The Sherwood Forest Art & Literary Review has been an important part of Tyler student culture for more than forty years. The annual competition encourages student artists and writers to create their best work, and the Review showcases the winning entries and presents them to the College community.

www.jtcc.edu/sherwoodforest
Sherwood Forest Art & Literary Review 2010
This journal contains the winning student submissions in the 2010 Sherwood Forest Art & Literary Review competition. This annual competition is sponsored by the Student Activities office at John Tyler Community College. For additional information, contact Helen McKann at 804-594-1523 or hmckann@jtcc.edu.

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This edition of the Sherwood Forest Art & Literary Review 2010 was revised on April 30, 2010.
Dear friends,

Since the first issue of the Sherwood Forest Art & Literary Review – published at the end of the first quarter (not semester then) of 1968 – this publication has provided an outlet for the creative ideas of the best John Tyler Community College students.

And, just like the College, the publication has evolved over the years, from a black-and-white copy job to the full-color, polished print piece you hold in your hands today. But, the purpose of the publication has always remained the same – highlighting the creativity and courage it takes to put pen to paper and create something new.

Painting, drawing, writing and other forms of art are inherently creative, but they are also forms that take hard work and a commitment to yourself. Submitting your work for publication takes all that and then some. You open yourself up to rethinking your work, editing and redesign, not to mention others’ reinterpretation of your work.

It’s an exciting challenge, and the kind of learning experience we work hard to create every day at John Tyler Community College. I congratulate those whose creativity is honored inside these pages, and I certainly acknowledge the hard work that is represented. The results were worth the risk.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marshall W. Smith
President
John Tyler Community College
first place, art  

*Lights on the James* by Khiem Tran
poetry

Bound Future by Hadley Mische ........................................ 5
Devil and the Deep Blue Sea by Vanessa Remmers ... 7
Blue Poetics by James Moore ....................................... 9

nonfiction

Dear Car Thief by Sara Page ........................................ 11
The Forgotten One by Sara Goodwyn ......................... 13
Finding Faith by Erica Brewer .................................... 16
Peeling Away by Sandy Johnston ................................. 19
My Baby Brother by Sarah Pless .................................. 22
Becoming Human on Tuesday by Sarah Swatosh .... 24

fiction

Je Ne Sais Quoi by Andrew Carter .............................. 27
Storms and War by Katherine Wingfield ..................... 32
Child of Darkness, Child of Light by Rebeca Parrott .... 38
I’m Not Crazy by Genevive Pegram ........................... 42
On the Dot by D. Travis Brandel ............................... 46

art

Lights on the James by Khiem Tran ...... 2, back cover
Stones #3, South Shore, Isle of Iona by Robert Wynne ... 4
Alyssa Rose by Hannah Morgan .................................. 10
Ginter Conservatory by David Center ............................ 26
Magnolia by Eleanor Rose ........................................... 50
second place, art  Stones #3, South Shore, Isle of Iona by Robert Wynne
I want us young and falsely innocent together in the mirror - hand print images dyed
dark and needle pricked
slow like thick black tea - sugar so sweet, honey in your coffee
and china doll hands growing in our gardens
crayon scribbled whispered letters on thick creamy paper
roughly torn from fairy tale after fairy tale
of glass, death, fruit of our enchantment

I want us gaunt and thinly veiled together behind a solid door - oak and cracked
no sounds will reach our shadowland
we, older and drinking cheap wine - it tastes like foreign words, bitter between my teeth
with dying flowers weeping on the kitchen table
lipstick and tear traces on our tissue cheeks
balled into cat toys in the dusty bones
of our unpainted wood, stained glass, trapped music box world

