

# Introduction

“Rainbow’s End” is one of my pre-Clarion short stories. I’d have to do some digging to figure out an exact date, but I’m fairly sure I wrote it while I was in my twenties, which means I was listening to Pat Benatar and the big hair bands at the time.

The story came to me as I was driving to a friend’s house. It had been overcast, and the clouds began to part as I drove across town. Suddenly, the image of a young boy pining for a rainbow came into my head. This is what I call the “lightning from God”—an image that makes me want to sit down and start writing that very moment. A fair number of my short stories came to me that way, and if I sat down immediately to write, a short story emerged in its entirety a few hours later. One of my instructors at Clarion said I’m an unconscious writer—the process happens beneath my surface thoughts. (That’s no longer true.)

I wanted very much to turn around and go home and write, but I was sure my friends would be offended if I blew them off. So, against my best instincts, I went, stayed for a few hours, and then rushed back home hoping to recapture the lightning from. To my surprise, I did get it back. That had never happened before. The lesson I took from this: I can delay writing even when I get struck by the lightning from God. However, I still drop everything and write when the lightning strikes. I can tell you exactly when the last time occurred. I was driving south on 288 in Chesterfield County, heading to my friend’s house to go with her to her son’s lacrosse game. Suddenly, a thought entered my head: What if *cats* had magic?

And that’s how [The Catmage Chronicles](#) were born.

January 2015

# Rainbow's End

by Meryl Yourish

**J**esse stared up at the sky on his way home from the library and as a result, he tripped over an uneven sidewalk and sprawled full-length on the wet pavement. He lay there breathless with the impact for a long moment.

The rain came down hard. It bounced off his raincoat noisily, dropped onto the pavement and leaped up, breaking the puddles into a miniature water ballet, the drops bouncing and dancing to the music of the thunder in the distance.

*He was walking through the rain and he was looking up at the sky hopefully but the clouds showed no sign of breaking and the sky was getting dark and it would be sundown soon and the rain was getting in his eyes and it stung but he had to keep looking, looking, looking. It had to happen, he knew it had to happen, he'd been waiting for it forever, for days and days and days and days and days, for a million years, but it hadn't happened yet. Mrs. Anderson said it would happen, she told him it was just a matter of time, and all he had to do was wait and he would see, but he had waited so long already and it hadn't happened yet.*

Jesse raised himself from the sidewalk and grimaced at the rip in his pants leg. He'd get in trouble for that, he knew. He walked slowly homeward, head down now. The Projects loomed closely—ugly, three-story brick crackerbox buildings that had been built during the forties and

not touched since then. Jesse hated the Projects. He hated the unbroken black tarmac of the parking lots and the green painted tarmac of the courtyards, the green paint fooling no one into thinking it was really grass. He hated the noisome, concrete-enclosed brook that ran by the back of his building and stank in the rain, hated the children who taunted him for not playing in their games, hated the adults who were always watching, watching him, hated his apartment, hated his room. He never used to like rain, but it was different now. Rain held a promise. Someday, the rain would—well, someday.

Jesse climbed the two flights of stairs to his family's apartment. He kicked a crumpled newspaper out of his way as he walked down the hallway to his door. He could hear his sisters arguing on the other side of the thin walls. He took a deep breath and stepped inside. The apartment was tiny. Jesse thought it ugly and noisy. His two sisters shared one small bedroom, he slept in the other. His mother slept on a dilapidated convertible sofa that she'd picked up secondhand. All their furniture was secondhand.

He heard water running in the kitchen. His mother was washing dishes. His sisters glanced at him briefly, then continued their squabbling. He walked quickly through the living room and tried to sneak past the kitchen.

"Jesse, what happened to your jeans?"

"I fell, Mama."

"I just bought those pants for you last month, you ripped them already? Can't you ever wear a pair of pants without wreckin' 'em faster than I can save up for a new pair?"

"I'm sorry, Mama. I didn't do it on purpose."

His mother regarded him for a long moment. She raised a damp hand to push a strand of hair out of her eyes. "Take 'em off and get into your pajamas. And put something on your leg, you scraped it."

Jesse stared down at his knee and saw beads of blood welling from it. "Oh."

"Oh? Oh? You didn't even notice you cut your leg? What were you doing, anyway?"

"Nothin'."

"Nothin'. You were looking again, weren't you? I told you before, you're wasting your time. Ain't gonna get nothin' from rain but mud and water."

