hadn’t pressed the matter any further. Noticing that my words had apparently reached no one, I glanced around hoping to see him. A shadowy figure seemed to slink behind the garden wall of a nearby house, and I walked over to scold him for worrying me. As I touched the wall and slowly bent to look around it, a sound behind me made my hair stand on end.  
‘What are you doing?’ said a playful voice. I swung around in fright and tried to slap Tobias with the back of my hand for frightening me, to no avail. He smiled wryly at my futile effort, perched like a bird on a nearby fence, and scolded me playfully for trying to harm his delicate skin. Tobias had albinism, which made his hair and skin white, and caused his eyes to look red. I straightened my ruffled hair and pretended not to notice him for the rest of the walk home, as he poked fun at the face I’d made.  
There was a note on the dining room table when I walked into the house that said my mother wouldn’t be home until the next day. I barely noticed it surrounded as it was by stacks of newspaper clippings and articles from environmental magazines. All of them had the same or similar topic: The nuclear power plant that had been built just outside of our town. Mother was probably out protesting it in a last ditch effort to stop it being activated on Monday. I turned on the T.V as I reheated some pasta and my suspicions about my mother were confirmed. The top story on every channel was the growing number of protestors camping outside the gates to the power plant, and my mother was right in front of the camera. The reporters were estimating almost a quarter of the town’s population had joined the human barricade to stop vehicles travelling in and out along the plant’s access road. My mother hadn’t always been so ecologically conscious, In fact she’d been a strong supporter of the power plant’s construction while she and my father were together; she would go on about how fantastic it would be for such a small town once the plant workers brought in all that business and publicity. She started to change when we were visited by an old woman who I remember very little about except that I thought she had red eyes, the same way Tobias did. I joked that she was his grandmother, but he said she passed away before he was born. My mother and father argued a lot after that, and then one day, my mother told me we were going out for ice cream and I didn’t see my father again for four months. He told me he’d had to file for joint-custody because my mother refused to let him see me, which was strange, because even after he won and mother had to let me stay with him every second week, I didn’t really see him all that much. Being the mayor of the town kept him very, very busy. I had a sneaking suspicion that my mother’s activism wasn’t purely for ecological reasons, brought on by the ease with which she turned every conversation about the environment to a list of reasons my father was a horrible person. In the dark, solitary emptiness of the house, I once again had the feeling I was being watched and this time, I was certain it wasn’t Tobias. But before my mind could wander any further, I heard the soft patter of rain on the roof and the feeling was gone. Hypnotised by the gentle rhythm, it wasn’t long before my eyes grew heavy and I finally fell asleep.  
  
The next morning definitely felt like a Saturday as I sat in front of the TV with the unhealthiest cereal I could find. But my cartoons were replaced by new reports on every channel of two separate bodies being found a few hours earlier. One body was several months old, and there was speculation that another death last year might somehow be related to the other two. I’d overheard my father say that ours was a small but growing town with very few police and as people continued to relocate, there had been a number of unsolved disappearances that were written off as administration errors by the busy local offices. All the news talk of burned skin, internal bleeding and brain tumours ruined my appetite before I could turn it off. I put on some clothes and decided to go for a walk through the trail at the end of my street to see if I couldn’t find Tobias after I’d pretended to ignore him yesterday. After about an hour of tromping rather loudly up the trail, I felt the same sense of uneasiness I had yesterday. As I thought of places a boy the colour of a dove could hide in the dark, I noticed all the trees in this area seemed to be drooping slightly.  
A faint dripping sound rang out into the now silent forest. A cold ripple travelled the length of my spine and I felt my hair stand on end, wishing for something to snap me out of my sudden panic. Now I knew I was being watched by something else.   
Unable to stand the tension any more, I broke into a run back down the path hoping to come within screaming distance of the town. I glanced over my shoulder at darkened trees and growing shadows, and felt myself collide with something solid, and alive. I screamed as I fell backward and covered my face but no hands clutched at me, and no malicious club struck me in the head. As I opened one eye, I only saw a mess of white hair slumped over a body with one hand on its chest.  
‘Ow.’ Tobias said, rubbing his ribcage where my head had crashed into him. I nearly leapt toward him for something to hold on to, but had to wipe my eyes as I felt tears escape them. I felt Tobias hand touch my cheek as he brushed hair out of my face.

‘Are you alright?’ he asked, and I looked up to see his red eyes focused intently on my own. I looked away, feeling like something was still after me.   
‘I want to go home.’ I said after a moment.   
‘Okay. Let me walk you.’ He said, and I felt him lift me by the shoulders as I stood. Trying to steady myself, I realised both his arms were around my shoulders in a hug. I lead the way home, happy he couldn’t see any red in my cheeks.  
  