I want us aging and plump rose cheeked together in our better years - we are fed
on ripe tomatoes
on bitter dark espresso and tongues - dripping ringed stains on our knuckles and gums
piles of violets and peaches on the door mat
we carved verses into tables at restaurants in our young times
ripped them into our skin but now we are safe
of our no longer selves, our bound hearts and wrists, never lost to those garden lions
I want us cold and gray in all colors together in a crooked chair - pictures on the walls of the walls around us in faded sheets
penicillin and children's aspirin - fake grape, cherry, orange dyed our tongues
those synthetic fruits grow and flourish in spidery bottles
pointed like letters crumpled beneath our pillows
we tore them in aching backs and restless nights
of our slowed breath, shallow breath, no more breath.
My mother stood silent in the blackberry fields
Between the devil and the deep blue sea
Where the whir of the locusts and the
Soft bellied cries of the Ayore Indians
Hummed there in her ear.

Hiding out there in the blackberry fields
The dust leaves scraped
And the ticks nested
On her pale, little feet
When she looked up there in the hard, glass sky
At the one plane to Tobite.

In the blackberry fields
Her arm hairs turned black when the
Berries would
Ooze
Down her curled, white knuckles,
Plucked from the vine
To watch them
Pop.

Way out there in the blackberry fields,
Tucked in the bed of a tree,
With the heat that sagged on her back like a coat,
Watched the shaving cream drip
From her father’s chin
As his Bible flew down at the flames
That came from the dirt
That sighed.

My mother fastened her hands on the vines
Of the jungles of Bolivia
And cried.

Until the church bells
Clamored on the cliffs of the deep dark valleys
My mother would drop and fly.

With black hair flying,
And arms pumping,
My mother ran through the blackberry fields.
We were painters painting for silence,  
And we were artists selling for money.  
Our senses were molded from heart songs  
& teardrops, collected in dustpans,  
    forgotten, and left for our homeless.

Educated, we turn our ignorance  
into epic poems and stone godheads--  
    by the end of the cycle, no one will know better.

Tiny, spindling spiders crawl amongst  
Places, where we grow lonely & inspired.

Malformed song-notes are thus played,  
& yet the pen only but scratches the paper;  
Notation of every rhyme is proven wrong--  
We have no art left in us, only a memory.

    By the time we realize this, we are slaves praying to God.
third place, art  Alyssa Rose by Hannah Morgan
Dear Car Thief,

I thought about you today. I finally shredded the last piece of you that was in my life. Remember the store card from Abercrombie and Fitch that you left in the overnight bag in my trunk with the unfired bullets, shaving kit and ladies underwear? It’s gone now. Did you think someone had stolen it? There’s no honor, I hear. Anyway, I didn’t need it. It took up valuable space.

I wondered if you worry about identity theft. I supposed not. The card was probably no good anyway. Did you cancel it? Did you have to?

I thought about you again as I shredded the payment booklet from the bank. The insurance took care of that. I had good insurance. It was a good car. A college graduation gift from my folks. Did your parents ever help you get something you needed? I think perhaps you had good parents. The lady in the photo card I found in the glove box looked nice. She had one of those friendly faces. Worn, from years of worry, I suppose, but also loving. You could see it in her eyes. The message in the card made it sound like she was well loved in return. Were the smaller, messy signatures your kids?

Shredding the garage receipts, I wondered why you never fixed the back window. It would have been easy enough. A busted out window draws attention. You could have kept driving that night. Across the Nickel Bridge to I-95 and freedom bound. It was so close. I would have fixed the window.

Did you see me that night as I talked to the cops then escaped the rain in the backseat of their car? I thought perhaps you were in
the van in those folks’ driveway. They sure were excited, weren’t they? I’m not sure they went inside, even for the deluge. It’s not every day you have four patrol cars and the paddy wagon in your yard. Is it?

The cops were excited, too. They could hardly wait to tell their supervisors they’d picked up a stolen car. And a long rap sheet. They asked me the same questions over and over. My answers kept disappearing in the instant messages on their computer screen.

