

THE FINAL STORM

20-DE04-W24

Terminal patient Susan has lost her passion for painting storms until unflappable nurse Holly proves no storm is too big to paint.

FADE IN:

EXT. FARMHOUSE, DAY

A blue Honda crunches up the gravel driveway in front of a peeling, white farmhouse with three pumpkins on the porch.

HOLLY (30's, professionally tranquil) pulls her nursing bag out of the backseat. She approaches the house in autumn-leaf scrubs, holding a clipboard.

PORCH

LISA (55, catlike, nervous) holds the screen door open for Holly and offers a hand.

LISA  
You're the new hospice nurse?

HOLLY  
Yes, I'm Holly.

LISA  
Lisa. Come on inside and meet Susan.

INT. FARMHOUSE, DAY

Holly follows Lisa across the checkerboard tiles of a barren white kitchen down an undecorated hallway to a sunflower-yellow door.

Lisa pauses, hand on the door knob.

LISA  
My sister's in a bit of a mood, but if she gives you the silent treatment, just ask her about the paintings.

INT. SUNROOM, DAY

Paint-stained floorboards creak under Holly's tennis shoes as she follows Lisa into the sunroom. Exquisite, nature-themed oil paintings cover the yellow walls.

An unfinished canvas the size of a mattress sits on an easel in the center of the room, depicting storm-tossed waves under black clouds.

The half-painted canvas is marred by an apple-sized hole punched in the sky.

SUSAN (60's, worn, bitter) hunches in a wheelchair and glares at the damaged, unfinished masterpiece.

LISA

Susan, this is Holly. She'll be here a couple times a week to make sure you're comfortable.

Susan doesn't respond.

Holly puts her bag down on the floor and unwinds a blood pressure cuff.

HOLLY

How are you feeling today, Susan?

SUSAN

Dying. Same as last week.

Lisa winces but Holly smiles. She waves Lisa off and approaches Susan with confidence.

HOLLY

Mind if I check your pressure?

Susan sticks out her arm. Holly attaches the cuff and squeezes the pump. She follows Susan's unrelenting gaze to the unfinished canvas.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

You painted that?

SUSAN

I tried.

Holly cranes at the other paintings. Rain-drenched wolves. Leaves in a gale. Waves pounding a water-logged dock.

Nearly every canvas has a dark palette and contains a storm.

HOLLY

You painted all of these?

Susan grunts.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

I see you like storms.

SUSAN

*Like* them? I paint *through* them, Miss Holly.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)  
I've painted through every storm in  
my life, whether I liked it or not.

Susan swivels. Holly goes with it, still holding the pump.

Susan points at a rowboat shattered on a rocky shore,  
lightning stabbing overhead.

SUSAN (CONT'D)  
Painted that when we lost Mom.

She indicates an enormous canvas of a tornado barreling  
through a cornfield towards a lonely silo.

SUSAN (CONT'D)  
And that one's for my husband of  
forty years. Car accident.

Holly glances at the unfinished storm-tossed sea.

HOLLY  
And this one?

SUSAN  
That one's mine. The final storm.

HOLLY  
It's huge.

SUSAN  
The bigger the storm, the bigger  
the canvas.

Holly makes a clipboard note of Susan's blood pressure and  
peels off the cuff.

HOLLY  
I've just a couple more questions  
before I let you get back to  
painting.

Susan scoffs.

SUSAN  
The last time I touched that  
painting was when I put my fist  
through the canvas.

Holly raises an eyebrow at the gaping hole.

SUSAN (CONT'D)  
Some storms are just too big to  
paint and I can't even stand to  
reach the canvas anymore.

Holly walks behind the easel, spins an easel screw.

HOLLY

The easel can be adjusted.

SUSAN

Leave it. If the LORD's gonna leave his work unfinished there's no reason why I can't do the same.

EXT. KITCHEN, DAY

Oblong, multi-colored pills PLINK into a plastic pill organizer.

Lisa sorts her sister's weekly medications from a mountain of prescription bottles. She looks up as Holly enters the kitchen.

LISA

Did she give you any trouble?

HOLLY

Not at all. She does seem a little agitated, but that's to be expected.

