**The Tension Just Before the Rain Falls ©**

By: Briana Gomez

Genre: Fiction

Swallowing the sky are swollen, ashen clouds that peer out from over the sea. Packed tightly together, they conceal the shy fragmented sky that tries to sneak a glance at the meadow in the distance. They begin to rapidly hasten their step, and the clouds encroach upon the jagged cliffside of the shore.

The air is thick and as the moisture clings to the leaves of scattered trees, the wind blows past the ears.

The wind creeps through the thin mossy blades that cascade over the hills and trickle-down slopes. It creates a certain harmony with the songbirds as it rustles the leaves in the trees. It sways the beds of soft gold dandelions that, seem to tremble in anticipation.

The gurgling belly of the clouds above churns the rain that sits in them. The ashen clouds roll over the meadow, sucking out the saturated pinks and blues from the wild zinnia below, casting a dull shadow over the landscape.

Then you hear it.

A crash from the shore below assaults the rocky surface of the cliffside. Gusts of air flare up the cliff, furiously thrashing the overhanging weeds and sawgrass.

The sting of salt engulfs the air with a bitter taste.

The songbirds grow silent as the wind picks up speed, bending branches and ripping off leaves. The sawgrass snaps like a whip to its touch. As if it were rivaling the howl of the wind, the shore comes crashing so hard, that the water erupts into the air, leaving behind a misty trail of salty imprints.

The clouds above wail as their bellies have grown too full for their weight. They sag over the meadow, the rain eager to break free from their cotton prison.

But, amid the approaching storm, the carefree rustle of grass can be heard, and the explosion of flower petals erupts into the air, drifting back to the floor like delicate confetti. The laughter of two intertwined partners echoes with the wind as they joyfully collide into the ground. Smiles spread widely across both their faces.

Man and woman.

Arms, legs, and hair intertwined with the grass that cradles them.

Time is still. The wind grows still, and the clouds have eased on their approach.

Dark, boyish eyes filled with unspoken light look into eyes that rivaled the vibrancy of the sage-colored grass below him.

Her sun-kissed locks tangled in the dandelions and zinnia beside her, filled his senses with a sweet, flowery scent. Her porcelain-flushed skin was sprinkled with the many freckled kisses he’d given her in their past lives.

The slipped sleeves of her white, lavender printed dress beckons him for a gentle kiss, to which he gives. The peck is tender and sweet, but a shocking chill spreads across his lips, and he pulls away from her shoulder.

“You’re so cold,” he says, swiping a finger over her cheek. Her frigid skin permeates through his hand as he cups her face.

A syrupy chuckle oozes out from her lips as she props herself up.

“Of course, I am! It’s freezing up here,” She remarks as she wraps her arms tight around her chest.

The gale softly sweeps the man’s ponytail causing the loose strands to swing around his frowning face.

“It wasn’t supposed to be this cold today, here.” He says whilst pulling away from his sooty-colored overcoat, revealing his dusty gray button-up underneath.

“No, no. I’m okay, Nathanial,” She dismisses, but Nathanial’s thick coat envelopes her, shrouding her from the cold. He holds it tightly onto her, his eyes pleading with her to keep it on. When she grips it, folding the cloth over her chest, a reassuring smile spreads over Nathanial’s face. He snags the pork pie hat off his head, snuggly pushing it onto her as a laugh escapes her lips, but a sigh leaves his.

“For extra warmth.” He says as he draws her in by the arms, holding her.

The wind softly tugs at the grass around them. The shimmering gold strands of her hair brush her face.

“Cecilia?” He whispers, his worried eyes flickering across her face.

“Yes, Nathanial?”

An unsteady breath escapes his lips. His gaze peters to the grass, watching the blades and flowers bend and bounce at the wind's touch. The ever-present hum of a lonely bee zips out of a blooming zinnia, whisking around from flower to flower. He hears the soft grumbling of the clouds that lurk above them and a frown spreads across his lips. But, a fridged touch on Nathanial’s cheek casts his attention back to her verdant green stare.