Did you wonder what I was telling them? If I was backing up the history you’d made for me by looking at the business cards you found in the center console? Did you make the story up on the spot or had you convinced yourself of this other woman’s existence? It was a good story. Had I not been staring at my reportedly stolen car, I may have believed it myself. Did you laugh at my slack-jawed expression when the cops told me of my long lost boyfriend who’d loaned you the car? My fiancée laughed at that. Or when I got out of the car I pulled up in and was surrounded like a common criminal? Did you think just for a second I’d back down? Guess you should have read my cards more carefully.

The prosecutor told me you’d been in jail the entire two months since that night. Did I even flit through your thoughts? Maybe what it’s like to walk to your parking spot and find another car there. The panic that ensues as you walk around thinking maybe you simply forgot where you parked or the sinking feeling as you call the police department for the first time. The weeks of back and forth faxes with the insurance company and the hours spent talking with their agents. Or maybe the rock in your stomach when you see your broken back window, the dents and scratches on the car body and the overflowing ash trays in a previously no-smoking area. The disgust that eats you the first time you sit in a seat that’s no longer yours and the inexplicable desire to protect yourself from the unseen film that covers everything. The hope that fills you when a car passes that maybe this person is drunk enough to slam into the one black car in the middle of flashing blue.

Your face barely registered in the courtroom that day. You were short in your orange jump suit and shackles. They’d already let the cop on our case leave by the time they called us. I stood long enough for you to be brought in and for the prosecutor to tell me you’d pled guilty to grand larceny. She said she’d go after you for the $500 insurance deductible, and I let her. I didn’t need it, didn’t even really want it, but I knew $500 would touch you more than my words ever could.

Sincerely,

Behind the Wheel
A father’s relationship with his daughter has a tremendous impact on her growth and development, especially psychologically. As I transitioned from an adolescent to a young adult, I was affected by my father’s authoritarian parenting methods in a way that changed the course of my life. His inability to allow me to grow into my own person was a strain on my family and me, even until this day. Authoritarian parenting has parental figures who attempt to exert psychological control over the child. These parents have unreasonable expectations and are unable to accept their children for who they are. They tend to withdraw from the child and no longer show any love or affection when the child doesn’t follow what the parent believes to be the only way of behaving. They are loud and verbally abusive and may be physically abusive as well. Children who are raised in this environment tend to be anxious or aggressive, or may be quiet and depressed.

I was born in a rural community into a well-known family of farmers. Needless to say, customs were very old fashioned and traditional. My parents were in their forties, and my brothers were about to graduate high school when I was born. My father doted on me when I was young and took me everywhere he went. He called me “Dolly,” in reference to me being his doll baby. He sang to me every night and prayed with me before I went to sleep. He influenced me cognitively by allowing me to develop high self-esteem during my early adolescent years. My mother was a wonderful woman and mother, but she was very subservient to my father. His opinion was all that mattered in my household and he made all the decisions in my family. The older I became, the more I realized that he was in charge and had the ability, with just a few choice words, to make everyone’s life miserable. He was, and still is, a very successful man and owned the most land in the county. My brothers worked for him on the farm, but he showed them no affection and never complimented or thanked them for anything. He didn’t even pay them for raising his crops. He forced them to rent their own land, making their only profit from the crops they raised on the side. I was treated differently though, or so I thought.

