

Snow in the Sandias

by Misti Rainwater-Lites

The F5 tornado inside my head continues to whirl and twirl. Shit is flying fast and furious. What the hell kind of mother am I? My son has been with my mom and her third husband for the past week. He is finally potty trained. He is doing well away from his sick mother. When I returned from San Francisco I put him to bed one night. I sat on the edge of his bed, looked into his beautiful blue eyes and said, "Mommy's heart is sick, Cooper. Mommy's heart is broke." And he looked at me with such compassion and said, "Mommy's heart not broke. Here's Cooper's hand." And he offered his little hand to me for comfort. My toddler son, trying to console me. I try not to think about these things, these moments. I shove it all deep down and go through my days skimming the murky surface.

I called my father a couple of weeks ago. I told him that I want to move to San Francisco and finally be the woman I am supposed to be. Strong. Independent. Vitally alive. Fearless. He was flummoxed. He said, "You are my daughter and I love you but I don't understand this. I can't understand how you could walk away from your son." I did not say, "I understand how you walked away from your three children in 1979. I was six. Summer was two. Cody was ten months old. You walked away because of fresh pussy. There was fresh pussy waiting for you in New Orleans so you left the wife you were bored with and the three babies you made with her to be with fresh swamp trash pussy. She of the long red hair and sweet silicone tits. I understand, Daddy, and I forgive you. You selfish piece of shit. I'm a selfish piece of shit, too. It's all good. You told me once that I'm a Rainwater, I have strong blood. I don't know about that. I don't know how strong I am. But I am plenty selfish. Sometimes I think maybe I'm a monster. But it's more acceptable for men to be monsters, isn't it? Women, especially women with husbands and children, are supposed to be martyrs. Angels. Give until gone. Give unto death. I cannot play that role. I'm sorry you don't respect me or understand

me. That is not what I am here for. I would like very much to respect and understand myself.”

Last night I got in bed with my husband and held him as he fell asleep. He always puts a movie in to fall asleep to. He had put in *The Weight of Water*. I watched Elizabeth Hurley tempt Sean Penn, the brooding poet. I remembered how I put my legs on Dan Zero's shoulders in the dream tub. I remembered how in bed in my hotel room I asked him to hold me. He didn't do anything so I cried out, “Hold me!” and grabbed his arm. He said, “I'm sorry, I didn't hear you. I'm deaf in my left ear.” I put his arm around me and held his hand. I rubbed my ass against him. I threw myself at the man after he had told me he only wanted my friendship. If my husband knew what I had done he would rage, he would scream, he would demand that I leave the house. He would drive me to the Greyhound bus station and wish me luck. There is still a hole in his bedroom wall. He made the hole with his fist before I left for California. I don't remember what we had been arguing about.

There is an old hymn I sang in various Baptist churches throughout my childhood. “It is Well With My Soul.” It's a favorite of mine. In late 2006 when my mother called me in Albuquerque and told me that my brother, Cody, had been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, I found the lyrics to that hymn online and sang it aloud as tears rolled down my cheeks. I researched the history of the hymn. Horatio Spafford wrote the lyrics in 1873 after his four daughters died while crossing the Atlantic. What can you do after sustaining such a loss? You can die, too, slowly with drugs or alcohol or suddenly with a shotgun blast to the brain or a noose or by throwing yourself at an oncoming train or diesel truck. You can set yourself on fire. Or you can live like an empty shell, like a robot, like a zombie. You can spend all your time weeping, looking out windows, letting the birds sing all the songs while your songs die inside you. Or you can live singing. I like that Horatio Spafford chose to live singing. It doesn't matter that he sang to a God I stopped believing in years ago. He fucking SANG. My mom told me to call my brother at the psychiatric hospital and let him know that I was

praying for him. I did pray, even though I had stopped praying years ago and even though I didn't believe my prayers would be received. If there was a God he was deaf in both ears, blind in both eyes and dumb. He was farting and scratching his ass. He was of no use to anyone. But I prayed for Cody. And I did not want to call Cody. I did not have words. I felt absolutely inadequate. What could I say? But I called my brother. He was heavily drugged. "Hey, Misti. How's it goin'?" Cody asked. "It's goin' fine. I just wanted to call and let you know that I love you and I'll...I'll come see you as soon as I can. I don't have any money right now but when I have money I'll fly to Texas and see you. I'm so sorry, Cody."

"It's okay. I understand. Is there snow in the Sandias?"

I walked to the window and looked out at the Sandia Mountains, the guardian angels of Albuquerque. "Yes, there is snow in the Sandias. I'll send you pictures," I said.