“Everything okay?” Cecilia whispers, her voice buttering his ears in a sweet delight.

Nathanial looks away once more, but Cecilia pulls his chin to face her.

“Nathanial, I can tell something’s wrong.”

He looks at her, and his forehead creases as he tries to find the right words to say.

“I’m just... Not sure we should be here any longer.”

Cecilia’s eyes burst wide and her mouth drops open. “What do you mean? It’s a good day!” She outright exclaims quickly.

Nathanial’s brows tighten as annoyance slightly escapes his tone.

“A *good* day?” he says,

“Come on! We’ve been planning this trip for a while now. Let’s just enjoy ourselves.” Cecilia says a bit dismissingly, and she tries to drag him down back into the flowerbed with her, but he pulls against it, remaining unmoved.

Nathanial scoffs, his face riddled with a hint of disbelief.

“I don’t think we can, Cecilia. Just look at the weather around us.” He says as he gestures to the clouds that grumble above them. The cotton above pushes and pulls itself over the meadow and the darkness pools where the rain sags.

“We’ll be fine, Nathanial. A little bit of rain doesn’t hurt anyone,” Cecilia says as she rubs a hand over his shoulder.

“It does to those still recovering,” He states firmly whilst passing a hand over her ankle, “You need to be careful, Cecilia. I won’t let you strain yourself anymore.” He says as he tugs the straps of her sandals.

“Nathanial, I’m feeling better now.” She says as she brings her hand to touch his, “My physical therapy has officially ended, and now we can return to how things were,” Her mind is filled with nothing but the enjoyment of the day's grayness as she looks at her partner, who’s face reflected anything, but enjoyment.

“I don’t… Think we can, Cecilia. At least, not like how we used to.” Nathanial says his voice slightly straining, but Cecilia clenches his hand in hers.

“Don’t say that, we can still enjoy the joys of travel, like how we used to. I just hurt myself a little that day, it’s no big deal.” She tries to encourage, but then a sudden fire ignites within Nathanial.

“No… Cecilia, it wasn’t, ‘no big deal,’ It was… I was…” Nathanial starts but his voice suddenly hushes out as his mind forces him to recall her scream and the darkness that enshrouds those who are lost. The tightness in his shoulders and frustration begin to grow.

“You can’t just say, it was ‘no big deal,’” He says, in disbelief that she would refer to that frightening moment as ‘no big deal’. Tension begins to stack on his chest as Nathanial is overwhelmed by his thoughts, ‘Had we not been out that late, Had we stayed on the path, Had… She not have been so *careless.’* And his frustration slowly begins to brew as Cecilia continues to dismiss his concern.

“Nathanial… Let us not.” She continues, shoulders sunken into her chest, “Let us just lose ourselves in this moment.”

The tension in his chest snaps and the air around Nathanial grows hot.

“Like how you carelessly did in Germany?” He snapped, eyes wide and brows dug.

The wind lashes in between the two, as they stare at one another. His head grows heavy with the deep anger that builds tension in Nathanial’s chest. He shakes his head to dismiss this feeling but it latches on, and it won’t move until it’s resolved. But he takes in a deep breath as he tries to ground himself.

“Why… Are you suddenly bringing up Germany?” Cecilia says, her small voice almost swallowed by the wind. Her eyes moist, from the mention of that trip.

Nathanial sighs, the frustration burning in his head, the frustration that he carries towards her, he tries to redirect it to himself. ‘I should have stood my ground. I should have made us stay home. I should have pulled her back when she was going too far.’ The anger towards her slowly fades into an anger that he carried within himself for a while now, and he looks away to face the sky. He slumps into the flower bed behind him. The weight in his chest slowly lifting.

“I’m sorry…” He says with his face in his hand. “It’s just… It’s getting too dangerous to continue staying out here.”

Cecilia swallows the lump her in throat, but her voice still comes out tight.