When I turned sixteen, everything changed. As a child and adolescent, my grades were excellent and I participated in numerous activities, including cheerleading. However, the older I grew, the stricter my father became. I was striving to gain autonomy and become less dependent on my parents, but at the same time, he was holding on tighter. His psychological
control over our lives was interfering with my goal of autonomy. I was very limited with the phone, where I could go, how long I could stay and with whom I could associate. Unfortunately for everyone at the time, I was just as headstrong and stubborn as my father, and I was determined to have my way about things. I did not agree with his limitations on my behavior or my friends. He bought me a candy apple red Mustang GT for my sixteenth birthday, but he put personalized plates on it with the intention of having people recognize me and tell him where I was. This included the local deputies. If I was late coming home, by even five minutes, he would tell me I couldn’t drive the car. He wouldn’t allow me to get a job as he wanted me to have to depend on his money. When I didn’t make all A’s, he would criticize my B’s. I never understood why he would get so angry and yell. He never listened to anything I had to say, and when he did, he had his mind made up already. My mother would never stand up to him. She had to be home from work by a certain time every night, have dinner on the table by a certain time, had to run his bath water, and yet she never complained. I would feel so much frustration at her taking everything that he dished out to her. He could really be cruel and hurtful with his words. She would tell me it was better not to say anything, because it would just make things worse. At this point, I learned that my parents were just people and my idealistic thoughts of them were gone.

At seventeen years old, I met Raymond. He lived across the road and his father actually had farmed with my father in previous years. You would think this was a match made in heaven, and it was for us, but not for my father. Raymond is black and I am white. In my family and in my town, it seemed that this was worse than murder. I was shunned, cursed and treated as if I had a disease. Most of my friends stopped talking to me. My minister came to talk to me. My principal called me into his office to convince me I was “hanging with the wrong crowd.” My father treated me like I had stuck a knife in his chest. I really don’t know how he felt, as he never really has told me. All I do know is that he beat me and threatened to put me in the local mental hospital. He threatened me with everything you could think of. He never gave me any support in my choices. My brothers chased Raymond and me with shotguns as we were driving, and we almost ran off the road in the process. They sat at the end of the driveway with binoculars, trying to see if I was at his house. I was forced to sneak around and lie to my parents. It was the worst time of my life. As I was falling in love for the first time, I had to endure abuse at the hands of those who were supposed to love me unconditionally. I never understood this and still have a difficult time with it.

I graduated high school with an advanced studies diploma, amidst this emotional trauma. My brothers hated me and told me that I was no longer their
sister. My father said I was bringing down the family’s name. But, Raymond and I never gave up on each other. I left for college the day after I turned eighteen, which was a week after graduation. My father was thrilled to have me away from the man I loved, but when I got to school, my only focus was having the freedom to finally be with the man I loved. I was not committed to my college courses, as this was my first taste of freedom. I am sure it felt similar to someone being let out of prison after years of confinement. I was not successful in school until years later. In the meantime, as a young adult, I struggled with identity issues. I didn’t know who I was and was scared to let anyone know the real Sara. I expected people to hate me and treat me with disgust, as I had been treated by my own family. When my daughter was born, I was so fearful that I didn’t even share the news with my mother until she was three months old. When I did tell her, she said that meant my father could never know, and if he found out, I would never be able to come home again. Over and over, my heart was broken by the same people who had given me life and raised me as a happy child. I learned that love is not always unconditional. I was sad, angry, depressed, disappointed, and confused at the very least. I felt alone and distressed.

After seventeen years, Raymond and I are still together. We are married and have two children, and we are very happy together. After several moves, we are now living back in the same small town we grew up in. Only recently, has my father allowed my mother to put pictures of the children up in the house. He has physically seen my children once, and that was by accident at the grocery store. We live five minutes apart, and yet those miles seem like an eternity. My mother comes to meet me at the mall or at the grocery store parking lot, with his knowledge, and she has begun to tell him about my life in bits and pieces. I feel appreciative that he seems to slowly be accepting this information more and more but angry at myself for feeling that way. As much as I don’t want to care, it still hurts me deeply. I don’t think that will ever change.

His drastic treatment of me as an adolescent caused me pain and grief. It made me question who I was and made me distrust people in general. I couldn’t trust a friend or acquaintance if I couldn’t trust in my own father’s love. My mother tried to compensate for him, but missing his devotion changed me inside. I had less faith in my own abilities and felt like I needed to settle for less than I should have in many situations. Seventeen years later, as I write this, I am at a point where the relationship I have with my father is still distant. The relationship is strained, and the communication is only made through my mother. I am unsure if this will ever change. I know that the impact my father has made, and continues to make on me, is painful, strong and lasting.
The above quotation is indicative of the attitudes of many addicts when the matter of religion as a cure is first brought to their attention. It is only when a person has tried everything else, when in utter desperation and extreme need, he turns to something bigger than himself, that he gets a fleeting look at the way out. It is only then that contempt is finally replaced by hope and hope by fulfillment.

