



RAINFALL

V. A. JEFFREY

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a short story

By V. A. Jeffrey

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DAY 1

It's raining.

I've had a migraine all day and I've been vomiting all morning. Only now that it's evening has the hammer of pain lifted. Headaches have become more frequent lately. Never used to get headaches before, much less migraines. The fever is subsiding, I think. My whole body was hotter than an oven last night. My skin, always cracked and dry feels soft with perspiration. I'm sweating like a marathon runner and it feels good. I hate my skin.

I finally muster up the strength to get out of bed without retching. Triumph. I wander to the living room to fire up the laptop. I leave the lights off in the house and peer through the window as it boots up. I look up at the sky. It's grayish-blue here and there with rivers of thin, dusty clouds crossing east and darker grays running in western currents with patches of fuchsia dispersed throughout. It is stunning. Even in a dim, half-stupor I can appreciate an April sky. Rain is sweeping in from the south. Softly it falls at first, then picks up speed. I listen to it in a dulled sort of calm as the rain pounds, beating down on the roof like a chorus of tribal drums. I like rain. It washes away smog, dirt, pain; it helps me think clearly, makes me feel safe. It also drives the cancer-courting sun worshipers out of the parks and away from beaches, out of sight. Especially the really pale ones who couldn't tan if their lives depended upon it, which they don't. *Aton is dead. And Ra, and Helios and Apollos and Amaterasu.* I'm off on a tangent.

Checking email now. What *is* that? I listen for the sound again and after a time I can pick it up. The sound of whispering. A soft crush of incoherent whispers and as soon I hear it, it's gone. My mind hasn't been right for awhile now. You see, I often see and hear things that aren't there. I wasn't always this crazy. Only the last few years. Like the time I saw a mermaid on the coast, at Depoe Bay. A beautiful woman with a long, emerald green fish tail. No one else saw her though, just me. Sometimes when I'm out and about I can see from the corner of my eye, dull red glowing outlines from people passing by. Not everyone, just some of them every now and then. Sometimes I even see shapes that shift in and out of corporeal form. Which means that I haven't seen anything at all.

Which is also why I've been put on paid leave.

The OS comes up and I click on the Chrome icon to access Gmail. Scanning messages. Nothing important in the email box. I go to the kitchen, fix some sardines with toast to eat and go back to bed.

It's late into the wee hours. I can't sleep and don't want to. The rain splatters hard on the windows, running down in thick rivulets, casting snake-like shadows onto the walls of my bedroom. Suddenly from the corner of the bedroom I see two tiny, glowing white orbs stationed just above the dresser. A deeper blackness then moves quickly across the dark room, following the orbs. I sit up, startled! My eyes follow the shadow as it slinks across the room. It disappears behind the bedroom door. I get up and follow the shadow that I think I see out into the hallway and I turn on all of the lights in the house but I don't see anything. Whatever it is, it's gone.

If it was even there at all.

Day 2

Whenever the weather shifts I feel it in my skin. One day it's cold and rainy, the next day it's warm and sunny. I hate it. And I hate the burning sun.

I shield my eyes as I peer out from behind closed blinds. Damned sun. Riding the sky like a merciless fire god. I feel sick again. If I were a woman you'd think I had morning sickness. My stomach reels and my head begins the slow, painful march into the migraine abyss once more. My skin hurts – it burns and the flesh is now bright red. My legs and torso are severely cracked and tiny beads of blood are pooling out from my pores. It itches and flakes so badly I think I might go mad! I take some sleeping pills, lay down and hide under the covers. Sleep reign over me. Please. . .

. . .Falling into black sleep, where there is no pain.

DAY 3

The weather is cool again. I feel much stronger. Perhaps I'm finally getting over this flu bug or something. It's been a few days since I've had a shower and I smell ripe. I throw my clothes off and toss them on the bed. It's right before sunrise and raining again. Pouring, in fact and I feel alive. My mind is clear. The water from the shower head feels good. I drink it in, steam and droplets. All of it. My skin feels. . . good. The dryness and flaking is gone. I can feel tiny bumps along my chest. Am I getting another rash? I look down. My skin feels slick. It can't be another rash! Please. I've had eczema for as long as I can remember. Perhaps I overdid it with the hot water. I turn down the temperature until the water becomes cold. Cold water feels better anyway.