“It’s just cloudy, my love. The forecast said it wouldn’t rain,” Cecilia says as she puts a hand onto Nathanial’s, leaning closer to him. “This is good weather,”

“At home, when we’re indoors.” Nathanial states firmly, as he then gestures to the sky again, “The clouds are literally about to burst, we should leave before we get caught in a storm,” he says as places a knee on the ground, he motions to stand, but he’s caught before he does.

“No, Nathanial.” Cecilia tucks at his arm, pulling him back down.

The clouds above rumble softly, as the wind tussles strings of their hair onto their faces.

“Please,” She looks down at the hand that forces its grip on her partner’s arm, and a flicker of guilt shines through her eyes. She is instantly reminded of the moment in which this hand slipped from hers after she had pulled it in the wrong direction. “It’s been so long since we’ve had a moment like this…”

Nathanial pulls her hand from his arm, and he cups it tightly with his own. His grips so strong, that if you’d pull, it’ll never break.

“I’m sorry… about what happened.” She starts, her voice barely peeking out from the tightness that threatens to close it, “But know that I’m here, Nathanial,” she says reassuringly as she looks towards him with a wavering smile.

“It was… my fault for what happened, but just know, that I’ll *never* let it happen again.” She says again, lifting a hand to her partner's face. “But,”

“We can’t let this trip we’ve planned fade into a forgotten memory.” She says, her voice cracking from the tension that grips her throat. She tries to swallow the knot, but her chest tightens and she’s left with a pounding in her heart.

“We’re finally traveling again! After all that’s happened…” She shuts her eyes tight, trying to force back the flood of tears, “We’re still here, together. So, let us enjoy every new moment that we get.” A choking sob escapes her, “I want to continue, to enjoy these moments with you.” She says as the tears slowly roll down her cheek.

Nathanial swallows the deep breath in his chest, trying to ease the heaviness in his shoulders. He slides his palm across the tears, trying to dry her wet cheek as he shakes away the anxiety that threatens the clasp around his chest. He pondered if he should have brought this topic up at all, but he knew it had been eating away at him in the months of her recovery.

“I know… I know,” he says as he holds her hand tight. Passing his thumb over her bony knuckles.

A certain apprehension flickers in his eyes as he's forced to peer into the darkness of a not-so-distant memory. Blackened nails and dirt-plastered hands held a ghostly glow in the pitch-black darkness of the forest. They were hands that belonged to her motionless body that laid wet in the soil.

His chest threatened to collapse on itself as his mind clouds over the memory that has been forever stamped into his heart.

Dread clutches at his throat, his trembling hand echoing his thoughts. But the warm, clammy hands that he holds eases him.

He caresses her thin pale hands, holding them tightly as he brings them to his cheek. He fills his lungs full of air, slowly letting it go along with the tension that’s built in his chest. Having tossed aside that memory for now, he looks back to the green eyes that stare at him expectantly and smiles.

“I’m happy to have you here, now, sitting by my side. I’ve learned that… That’s all I’ll ever want.” He starts, “It’s all I’ll ever need.”

Cecilia smiles brightly, as she wipes the still-running tears from her face.

His eyes drop to her hand, and his finger trails the blue vein that pops out of her skin. A nervous chuckle escapes his lips as he gently squeezes the ends of her fingertips.

“And you’re right, we should enjoy this moment. And more of these moments to come.” Nathanial says, interlocking his fingers with her. He looks back up to the sky, the dark clouds still looming overhead. And he grazes a finger over the pocket of his trousers.

“Still... This wasn’t the weather I had in mind. I wanted this next trip to be safe… I wanted it to be perfect.” He says eyes back down to the hand of the one he loved.

“It is perfect,” Cecilia says, smiling reassuringly as she cups his hands in hers. And a sure smile spread across Nathanial’s face.

“Come on now,”

He says as he props himself to his feet, offering a hand to the lady below him, who’s tangled in an evergreen mess.

“Nathanial…” She begins to whine, but Nathanial dismisses it with a wave of his hand.

“We’ll go after I show you what we came here for.” He says, his face now bright as it holds his glinting eyes.