Lisa sets the filled pillbox aside.

LISA

I'm worried about her.

HOLLY

In what way?

Lisa sneaks a glance down the hall.

LISA

She spends all day in the sunroom, just staring at that painting. Won't finish it. Won't get rid of it. Is that ... normal?

HOLLY

I wouldn't say it's out of the ordinary with her diagnosis.

PILLBOX

The rectangular pillbox sits on the table, the flaps for each weekday closed.

HOLLY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
For now, let's increase the Celexa  
for her anxiety and I'll check back  
in on Friday.

TIME LAPSE

The pillbox flap marked 'TU' for Tuesday POPS open, the pills  
inside disappearing.

'W' POPS. 'TH' POPS. 'F' POPS.

EXT. FARMHOUSE, DAY

Dark clouds rumble and wind sends straggling autumn leaves  
whipping across Holly's windshield as the nurse pulls up at  
Susan and Lisa's house.

Lisa watches the storm approach from the safety of the  
screened-in porch but Susan has parked her wheelchair under a  
swaying oak in the front yard.

Holly kicks her car door open and grabs her nursing bag.

Susan watches the approaching storm with glee. She holds out  
her hands to collect the first drops of rain.

Holly hooks her nursing bag over the back of the wheelchair  
and turns her patient towards the porch.

Susan looks wistfully over her shoulder.

INT. BEDROOM, DAY

A rain-pounded leaf sticks to the outside of a latticed, lace-  
curtained window. The refilled pillbox sits on the sill,  
flaps closed.

Lisa hovers in the bedroom doorway while Holly takes Susan's  
blood pressure.

Susan looks up at Holly.

SUSAN  
How much longer?

HOLLY  
Just another few seconds.

SUSAN  
Till I'm dead, Miss Holly. How  
long?

Lisa sucks in a breath, fingernails sinking into the wooden doorframe.

MOS: Holly hesitates, then kneels, putting a gentle hand on Susan's flannel sleeve. She answers, unseen.

Susan's face slackens. It sinks in and she rips the cuff off her arm, tosses it aside.

It knocks the pillbox off her sill.

The pillbox bursts open and multi-colored pills bounce and scatter on the rug. Lisa scurries to pick them up and Susan yells at her to get out.

END MOS

INT. KITCHEN, DAY

A cast-iron tea kettle hums on the stovetop, not yet boiling. Lisa slumps at the kitchen table.

Holly enters, ruffled.

In the hallway behind, Susan wheels into the sunroom and slams the door.

LISA

There she goes, to look at the stupid painting again.

Holly takes a seat beside Lisa.

LISA (CONT'D)

This isn't how I thought it would end. You should have seen her when she first got the diagnosis.

INT. SUNROOM, DAY

Susan glares at her unfinished painting, twin tears skiing down both cheeks.

LISA (V.O.)

She told me she was gonna buy the biggest canvas she could find. "I'm going to paint my way home," she said, but it just got harder and harder.

Susan turns her head, the muffled conversation reaching her.

She cracks open the sunroom door.

LISA (O.S.)  
And then the cancer wrapped around  
her spine and took her legs.

KITCHEN

Holly sits opposite Lisa, listening as Lisa punches the air.

LISA (CONT'D)  
That's when she put her fist  
through the canvas. It was too  
much. At the start, it seemed like  
she could walk on water and now  
she's just—

HOLLY  
Sinking?

Lisa nods and tears drip.

HOLLY (CONT'D)  
It must be hard seeing her like  
this. It's been one storm after  
another for you and Susan.

SUNROOM

The muffled conversation floats down the hall through the  
half-open door.

HOLLY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
It can be hard to remember, when  
you're staring at the waves and  
clouds and the rain, that there's  
any light behind-- but there is.

KITCHEN

Lisa wipes her eyes, listening.

HOLLY (CONT'D)  
I believe it. And I believe that  
you and Susan believe it too. You  
might have taken on a little water,  
but you're not going to sink.

SUNROOM

Susan listens, face unreadable. The door creaks shut.



## KITCHEN

The cast-iron teapot shrieks on the stove top and Lisa hops up.