I have endeavored to relate some piece of my own experience in the search for spiritual help rather than speak of descriptions or reasons for the neurotic drinking that made my search necessary. After all, the pattern of most addicts’ experiences fits a pretty universal mold. Experiences differ because of circumstances, environment, and temperament, but the aftereffects, both physical and mental, are almost interchangeable. It makes little difference how or why a person becomes an addict once this disease manifests itself. In my own case, I was not entirely oblivious to the causes that guided me to excessive drinking. In a desperate effort to erase these causes from my life and to find means to better mental and physical health, I investigated my battle of addiction from every conceivable angle. Medicine, psychology, and psychoanalysis absorbed my interest and supplied me with a multitude of information, both general and specific. It led me in the end, however, to the fact that there was a mental and physical disease that science had placed in the category of “incurables.” Concisely, all my study and research did for me was to illustrate something about WHY I drank. It substantiated a fact I had known all along, that my drinking was symptomatic. It was cause and effect. It did point out a road to better emotional health but it commanded something of me in return that I did not have to give. It asked of me a power of self-will but it did not take into consideration that this self-will was already drugged with poison and was sick, more often than not, violently ill. Intuitively, I also knew that a person constrained to temperance by the domination of will is no more cured of his vice than if he were locked up in prison. I knew that somehow, some way, my emotions, must be purified before the appropriate pathway could be followed.

It was about this time that I began flirting with religion as a possible way out. I approached the subject with a wary,

“There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance- that principle is contempt prior to investigation.” Herbert Spencer
none-too-reverent attitude. I believed in a supreme Deity, but the orthodox approach through the church, with its doctrine and sacrament, left me unmoved. The more I struggled to gain an intelligent grasp on spiritual growth, the more confused I became. On the other hand, a purely materialistic viewpoint that postulated a “mechanical order of things” seemed much too negative even to entertain.

As a poet, I had spent too much time communing with nature, trying to place upon paper my feelings, not to know that a tremendous spiritual force was just beyond our universe. There was, however, so much that seemed specious or sentimental about religion—so many doubts assailed me, so many evils to be confronted—yet there was within myself a fervent and burning desire for spiritual orgasm. The occasional periods in which I felt spiritual emotion, I immediately examined with all the commitment of the steadfast analyst. Was this emotion just a form of religious ecstasy? Was it fear? Was it just blind conviction or had I tapped into something?

“Most men,” as Thoreau wrote, “lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them.” It was the articulation of this despair that led to my drinking in the beginning. Religion, so far, had only added to my desperation.

I drank more than ever!

A seed had been planted, nevertheless, and a short time after that I met the couple who had for the previous five years devoted a tremendous amount of time and energy helping addicts like me. Looking back on that meeting, the simplicity of their conversation with me is beyond belief. They TOLD me very little beyond what I already knew, but what they HAD to say was unbound from any elaborate spiritual jargon—it was simple Christianity spoken with Celestial Wisdom. The next day I met over twenty men and woman who had discovered a mental rebirth from addiction. Here again, it was not so much what these people told me in regard to their personal experiences that was impressive, as it was a sense that an unseen influence was at work. What was it this couple had and these other men and women exemplified unknowingly? They were everyday sort of people. They certainly were not sanctimonious. They had no “holier than thou” attitude. They were not reformers, and their ideology of religion in some cases was almost inarticulate. Nevertheless, they had something! Was it just their sincerity that was magnetic? Yes, they certainly were sincere, but much more than that emanated from them. Was it their great and terrible need, now being fulfilled, that made me feel a vibratory force that was new and strange? Now I was getting closer and suddenly, it seemed to me, I had the answer! These people, of themselves, were nothing. They were but instruments waiting patiently for their maestro.