"There is so more! I seen it on TV, it is so gonna happen!"

His mother sighed. “Go fix your leg and gimme those jeans.” Jesse fled from the room, close to tears.

*It was late and he was listening to his cassette player with the headphones and his sisters were asleep in their bedroom and his Mama was watching television and she'd kill him if she found him still awake at this hour but he had to listen, listen, listen, he had to listen because when he listened to his tape then things were all right, they were better than they could ever be and it would happen someday, it would, it really would, and they'd see, he'd show them all. He'd seen it on the TV and it had been wonderful and different, so different from where he lived and what he did and the people were nicer and the trees were nicer and the flowers were nicer and there weren't any parking lots and there weren't any ugly brick buildings and there weren't any grownups yelling and there weren't any sisters laughing and there wasn't anything but nice people who wanted to help you unless you count the bad lady but there was only one of them and she didn't like water so she wouldn't bother him if it was raining out and if it wasn't he'd just run away, anyway, that's what he'd do.*

Jessie's mother got up tiredly from the sofa and switched off the television. She walked softly through the hallway and pushed open the door to the girls' room. They were sleeping peacefully. She left the door open a crack and padded to her son's room. The rustle of the covers made her shake her head. “Jesse, you take off those headphones and go to sleep. School tomorrow.”

Jesse pulled the cover from his face and removed the headphones, placing them carefully on the nightstand next to his bed.

“I don't see how you can stand listening to that over and over again. You listen to me now: I catch you with those things on one more night past your bedtime, and I'm taking them away for a month.”

“Yes, Mama.”

“Good night.”

“Good night, Mama.”

She closed the door quietly. Strains of Judy Garland emerged from the tiny speakers in the headphones. Jesse hummed along softly. He'd been waiting to see a rainbow for months, ever

since he'd seen *The Wizard of Oz* that weekend night. He'd been entranced for days afterward, and had pestered his mother for the soundtrack until she finally scraped together a few dollars and bought it for him. He'd listened to it over and over again and asked his mother when it would be back on television so many times that she'd lost patience and slapped him, finally, and he stopped asking.

When he found out that the movie was also a book, he went to the library and read it. But it hadn't been the same. It wasn't like TV. The colors weren't as bright, and the people in the book just weren't as alive as the people on the TV.

He sought his teacher in private one day after school, and asked her where he could find a rainbow. She told him he had to wait until it rained when the sun was out, and Jesse blushed, thinking she was making fun of him. When he saw that she was serious, he asked her how often it happened. "Summertime's the best time," she said. "It will happen soon. Just wait and watch."

So Jesse waited, and watched, and if it rained during the daytime, he was either out in it looking for the sun, or he kept a close watch on the sky through the window. He didn't care if it happened while he was in school, he was going to run outside and see it, and then—well, they'd see.

*It was the last day of school and that meant that it was summer and she said it would happen in summer so it wouldn't be long now before he'd see it, see it, see it, then they'd all stop laughing at him like his sisters laughed at him they always laughed at him and said "go away, you're a boy," so he went away and they giggled and played with their stupid dolls and their stupid jump ropes and their stupid girl games and he hated them anyway he didn't need sisters he didn't need a brother he didn't need anyone or anything he just wanted the rainbow, that was all, he wanted the rainbow and then things would be better they'd be better than they'd ever been and he would be happy, happy, happy all the time and there would be colors, bright colors, and he'd watch them all day long and nobody would ever be able to bother him again.*

June was nearly over by the time school let out, and July passed quickly. Jesse's heart beat faster every time it rained, but the summer thunderstorms were not obliging. Sometimes, it just rained drearily all day long, and Jesse grew bored sitting at the window waiting for the sun to come out. He watched television a great deal that summer, staying indoors even in the stifling mid-day heat. His sisters played outside under the sprinklers and he had the apartment to himself.

His mother tried vainly to convince him to go outside and play while she was at work, but she couldn't force the child outside if she was on the other side of town, so she gave up.

August was nearing its end, and Jesse was beginning to despair. It happened mostly in summer, Mrs. Anderson had said, and summer was almost over. In another two weeks, school would start, and he still hadn't seen a rainbow. Then the weather would turn colder, and the rain would turn to snow, and if there'd ever been a snowbow, Jesse had never heard of it. He smiled as he thought of a snowbow.