I'm out of the shower, toweling off and I look myself over in the mirror. I notice the new rash. It's red and winds down from my hips to my legs. Son of gun! Strange thing though, it doesn't itch anymore. Usually weeps and itches like a mother.

I'm eating breakfast - sardines and some toast, the usual. I start gagging on the piece of toast. It's so dry that it feels like sandpaper in my throat. I try another piece and nearly cough up a lung. Involuntarily I start making odd clicking sounds in my throat. The hacking becomes so violent that it throws me to the floor and I feel my body twitch and go into convulsions. For an instant I see only darkness and what looks like lightening streaks cross my eyes.

I've *never* had this happen to me before.

It takes me some minutes to recover from this new episode. I feel wetness on my right side. I'm lying in a puddle of urine, staring at the half-eaten toast across the kitchen floor. I slowly get up and toss it in the trash. I feel awkward, afraid and alone.

After cleaning up I go to my desk and flip through the Rolodex to make an appointment with my doctor. After a while I start hearing the voices again. The babble of whispers are so thick it's as if they inhabit the very air and they seem to only come when it rains. I hear a soft rustling nearby and turn to see a black cat. It's sitting near the living room table staring intently at me.

"How did you get in here?" The hairs on my body begin to prickle and rise. The cat licks it's paw. My initial reaction is to shoo it away but I don't. We stare at each other for a long time and then I start to relax a little. I go into the kitchen and get some milk for the cat, feeling a little foolish. Why am I doing this? I set a bowl of milk down for the cat who roundly ignores it and begins sniffing around the house. I try to pet it but it nimbly avoids my hand. The cat leaps onto my computer desk and faces me again.

"Hello Jonah." I don't move. It's talking to me.

"Don't be alarmed. I realize that you don't know me and that's fine." I'm in such a state that I can't say anything. I feel numb.

"I'm here to help you. I've been sent here as your guide. You're changing, right on schedule."

"Changing?" I manage to say but I can't feel my lips. A cat is talking to me.

"Yes, Jonah." Says the cat patiently as if speaking to a small child. "Nothing to worry over. Perhaps you

don't remember why you're here and that's to be expected, considering the circumstances. My name is Nen."

"Nen."

"Yes."

"I didn't know I had a cat."

"You don't. Never mind that. You'll need to rest and sleep. Sleep is going to be critical for you now. These next few days will bring momentous and blessed changes for all of us. It's what we've been waiting on for so long. Let's get you to bed." The cat jumps down from the desk and patters over to the hallway towards my bedroom. It turns and looks at me expectantly. I feel a strange compulsion to obey.

I didn't know I had a cat.

DAY 4

It's raining again. Hallelujah! The cat has been with me all night, purring and kneading my side. At first I found the entire situation freaky and I didn't know how to react, so I didn't. However, I feel strangely comforted and safe with the cat and its talking is becoming less freakish and distracting to me. It helped me get to sleep and I don't feel alone anymore. The rain fell all night and it's still falling. The dim light of dawn is peeking through the blinds. The tittering voices have been cresting and falling all night in a low chorus of incomprehensible words. They've now faded to a murmur. I wonder if anyone else can hear them?

"Those voices are your brothers and sisters. You can hear them just as other people can hear the goings-on outside their houses or rooms."

"My brothers? What are you talking about?"

"It is early yet but you might as well know. Do you feel strange? As if you are not yourself?"

"I always feel strange but I had a fever a few days ago and I've been really sick. I think I had a seizure yesterday. I feel better now."

"Right. And what else? Any other issues? Your skin, for instance?"

"What about it?"

"Do you have problems with it? Has it changed?"

"I have eczema. It's always dry and flaking or bleeding. Especially when the weather is dry. It feels better when the weather is damp. Feels better today than it ever has but I have a new rash and I'm out of cream."