Here, at last, was a demonstration of spiritual principles at work through human lives just as definitely and with
the same phenomena expressed through physical laws that govern the material world. These people were like lamps supplied with fire from a huge spiritual explosion and controlled by the wick of their souls. They burned dim, bright, even brilliant, depending upon the degree and progress of their faith. In addition, this faith could only be maintained if they obeyed that spiritual law.

These men and women were thinking straight--therefore their actions corresponded with their thoughts. They had handed themselves over to a higher power for guidance and direction. Here, it seemed to me, in the word “Thought”--was the soul of the whole spiritual quest. As Proverbs 23:7 states, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he…” and so is his health, his environment, his failure, even his success in life. How foolish I had been in my journey for spiritual help. How self-centered and arrogant I had been to think that I could approach God intellectually. In the very struggle to obtain faith, I had lost it. I had given the term faith a religious significance only. I had failed to see that faith was also a mundane way of thinking. That good and evil were only the end results of homogeneous and consistent spiritual principles. Noticeably, my own thinking (typical most times and atypical at the wrong times), had been unquestionably wrong. Like everyone’s thinking, it was a mixture of good and bad, but it was extremely uncontrolled. I had been sticking my chin out and getting smacked by spiritual law until I was punch drunk.

The day I made my initial attempts toward holy direction, a completely new world unlocked for me. My prison bars clanked and clattered open and I was free. Drinking, a vicious habit, was washed completely out of my consciousness. I have never since used alcohol as a way to disguise my dilemmas. In fact, there are so many other things within myself that need correction that my drinking habit pales in comparison. Please do not assume that all this is but an exposition of spiritual pride. A chart of my spiritual progress would look like the graph of a business that had been hit by everything but an earthquake. Nevertheless, there has been progress. It has cured me of a vicious habit. Where my life had been full of emotional turmoil there is now an ever-increasing depth of calmness. Where there was a hit or miss attitude toward living there is now new direction and force.

The approaches of man to God are many and varied. A scripture in the book of Hebrew (11:1) states, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for; evidence of things not seen.” My conception of God as “Universal Mind” is after all, but one person’s approach to the belief of a “Supreme Being.” If one’s belief makes sense and opens up a fascinating field of discovery as well as challenges one’s perspective, the acceptance of that faith can make life an extraordinary and magnificent adventure.
Forcing independence can be as tough as peeling a banana. My son's first day of kindergarten taught me that letting go can be as hard on the child as it is on the parent. We always think that the pain associated with growing up is reserved for the parent as their child makes that dreaded pull for independence. My son's first day of kindergarten showed the difficult job of peeling away occurs for both parent and child.

Walking with his sister and me to the school bus stop every day for two years was a treat for Kyle. Being my second child, he began to understand the drill of how school days always started with the bus trip, and he loved it. He always envied his sister Kelsey getting to be the one to ride the bus. Kyle knew all the kids at the bus stop and loved to talk and flirt with the girls and toss the ball with the boys. All the kids knew when the bus was coming as Kyle would holler, “Bus!” The big yellow bus would pull to a stop at the corner of our street, just three doors down from our home on Sandbag Road. Yelling again, “Hi, Mrs. Wiley!” he always greeted the sweet older bus driver. Mrs. Wiley drove the bus in our neighborhood for over seventeen years. She was a grey-haired, thin woman, with a wrinkled face and eyes that sparkled when she spoke to the young ones. She always made sure, on special days, to have treats not only for the bus riders but the younger brothers and sisters also. Every morning she greeted Kyle by name. He so wanted to ride that bus. As the bus rolled on down the road, we would wave and watch until it was out of sight. “Next year, Buddy,” I would always tell him, and then next year came.