Feeling a little assured, Cecilia nods.

Their hands meet, and as Nathanial pulls Cecilia up he is met with an unexpected tug.

“Ahh!” Cecilia spurts, pulling at Nathanial’s sleeved arms. “The grass, it tickles!” She chuckles, fighting back against the entangled vines and wildflowers that cling to her ankle.

Nathanial lets out a soft laugh as he exaggeratedly pulls Cecilia’s hips, ‘trying’ to free her from the vines.

“Hurry! Get it off me, please,” She begins to giggle uncontrollably as the vines brush against the bare skin of her leg.

Nathanial ducks to her feet, carefully untangling the foliage that seemed eager to keep her bay.

“There,” he says, straightening himself up. But as the rush of wind blows past the two, Nathanial pulls Cecilia close. She fumbles her footing at this unexpected pull; a tiny shriek escapes her lips as she’s vaulted into the air, just to fall into a cradled embrace.

“Come, I wanted to show you something,” Nathanial says with a smile that is laced with a certain sweetness.

“Nathanial! Come on now!” She laughs her syrupy sweet laugh once again. “Put me down! I can walk on my own now,” Cecilia says kicking her feet in the air. But instead, Nathanial lets out a hearty laugh.

“And let nature try to take you from me? Not a chance.”

They approach the cliff’s edge where the gales are most prominent. They see sinking bellies of the clouds above, churning the rain within them. But what catches their eyes the most, is the flickering ocean that crashes powerfully into the shoreline.

But, a soft hum can be heard in the distance. A song of giants clicks through the water, singing in an enchanting frequency.

Cecilia jerks her feet, motioning Nathanial to let her down. Silently, they stand aside the cliffside, admiring the deep sea that reflected the darkness of the clouds above it.

“Be careful,” he says whilst grabbing Cecilia’s wrist, gently pulling her back from the edge of the cliffside. They lock hands.

The wind blows through their hair, showering their faces with cold kisses. Sea salt wafts through their noses, sticking to the fabric of their clothes. Cecilia clings to the overcoat over her shoulders, the pungent smell of the ocean water calms her soul and she continues to let the wind tangle her hair.

But then she feels a pull on her hand.

“I’m sorry, Lia. I didn’t expect the weather to be so grey today.” Nathanial states, his eyes shooting up to the full clouds that threaten to explode on them.

“Don’t apologize.” She says, smiling at the mention of her nickname. She rubs the side of his arm softly, with a rhythmic motion. “I like it.”

Nathanial smiles, but he casts his eyes back to the ocean, and so does she.

Even though the looming clouds threaten their downpour, a moment of silent peace ensues between the two. And the crash of the shoreline brings a cooling mist in the air, bringing with it the smell and taste of salt, and memories.

“Do you remember when I got tangled in the seaweed off the coast of Florida?” Nathanial states.

“Oh yes! And the tiny crabs that pinched you?” Cecilia chuckles, “I had to help you take them off.” She laughs, her voice smooth like honey.

“Yes! Oh god.” Nathanial shivers at the mention of the crabs, “Had I known they’d be in that seaweed I wouldn’t have jumped in!” He exclaims.

Cecilia’s laughter fills the air with a sugary whisper, “That was a good day,” Cecilia announces, smiling.

The air around them grows colder, and the dense smell of seawater hides the moisture in the air. Nathanial’s thoughts race as he thinks back to that day, in Germany, and the tension begins to swirl again in his stomach. His hands give to a slight tremble, and he shoves them into the pocket of his trousers.

“And the night we spent lost in Germany’s, Black Forest,”

“Ah…” Cecilia’s face fades flat, as she ponders the experience. “That was… A scary night.”

“I know.” Nathanail claims, “After you fell down that ravine, for a split second… I thought…” He stops, the tension in his voice is clear.

“Hey,” Cecilia extends a hand to Nathanial, who takes it, eagerly interlocking his fingers with hers. “I’m still here. And in the end, I always will be.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Nathanial repeats, his shaken tone easing up.