"I thought so. You do not have eczema. You are part of the first wave. Most of your peers in the first wave of colonists have this issue. It is a result of the skin-suit fashioned for you. Old tech. The newer colonists have the latest in skin-suit tech and do not have these problems. The feeling of sickness, the fever, the skin problem, the strange sights and sounds are all results of a suit and mind-memory programming that is old and wearing off. However, you do not have to endure this much longer. The next and final phase of colonization is about to begin."

"I don't understand. Colonization?"

"You will understand very soon. Memory will most likely be the last thing to be restored in the earliest colonists, like yourself. Technology has changed somewhat since we all left our world." I don't know what to say and so, for a very long time, I don't. Then:

"I'm not human?"

"No, Jonah, you're not. I could answer all of your questions now but it is better for you to see the truth for yourself. A meeting will take place at the Pacific coast at a special location. You will find the directions to this location in your email in-box later this morning. Get started on your trip early. You are expected to be there this evening. I know this is all very sudden but we must work quickly. At the meeting you will understand what is happening and where you fit in the plan. Colonization is nearly complete. These are exciting times Jonah!" The cat speaks with complete, confident authority and I feel compelled to believe it, odd as the situation is.

"What are you?"

"Your guide. A colonist put in this suit to carry out my tasks in secret, many of which do not concern you. However, I must obey those who put me here and therefore, you must obey me if you are to survive the transition. Part of my job has been to watch over you and many others and I've done so for a long time. The next step is about to begin."

"What's the next step?"

"Building our home."

DAY 5

The sky is overcast. I'm back from a long car ride and I feel weaker than I did yesterday but not sick. However, my spirit is soaring.

I am not the only one who heard the call!

There were so many there! We met at a cabin, in an underground pool that led into the ocean. It was the first time in my life since I was back home that I felt like my *true* self. The ocean, the salty, beautiful ocean; to it I belong and always have. All of us. These legs, this body that is slowly peeling off, the programming; it's all falling away. The end of the Human Being.

In the space of a few hours I learn many things about how we got here and how we came to look like human beings. Things wonderful and terrible.

In a blinding white singularity of flooding thought I came to remember the ones I left back at home, the arduous trip through the stars, the exodus of the ages. I remember the bonds I made with my brothers and sisters in the amniotic rebirth sacs that carried us here, made of salt water, like our own oceans, now long gone. I can't wait for the next phase. We are to meet again when we get the final call, when we are all fully awake and the building, *proper*, begins. Then we will never come back to the land. The land will then come to us.

My brothers. I'm not alone.

I'm careful not to speak when I see the neighbors. I just wave and hurry on inside the house. My voice sounds weird now. It would frighten them. I'm hiding under sunglasses and a hoodie too. I don't want any extra attention. Not now.

I get inside and the phone is ringing. I look at the caller id. It's "mom". This forces me to halt, momentarily. I hear the message on the voice mail machine but I can't *really* hear it. Actually, I don't want to hear it. I feel a sudden stab of pain, briefly, but there is nothing I can do. She isn't my mother. This is a suit I wear. I'm not her son. Her son is dead and I wear his skin.

I ignore the phone, taking off my clothes to examine my body. Memories of my former life slip away as I admire my reflection. The rash is no longer a rash but markings of beauty, a patterned spray of purple star-like dots that glisten and shimmer in the water. They attract females and I am proud of them. My toes are now webbed and some of my fingers are as well. Tiny gills on my sides open and shut rhythmically. I draw a bath, add salt and relax in the cool water. A poor imitation for the glorious ocean but it'll have to do.

It's now late at night and in this somewhat peaceful respite the voices come back out of the far distance like crushes of whispers, feathery and insistent. My brothers and sisters. We are all on the cusp of a grand new world. I listen to them for hours. More skin from my upper body sloughs off in the tub, floating on the surface like pinkish-gray sea foam. Nen pads into the bathroom and insists again that I sleep, that tonight and the next few days dreamless sleep is important for the suit to completely disappear.