LISA

I'm sorry, Holly. The hospital's paying you to be Susan's caretaker, not mine.

HOLLY

I don't mind at all. Hope I didn't overstep my bounds.

Lisa laughs and pours hot tea into a ceramic mug while Holly collects her nursing bag.

LISA

Not at all. Can I offer you some Earl Grey?

HOLLY

Thank you, but I can't stay. I've got two more patients to visit before five. I'll see you Monday.

Lisa sits at the table with her warm mug of tea and listens to Holly's car drive off.

A loud CRASH sounds from the sunroom.

Lisa drops her mug and runs.

## INT. SUNROOM, DAY

Susan wrestles the mattress-canvas, fallen off the easel atop her.

Lisa bursts in and pushes the canvas off her sister.

LISA

What are you doing?

SUSAN

Trying to get this darn thing where I can reach it. Grab the other end. You'll have to adjust the easel.

LISA

Sue--

SUSAN

You said throw it out or finish it,  
and I'm finishing it, okay? So just  
help me.

The two sisters wrestle the enormous canvas back onto the easel. Lisa tweaks the easel's height while Susan watches, feverishly mixing paints on a plastic palette.

LISA

What about that hole?

SUSAN

It'll be fine. You and that pesky  
nurse got me thinking about what's  
behind it.

She stares up at the canvas, brush raised, breath quivering.

She lays the first stroke. Then another.

MONTAGE:

Paint drips off the canvas edge, staining Susan's jeans.

The sky darkens outside the window. Susan gulps down her evening meds with a cup of coffee from Lisa, then resumes painting.

Lisa pulls a rocking chair into the sunroom and curls up beside Susan with DEE HENDERSON's *The Healer*.

Susan's paint-soaked hands fly over the canvas, but all improvements she makes to the painting remain unseen.

END MONTAGE

Susan drops her brush and rubs her eyes, smearing yellow paint over the bridge of her nose.

Lisa's drowsy head lifts off her chest. *The Healer* drops off her lap as she rises, stretching with a yawn.

LISA

You need to sleep.

SUSAN

I'll soon have more than enough  
sleep, thank you.

She readjusts her cloth headband and picks up her brush. Behind her, Lisa gasps. Susan smiles.

SUSAN (CONT'D)  
It's almost done.

LISA  
Oh Sue.

Lisa hugs her sister from behind.

LISA (CONT'D)  
I know it feels like you're  
drowning and unfinished but you're  
not, Sue. You're not.

Susan grips Lisa's arms, hard, hugging her back.

LISA (CONT'D)  
When the time comes, you just take  
his hand. He's waiting behind this.  
He won't let you sink.

SUSAN  
I know.

The sisters look up at the unseen canvas and cry.

EXT. FARMHOUSE, DAY

The porch pumpkins have melted into frost-covered mush.

Holly's feet crunch on the gravel, headed to the house. Lisa opens the door.

INT. HALLWAY, DAY

Lisa leads Holly down the hall. The bedroom door is open.

LISA  
You were right.

INT. BEDROOM, DAY

Susan lies on white sheets, chest rising and falling with weak rhythm.

LISA (O.S.)  
She just slipped in yesterday.  
(choked)  
Won't be long now.

The two women peep through the door at the sleeping Susan.

HOLLY  
She looks peaceful.

LISA  
She was. Once she finished the  
painting, all the fight left her.

HOLLY  
The painting?

LISA  
Come and see.

INT. SUNROOM, DAY

The enormous canvas waits, center of the room, finished.

Waves surge, whipped by wind and lashed by rain, but every  
foaming drop reflects light.

The fist-hole in the canvas has been mended with a patch,  
over which Susan has painted the sun, literally bursting  
through the dark clouds. Beams of light shine a pathway over  
the troubled waters.

LISA (O.S.)  
What do you think?

Holly looks at the canvas, tears gathering in her eyes.

INT. BEDROOM, DAY

Susan wheezes rhythmically under the sheet, face relaxed and  
peaceful.

HOLLY (V.O.)  
She painted through her final  
storm.

Susan's folded hands, still stained with paint, rise and  
fall, rise and fall.

FADE TO BLACK.