Cecilia sighs, “That day, was a struggle, for us both. But we made it through. And in the end, it really was a fun journey. One of my favorites.” She coos softly, exchanging a glance at Nathanial, before returning her gaze to the sea. “Thank you, for sticking with me even in those moments.”

“I will always be by your side,” Nathanial says as he lets out a chuckle, but it ends tightly. However, Cecilia does not notice. Her focus has entirely shifted to the sea that waved before them.

Slightly spread, creating a path through the clouds, was a ray of sunlight that slowly peaked through. A single strand of light, in the dark ominous sky created an otherworldly glow. It shone through the sky, clattering against the ocean in a mass of glittering sparks.

 The harmonious song of the giants sings, their voices bouncing over the water, reaching the two intertwined souls. At that moment, through the ray of the sun, the ocean trembles as a creature more powerful than it breaks through.

Parting from the sea, crashing into the air was a whale. It broke through the tension of water and air, splitting through the barrier with its silvered cylindrical body. The ocean sprinkled the whale in a glittering confetti of sparkling blues, and the ray of the sun cast an ethereal glow that outlined the creature as it came crashing back into the sea.

“Nathanial!” Cecilia exclaims but her eyes are fixed on the being that erupted from the sea. Although its body has sunken, its tail waves high into the air as its song passes through the waves, meeting her ears like honey-sweet. Cecilia’s verdant eyes sparkle with the glittering specks of the sea.

“Nathanial! Do you see it, Nathania-,” Her body twists to him,

But her eyes fall to the ground,

The zinnias and dandelions brush against the kneeled leg of her partner, and the peaking ray of the sun glints against the moss-agate ring that he holds to her in his hands.

 “I love you,” he says with a soft smile, complemented with the upright crease in his sparkling eyes. “I realized that night, that regardless of where we are, I always want to be with you, here, now, and forever.” He continues, “So I ask, regardless of my worries, continue to travel with me, around the globe.”

Cecilia stops. The only motion coming from the maxi dress that whips in the wind. She clutches the overcoat to her chest, and pressure behind her eyes begins to build again.

“As we do, I want to continue this life with you.” Nathanial starts, “Regardless of our challenges, I want to always be there with you. And as we travel the world, we explore each other as well.” He speaks softly.

“Will you let me continue to explore your heart?”

The moisture in the air lays down a thick heavy coat onto the meadow. The crash of salt engulfs the taste and smell of the rain-filled clouds. The bellies of the cloud, churn, and grumble.

A smile extends across her face as she holds her hands to her now wide-opened mouth. Her vision blurs as happy tears flood her eyes. She tries to blink them back, but they gracefully fall, slipping down her cheek. She tries to bite back that shriek that escapes her lips, but she cannot. They crowd the vision of the person who knelt below her, but she knows that he too, is shedding this happiness with her. But then, the first drop of rain kisses her cheek.

Then another, then another.

It comes crashing down in an explosion of wind, and rain.

Nathaniel tucks the ring into his pants, rushing to Cecilia. He grabs her hand pulling her away from the cliffside as the rain pounds into their backs.

But,

She pulls back.

Snagging his wrists, her cold hands rush to cup his face in her palms as the rain slips between her slippery fingers. The wind snatches the hat from her head, carrying it far away as she drags him down into a kiss.

The sting on their backs fades away.

The cold touch of the wind disappears, for they are enveloped in a tender embrace that warms them down to their souls.

Heat explodes from their chests just as fast as their cheeks flush red. The dandelions and zinnia dance in the meadow. The wind twirls the loose petals and all is forgotten, as the two souls finally let go.

Cecilia clutches Nathaniel’s face. The water droplets force her to blink furiously but her gaze stays ever-loving.

“You’re my everything, Nathaniel.” She whispers. The makeup from her mascara drips down the creased corners of her eyes, leaving dark highlights that contrasted the vibrant green.

A wide smile spreads across Nathaniel’s face as he runs his callused hands through her wet stringy hair.

“You’re my world, Cecilia.”

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