The cat sat quietly in the night again to watch over him. Its shadow shifted and morphed in the dark, casting odd shapes against the wall, none of which reflected its present corporeal body. With luminous white eyes alert to everything seen and unseen, the cat guarded its charge as he slept, licking his face periodically to ensure he continued to get the much needed sleep.

DAY 6

Sun.

I felt so full of life only to be beaten down by a hot sunny day, like a helpless fish on land. I feel sick again but this time it isn't debilitating and I know why I feel this way. It doesn't bother me anymore. Nen says to remain inside and I see no reason to disobey. The migraines are gone and my own memories come fading in like ink through torn fabric. Funny, that. My mind was once like a torn piece of fabric.

A mind rewoven.

My old home from far away was a water planet. I dream of its beauty. I'm in a forest of trees that sway dreamily in the ocean currents, the world is cerulean blue and filled with mysterious creatures of the deep and beautiful people; the females with their long, lithe tails and graceful veils of fins and their long, long hair.

My love. My mate. My real voice is ragged with disuse but I'm able to click and squeal her name now. Her name means: sea joy. She of the deep blue fins and blue bands of markings like a spray of diamonds over her breasts and tail and her long hair swaying over me. We would swim for hours, forever and ever, or so it seemed

in the endless ocean under tiny atolls and over dark forests. The cursed daystars only seen through the watery lens of the ocean, their rays diminished through the water into only glittering and wavering shafts of light.

The way they were meant to be seen. Then something happened. The suns shifted closer and became looming, monstrous orbs in the sky. The ocean began to slowly dry up and we all had to leave. Will I see her again? To wind and curl seaweed through her hair again? I have to find her. I wonder when she left home for this place. I hope she left before the oceans dried up. I am told home is only a burnt-out cinder among the stars now.

Now we have a new home. Millions of us. I remember traveling. I remember waking in a dark ocean here and then being given a slimy thing to rub on my body. A skin I was given and I had to eat some of it; I remember eating my rebirth sac. Then I became this alien thing and then my memories left me, imprinted with the dead man's memories and his name. But now the Human Being I was is nearly gone and soon all of them will be gone. I want to see my mate. When Nen comes back I'll ask about her.

And send for her. I hear the voices and I can understand some of them now. One word within all the whispers I understand thoroughly: *Home*.

DAY 7

Nen is staring out of one of the living room windows, tail twitching. It's raining again. I feel something I haven't felt in years: Happiness.

"Nen, why do your eyes glow at night?"

"A remnant of my actual body. Back home I lived in the lower depths of the ocean, where no light could penetrate."

"When will you change over?" At this Nen's ears twitch. The cat turns toward me.

"When all is finally in place. For now my job is to shepherd and guide. Your mate lives on the other side of the world. I know you miss her. She will come to you in due time but I know the feeling. I can't wait to be with my own family."

"So many humans here will die. So many."

"Yes." The cat is quiet for a moment. "That is true and I feel no joy in it, but there is nothing you or I can do about it. Our people *must* survive. They would do the same and often do at the expense of others of their own kind. Think of it this way, at least when they are gone the oceans will be clean again. And our people will thrive again. That is what matters. *We* must survive. It is the way it is."

"Did everyone leave?"

"No. Those too old or sick to make the journey stayed behind. Most of our people did make the journey, though. We are a strong people."

"When will it happen? My body is changing fast. I feel it inside me. I can feel and see and remember. I can hear. My name! I remember my own name, though I can't speak it yet, but I can even say her name!"

"Take a look outside, Jonah. It is happening as we speak. The final part of the plan is in motion. All we must do now is wait." Said Nen triumphantly. I can feel his excitement and as he explains, I hear it. The rain is pounding so hard that it seems it will come through the roof. In the far distance I hear sirens.

"This is no ordinary rain, Jonah. It's a seeded rain. The God Rain has finally begun. This planet is now our home, but first, the die-off must happen. There is no other way. Only the creatures of the oceans will survive it. This day, it rains forever and the world will become what it once was: the once and future world ocean."

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