

LIGHTNING FLASHED. Thunder roared. Cold wind blew mercilessly against everything that lay on its path. "Mother, isn't the storm terrible, but it doesn't destroy everything."

"Yes, Mother, it does. Tomorrow we would see trees uprooted, streets flooded, and houses warped out of shape."

"That's what you think child, and that's what you see. But, listen to me. Are you not glad we strengthened the foundation of our house last week?"

"Yes, Mother, I sure am."

"Why?"

"Because today the storm cannot threaten to wash us away. We are safe. Our house won't be destroyed."

"There, you see? The storm does not destroy everything. It cannot destroy that which is built on strong foundation. And there's one thing I want you to remember regarding storms, child. It is sure to pass away. It never remains forever. Tomorrow, there will be peace and quiet again."

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The night was cold and dreary. Inky darkness enveloped the earth. The moon and the stars hid behind the clouds which were once white but which had now turned black and ugly. Palm trees bowed down to mighty wind. Rain poured down pitilessly on the sleeping world.

But one soul couldn't sleep. She stood by the window staring with unblinking eyes at the ferocious outburst of nature. A streak of lightning revealed the sad lines on her face. The face which had always masked her emotions now clearly revealed the anguish she had been secretly feeling.

The heavy downpour sounded ominous. Ordinarily, she would have been afraid. But now, she didn't take notice of it. Other feelings crowded out fear from her heart — other feelings which she did not understand.

She was angry, but she was angry with nobody. She hated, but she hated nobody. She wished she were dead, but she wanted to live. She wished nobody else existed in the world, but she longed for company. She did not understand herself. She couldn't.

She felt like crying, but she did not want to cry. She bit her lips until they bled. Her eyes were painful from holding back the tears that were threatening to fall.

"No, Doreena. You should not cry. Doreena never cries even of the whole world seems to have gone against her," she chided herself.

Yes, she wanted to be brave even when she felt everything and everyone had taken up arms to fight against her. She wanted to face them all with a smile.

There was the problems of money — a problem she considered so base yet so basic. The end of the month had come

and gone but she did not receive her allowance. The crops back home had been destroyed and they weren't rich to begin with.

Then, there were Brenda and Sarah. They were her closest friends but they were now talking against her. She became a scholar. They did not. The yellow dragon had eaten them up. They tried to belittle her achievements and to discredit her merits. She prayed for them.

And there was Luisa, the only person whom she trusted completely. She considered her the steering wheel of her life. She once felt she was driving around in circles and she had successfully guided her out of that maze. She was grateful to her. But now, she was slowly drifting away, afraid, perhaps, that she would become too dependent on her or that someday she would suddenly cause her destruction.

These facts, grinding viciously in her mind like little cog-wheels, troubled her. A storm was raging within herself

— a storm she had been desperately trying to hide; a storm which could be seen on her countenance only now as she stared at its counterpart in nature.

A deafening roar of thunder ensued. It recalled to her mind the words her mother spoke fifteen years ago when she was only five.

"The storm cannot destroy anything built on strong foundation."

Was her foundation strong? Didn't the storms of life weaken it? Won't the storms of life destroy her? She was proud of herself. She had gone on strong and sound in spite of the storms.

"A storm always passes. It never remains forever. Tomorrow, there will be peace and quiet again."

That was consolation. Storms do not remain forever. They must pass away. When would the storm of her life walk away? That, she did not know.

Doreena walked away from the window. At least, of one thing she is sure. The storm will pass away. Then, peace and quiet would come again.



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