It had begun to rain as we reached the house, and I opened the door for Tobias but he shook his head.   
‘I have some things to do.’ He said, shaking his head. I had to wonder, as he walked out into the rain, what things a truant who didn’t seem to own shoes could possibly have to do on a wet Saturday morning. I spent the rest of the day curled up on the couch, muting cartoons on T.V as the rain came and went and trying to draw cats in my notebook. My mother still hadn’t returned when it came time for dinner. Left to my own devices, I forced myself to survive on ice cream and sprinkles, and eventually collapsed on my bed.  
Noise from the living room woke me the next morning, but my fears of an intruder were swayed when I realised I’d left the T.V on all night. A ‘breaking news’ message kept me from a morning of cereal and cartoons once again, but the story made me sick to my stomach. Another body had been found with burned skin and ruptured organs, in the same forest I had been yesterday. Perhaps this combined with my poor choice of supper was what lead to me kneeling over the toilet, a bad tasting rainbow hanging from my lips. I woke up on the couch, knocked out by the stress of emptying my stomach, and decided on a breakfast of water and fruit instead. I had been on my own for almost three days and my mother had left nothing but a false note to comfort me. The local news had circled back to the protests in front of the power plant, where the crowd had grown so large it made moving through it impossible. My mother was nowhere to be seen among them this time, but I was certain the closing gap towards the plant’s opening was what had kept her away for so long. I made sure to switch off the T.V before I left, and opened the door to see a single pink-red flower with a note attached to a small box on the doormat. I opened the note, which simply read ‘Happy Valentine’s Day’. The holiday had completely slipped my mind, and I thought the gift might have been meant for my mother, but I didn’t think she was seeing anyone. Which meant it was left by someone who knew I was the only one home. I took the rose and chocolates to my room and pocketed the note before I left, intent on giving the sender a stern talking to when I found him.  
My journey across town to the protest might have taken quite a long time had a car not pulled up beside me, driven by my father’s secretary. She had been on her way home, since the protests left her without much to do for my father, and he had sent her home early. She asked where I was going and told me I might get a cold if the dark clouds opened up while I was walking there all alone. As I entered the car I couldn’t help but notice several letters and other gifts adorning her back seat, obviously from a number of different admirers. One rather large envelope, set beneath a full bouquet of flowers, bore the distinct handwriting of my father. My own small card felt conspicuous in my pocket and I shifted in my seat. The secretary, who I was to call Miss Madeline, made small talk with me until we reached the street marked by a front of environmental signs and angry messages. I narrowly escaped the car as Miss Madeline asked something about my father.  
‘I’m sorry. I really need to go.’ I said, almost closing the door.  
‘Okay, well your father will be attending a lunch meet across the road there in a few hours. You might be able to see him when he’s done, before he leaves.’ She said with a smile. I thanked her and closed the door after trying to return her expression.  
The news reports had been right about the impenetrable wall of protestors. Before I could even approach the group, I was stopped by the majority of the town’s police force who told me they couldn’t allow anyone near the protests, even after putting my foot down and telling them I was the mayor’s daughter. To her credit, one policewoman didn’t waiver and instead insisted that as the mayor’s daughter I was to stay away in case it became dangerous. I turned away, but I was struck by the thought of an old path to a water tower, one that I visited often to go swimming in, hidden in the forest not far from the road. I tried not to draw attention as I walked away, planning to use the path to move around the police blockade and hopefully reach the protests, and my mother. Eager to deceive the ones that had hindered me, I realised too late that I was once again surrounded by trees, in strange silence.   
As the hair on my neck stood on end, I ran for the water tower. The rain had left a waist high pool around its rusted supports, but fear compelled me through the water and up the ladder. Only once I reached the balcony around its tank did I pause to look around. At first I saw nothing in the increasing darkness, but as though out of my peripheral vision, a dark shape took form on the edge of the pool below me. The ground around it seemed to grow dry at its touch and despite no clear eyes, I knew the grotesque figure was hunting me as it stepped into the water, which grew black and bubbled. I screamed at it as it approached, and a grotesque appendage extruded from behind it. Too late I braced myself as it broke one of the tower’s supports and I slammed into the railing, which gave way beneath me, sending me into the blackened water below.  
I felt as though I was on fire. The burning of my skin caused me to gasp, inhaling the violent fluid that began to attack my lungs. My head felt as though it would burst, my skin was melting away. My thrashing pushed my head above the surface as it began to rain, but I could not scream as I fell back into the mire. I couldn't feel the pain anymore. My slowly fading mind was aware of parts of me turning numb. I knew I couldn't breathe. Scars torn into my back felt like a cold breeze, ruptured skin just a dull throbbing. The last image that passes through my mind is he striking red eyes that would weep for me, days after I am found.