

The Place Where We Waited All Day in the Rain for You

Fiction

By Jonathan Goyt



After dinner, my father called. I was upstairs. It was Saturday night, so instead of my schoolwork, I was lying on my bed with the window open and the radio on. The Prairie Home Companion was on NWPR, and I was listening to it. I don't understand everything--Dad says some parts are for grown-ups--but I like the stories and the music. I like his voice, too, Garrison Keillor's. He breathes through his nose as he talks, and you can hear it over the radio, these slow, airy breaths, like he doesn't have anywhere to go.

I think that's my favorite part about the radio. It never leaves. It's always waiting for you when you turn it on, just like home. You know that feeling? When you come home after a long trip? You come home, and it smells like home, like wood and fabric softener. You've been all over, visiting or on vacation, and your house has been right there like it always has, waiting. That's the way I feel when I turn on the radio. Once, Mom asked me why I was always listening to it, and I told her, but she told me I was being silly. How could it remind me of home if I was already home? She said it was more like when you turn on the TV and you don't get a picture, just the snow.

Anyway, I was listening to it when the phone rang. I could hear Mom pick up the receiver and say "Hello" from the kitchen. It's right below my room, but she must have opened the kitchen window, too, or I don't think I would have heard her.

It was a weekend my mom had me, instead of Dad, so he called. Sometimes when he calls, they talk for a little bit, but usually, Mom just puts the phone down when she finds out who it is and waits for me to come get it. This was one of the nights when they talked because after a little bit they started arguing.

Garrison Keillor was talking about the News from Lake Wobegon. It was that part of the show, where he talks about people from this town. I'm not sure it's a real place. Maybe I'll ask Dad and see if he knows if it's real. I'd like to go fishing there, someday. Maybe we can go. Maybe with Mom. It's kind of a funny name for a lake, Wobegon, but it sounds right for the people he talks about. I've heard him say it means: "the place where we waited all day in the rain for you," but it seems like an awful lot for one word.

It reminds me of one night, a little while after Dad left. Mom got angry at dinner and said she wished we had never known him. When I finished, I went up to my room and emptied my backpack onto the floor. I put some socks and a T-shirt and a flashlight into it and left. Mom didn't hear me leave. I thought she would hear the door squeak, but she didn't. She was probably on the phone or something, or she would have heard and come out.

I wanted to see Dad. He only lived 10 blocks away then, and I wanted to see him. It wasn't dark out because of the moon, so I started walking without my flashlight. If she looked sad, I would've stayed, you know. But she doesn't get that way. Dad does, sometimes, but Mom doesn't, and I wanted to see Dad.

She never used to get angry. She used to smile a lot, too. She still does, just not as much, I guess, and only when she's not thinking of Dad.

I started to think about Christmas as I walked, but I felt a drop on the back of my neck and looked up into the night. It was starting to rain. I wished I had grabbed my hat and a jacket, but I kept walking. It started to rain harder, but I almost didn't mind.

Since the moon was out, the raindrops looked like little blue-white streaks racing down.

I like the smell of the rain. Mom does, too. That's one thing me and her like together. I asked her once what she thought it smelled like, and she said, "Yesterday. It smells like yesterday." I didn't used to know what she meant, because how could she explain something like that?

When I got to Dad's apartment, I was pretty wet. My hair was stuck to my forehead, and my jeans were starting to chafe my thighs where the seams were. I walked up the three cement steps to his door and knocked. The roof of the building didn't cover the steps, so I pressed up as close as I could to the door. I didn't see any lights inside. I waited for a second and knocked again. The rain kept coming down. My backpack felt heavy, so I took it off and set it on the step next to me. I made a bridge out of my hands and cupped them across my forehead as I looked inside again. It was too dark. I knocked again, harder this time. Still nothing.

He wasn't home. But even though I knew there was no one to hear me, I kept knocking until my knuckles hurt. I even called out a few times. Don't ask me why. I didn't want to walk all the way home in the rain, I guess. Not without seeing Dad. So, I don't know. I guess maybe I thought I could just wait, maybe just sit here on the steps until he came. But I knew he wasn't going to come. I felt my eyes get hot, and my throat started to hurt so I sat down on the top step next to my pack and waited in the rain.

I got sick after that. Mom came looking for me after 20 minutes or so. She was crying, but she didn't yell at me when we got into the car. All she said was, "I'm glad you're safe." I remember we got home, and she took me upstairs to the tub. She took away my wet clothes and brought me a hot chocolate but didn't say anything else.