An oppressive heat wave finally forced him away from the television and out of the apartment. During the daytime, the apartment was an oven. At night it was little better, but the sun couldn't beat down on the roof and the window fans made the air almost bearable. Jesse spent most of his time outside in what little shade there was to be had, or he went to the library and read all day in air-conditioned coolness. He finished the Oz series then, but still the books couldn't satisfy him the way the movie did.

Sometimes Jesse just sat in a chair, eyes closed, his portable cassette player resting on his lap, the headphones sending forth melodies that had been written decades before he'd been born. At those times, Jesse was transported back into Oz. He could see the entire film in his mind's eye. His favorite place was the village of the Munchkins, and he spent many hours talking to the funny little people who were no bigger than he.

On the Saturday before school started, Jesse awoke later than usual. It was cooler than it had been. As he dressed, he noticed that the sky was dark, and his heart skipped a beat. Today, he thought, it has to be today.

He could barely sit still during the meal, even though his mother treated them all to a hot breakfast for the first time in weeks. The wind grew stronger as the morning wore on, bending tree branches and pushing pieces of paper before it as it rattled the windows in their frames.

By eleven o'clock, the clouds were thick and black and so low they seemed to be almost sitting on the roofs of the buildings. Jesse quivered with excitement. "Mama, I'm goin' out," he told her.

"Jesse, it's gonna rain. Why don't you stay in and play cards with me?"

"Please, Mama, I have to go. Please?"

"I told you a thousand times, Jesse, a rainbow ain't nothin' but an empty promise. You're settin' your hopes on nothin', and you're wasting your time."

Jesse said nothing.

“Oh, get out of here. Take your raincoat and get out of my sight,” she snapped.

A flash of static from the television was followed by the rumble of thunder outside. Now, Jesse thought, it has to be now. He ran and got his raincoat and hurried out the door. The rain began falling as he rushed down the two flights of stairs, almost tripping on the last few in his haste. Outside, the sky was very dark, and the wind was whipping harder. Jesse grinned up at the skies, willing the rain to fall.

*This is my storm I know this is my storm this is the storm I've been waiting for, the clouds are gonna clear in a corner of the sky and I'm gonna see my rainbow, see my rainbow, see my rainbow, I know I am, this is the one I've wanted, and it's going to happen, they'll see, they'll all see. And I'm gonna follow that rainbow and I'm gonna find it, yeah, find it, and I'm gonna never come back and I'm gonna be happy forever and live happy ever after and that Dorothy was dumb because she was there and she went back to the grey, the grey, the grey, and I'm never going back there, no I'm never going back there, once I see my rainbow I'll be free, free, free. Look, the clouds are parting, can I see the sun a little? I can see the sun a little, yes I can, yes I can, now the sun is coming out and now the rain is still there raining now I'm gonna see a rainbow, yes I will, yes I will. There it is! There's my rainbow! There's the rainbow that I wanted, now I gotta catch that rainbow, wait for me! wait for me!*

Jesse's excitement was such that he couldn't stay in the Projects. He walked through the rain, down one street, across, down another, wandering aimlessly as the rain poured over him, down him, around him. He didn't know how long he walked, nor did he care. He just waited for the rain to cease in one part of the sky. And when it did, his breath caught, his pulse quickened, and he jumped, ecstatic, and ran in the direction of the sun. He splashed through puddles joyfully, legs pumping, arms outspread, smiling a smile that felt like it would split his face. His leaps got longer as his excitement grew. And finally, when he thought he could bear no more waiting, the rainbow appeared.

Faintly at first, the beginnings of the bow arced through the summer sky. Jesse ran with all his might towards the rainbow, laughing as the sunlight grew brighter and the colors grew stronger. The buildings on the streets were in the way, now, he needed space to see it. He hurried

down the street, scared that the sun would go back in before he accomplished his goal. The buildings opened up finally, onto a huge parking lot. He stopped to catch his breath.

The rainbow was glowing brightly, and the arc was clearly visible. There, there, there was the end of the rainbow, now, he just had to get there.

And suddenly Jesse recognized the parking lot, and the building lying under the rainbow. No, he thought, this isn't right. That's my building. That's my apartment. The rainbow can't be leading me there.

Jesse stood there, gasping, staring, unbelieving.

His mother turned from the window as she heard her son walk through the door. She looked at him sadly and held out her arms. Jesse ran to her, crying helplessly.

"It's all right," she said, stroking his wet hair. "It's all right, honey. It ain't nothin' but a rainbow. Nothin' but a bunch of colored lights in the sky."

End