Oh, how exciting that morning was! Kelsey and Kyle both awoke early that morning, too excited to wait for mom to wake them. They quickly dressed in their new school outfits that we had purchased weeks ago and laid out nicely the night before. Breakfast was a special treat of cheese scrambled egg and bacon sandwiches, one of their favorites. Breakfast was gulped and teeth were quickly (and I’m sure not thoroughly) brushed so they could check their new backpacks one final time. They were sure the hands on the clock had stopped moving as they waited for it to be time to walk to the bus. It happened all too quickly for me. Were both my kids really going to school now? Where had the years gone? 8:50am, time to head for the bus stop. Out the front door, down the ten brick steps, down the slanting asphalt drive, and out into the street. We could see several other kids already waiting with a couple of parents to boot. Kyle’s steps never wavered. He called out greetings to
everyone and chased his friend Lexie, both almost falling into the ditch. Kelsey was a little more reserved, talking to her friends in animated conversation, but always casting that protective eye towards her little brother whom she adored. There was only time for a few minutes of conversation and play before we all heard that cry from Kyle, “BUS!” Everyone turned to watch that yellow bus come rumbling down the street. I’m not sure what thoughts started coursing through that little head of his, but he nearly ran both of us full force into a brick wall.

Suddenly, something inside Kyle switched off. His steps slowed, his voice was as soft as a gentle breeze, and he was immediately by my side. Kids ran to get in line for the bus. The older kids loved to get on the bus first, claiming what were considered the choice seats in the back. The rear of the bus was big kid territory. Kelsey, Kyle and I joined the line at the back of the bus. Kyle was awful quiet.

“Isn’t it exciting Buddy, you finally get to ride the bus,” I said. Kelsey coupled my encouragement with, “Yeah Buddy, we can ride the bus together.” Holding my hand, he kept looking up at me with a stare that was no longer full of enthusiasm and excitement. Suddenly, it was their turn to board. I gave Kelsey a kiss and she turned and climbed the stairs. Kelsey stopped at the front row of seats and slid over to make room for Kyle.

Kyle looked up at me and said, “I don’t want to wide the bus.”

“It’s all right, Buddy. It will be fun. You are going to have such a fun day today.”

“No, pwease don’t make me go! I’ll go tomorrow.”

“Come on Buddy, you can sit with Sissy.” Kelsey had returned to the door of the bus to try and help coax him onto the bus.

“Pwease, pwease don’t make me go! I don’t want to wide the bus no more!” He was holding on to my legs tighter than a tick. I reached down and picked him up. He was holding onto my neck so hard I could barely breathe. His tears made a puddle on my cheek, breaking my heart into a million pieces.

“Buddy,” I said. “You know you have to go to school.”

Mrs. Wiley came down the bus steps to try and help. “Come on Kyle, you know you want to go to school, you’ve been waiting all year.”

Kyle was having none of it. “I don’t need to go to school, I alweady know evewything. Pwease, pwease, Mama!” he cried.

As gently as possible, back to that banana peel again, Mrs. Wiley peeled him off me and put him on the bus. He cried quietly. I looked through the window into those pleading eyes and thought I would lose it right there and then. The bus doors closed and our eyes met. I held one hand on my mouth, to keep from losing it, and
with the other I waved as the bus rolled down the street.

The walk back to the house was the longest, shortest walk I have ever taken. Sight was almost useless, like looking through a shower curtain, for tears had filled my eyes and run down my face. The thoughts that ran through my mind were all jumbled and crazy. What was I doing making my baby go to school? How could I let him go off like that? Should I head up to the school and get there before the bus so I could comfort him? Somehow I made it back to the house and sat down in the kitchen and cried like a baby. It had never been this hard with Kelsey! She had attended daycare for two years and a year of half-day classes at the church while Kyle was a baby, so starting kindergarten had not been as traumatic an event for us. How were we going to make it through this?