The next morning, I woke up and walked into her bedroom where she was still sleeping on top of the covers. She must have

been too tired to change out of her clothes from the night before. I crawled up on the bed next to her and hugged her neck, burying my face in her hair and breathing in the smell of sweet pea and almonds and rain. It smelled a little bit like yesterday.

Garrison Keillor was still talking about Lake Wobegon. It was a story about a man, Doug Drescher, who had two daughters, but they were grown up, and he didn't see them so much anymore. So one day, his wife said she wanted to leave him, kind of like Mom and Dad, but the other way around. Anyway, this man, Mr. Drescher, he didn't know what to do. His wife was telling him it was over, but he couldn't think, so he just turned away and walked out the door. She yelled after him saying this was why she was leaving him, because he never paid any attention to her.

Outside, it was cold and grey, November, I think, but Mr. Drescher padded out in his slippers all the same, like he couldn't feel it. As he stood out there, he noticed the big walnut tree in the yard and thought of the one his parents had on the farm when he was a boy, the one that was struck by lightning. He'd seen it happen.

Doug was eight at the time, and his dog had run outside into the storm. She was still too young to be out by herself, but his folks wouldn't let him go out after her because of the rain. They had let him sit out on the porch, though, and his mother had left the light burning in the kitchen so he could see while he waited. The light was enough to illuminate the porch and the beads of water dripping off the roof, but beyond it, there was only blackness and the sound of rain. He might have been able to see better with the light off, but he didn't want to go without its company. And anyway, if he squinted, he thought he could make out the ghosts of the fence and the walnut tree in the front yard, the one just off the road where you turned onto their drive.

Then, as he squinted into the night, the sky light up, bright as

day. In that instant, he saw the skewed and twisted trail of the lightning reach down and split the tree's dark branches in the night. Before he could flinch, the light was gone, but he heard the crack of limbs ripping away from the trunk, still glowing and smoldering in the rain where the lightning had touched it. Something in his chest and in his cheeks made him start to cry. Doug remembered he cried and cried staring at the walnut tree and waiting for his dog. He sat up all night, but she never came.

The next morning, the neighbor came by while he was asleep. He told Doug's parents that he was awful sorry, but there was nothing he could have done. He had been driving home to get out of the storm when the dog jumped out in front of his truck.

Now, Doug was back in front of his own house, standing outside in the cold with the walnut tree, his wife yelling at him, and he thought about that dog, Lucy. "I'm sorry, Lucy," he said, "I waited for you all night in the rain."

Downstairs, I heard Mom stop arguing, and she called for me. I got up and walked out to the hallway wondering if maybe Mom and Dad weren't a little bit like that Mr. Drescher, didn't know how to say the things they wanted to say, didn't know what to do, so they froze up instead.

I picked up the phone and put the receiver to my ear and waited for Mom to hang up, but she didn't. Nobody said anything, but I could tell they were both still on the line. There's that sound, you know? You can hear when someone's there. So I waited with them, waited with the phone up to my ear and thought of Wobegon.

Testing Arrangements

By Stevie Morrow



I wasn't scared watching the hard baseball fly into the air and descend straight for me; my inexperienced hands being too far apart, prepared to brace my face didn't scare me; the ball smashing the softest and most vulnerable part of my nose wasn't scary. My inevitably budding tears showing weakness worried me though. I've never had a bloody nose, which was peculiar to me. Up close my blood smelt like discipline and the back of my throat was sticky with the taste of foil. It tentatively lingered in my nostrils, drawing a perfect ruby ring of crust around each one, little did I know prior to shyly rubbing the backside of my hand beneath each ring—a nervous habit. I guess I'm overly aware of the presence and actions of my hands. The pair is constantly orbiting the lower half of my face; around my nose they ready themselves to wipe away any sign of leakage and in this moment, blood crust. Near my mouth, ready to stuff a fist in it after my inappropriate impulses evade my good senses and escape my mouth (exclaiming, "Oh hell no!" before escaping an elevator to take the stairs when it seemed the max weight had boarded all at once). This mouth: pimples resonate and redden before they whiten into a pursed and painful bump on the cusp of my right, top lip.

Now, being purposely awkward is my defense mechanism; I never noticed, then I started being honest with myself. The simplest interactions are enjoyable, such as coming face to face with a stranger walking in the opposite direction and neither party can seem to step around the other, I like to double time and make