I’m not sure how long I sat there with all these crazy thoughts going through my head, but I soon realized the phone was ringing. Drying my eyes, I reached for the phone. It was the principal of the elementary school. Mrs. Wiley had gone into the school to let them know that Kyle had had a rough start, but as soon as the bus was out of sight of home, he calmed down. The principal went to his classroom to check on him and then called to inform me he was in his class laughing and playing and for me not to worry. The relief I felt was immense, but the pain of that time in his life has been repeated over and over again as he has passed from one milestone to another. Sometimes the pain was mine, sometimes his, but mostly it belonged to both of us. We have both learned that these events are a hard but necessary part of life. The fear, pain, and heartbreak that Kyle and I faced that day was something we both overcame, but that “peeling away” was hard for both of us.
“Knock knock!” my 5-year-old brother Tyler yelled into my face with as much gusto as he could muster, spitting all over my face. He had just learned the fine art of telling jokes, though most of his jokes had no real punch line and rarely made sense.

“Who’s there?” I laughed back, and tousled his bright white-blond hair. With his hair standing straight up like he had stuck his finger in an electrical socket, Tyler was always getting his head rubbed. His soft blue eyes were always looking deep into yours, as if he were trying to read every thought speeding through your brain, to capture it and keep it for his own. With a big, gapped baby-tooth grin, Tyler responded, “Joe!” He laughed like the joke he was getting ready to deliver was the juiciest secret ever told.

Getting just as excited, I asked, “Joe who?” and with an impish grin, Tyler answered “Joe MOMMY!” as he giggled and ran off into the other room. The fact that he got such a kick out of this lame Knock Knock joke was hilarious. He even delivered the last line wrong. It was supposed to be “Joe Momma,” but his twist on the joke made it that much better.

It’s amazing when I look back and think about how much light, love and laughter Tyler brought into my life. He was such a breath of fresh air, always coming up with something new and off-the-wall to say, at the wrong time, making me laugh every time. Once, when Tyler was four years old, we visited my Aunt Karen for Thanksgiving. As we were cleaning up after the big meal, my stepdad joked around with the turkey, asking in a singsong voice “Who wants to say goodbye to the carcass?” My little brother, in sweet innocence, walked over to my aunt with tears in his eyes. Tyler, with a quivering lip asked, “Where are you going, Aunt Karen?” We all laughed and wondered what on earth he was thinking.

Tyler suffered from Asperger’s Syndrome, which is a form of autism. Two of the characteristics of Asperger’s are obsessive-compulsive behavior and the ability to memorize massive amounts of information. Tyler had many obsessions, but one big one was Pokémon cards. He would lay his cards out in a perfectly straight line and for reasons only known to him, arrange them in a certain order. He also loved playing the game Guess Who, as he had memorized all of the characters in the game. Without looking at a card, he would hop over to you like a rabbit and ask coyly, “I have black hair, a big mustache and I’m wearing glasses! Who am I?” As you looked at him with a bewildered look on your face, he would yell out “Ralph!” or whoever the character of the moment...
was. He also had a knack for memorizing professional basketball players’ statistics. He would walk up to you, put his hand on his hip like a sassy teenager and ask “What is Glenn Robinson’s free throw average this year?” If you didn’t know the answer, you’d get “schooled,” big time. It never ceased to amaze me that such a little kid could make me feel so inferior!

On July 10, 2001, Tyler was preparing to swim at one of the many local meets of the summer. While practicing before the meet started, Tyler jumped into the water and immediately started thrashing. One of the lifeguards was able to jump in and pull him out. My mom came running and cradled Tyler in her arms. All he could say was “Mommy, my head hurts. My head hurts, Mommy,” before succumbing to one of multiple seizures. Tyler was rushed to the emergency room as he fell into a deep coma. Several tests, scans and second opinions later, it was determined that Tyler had suffered a massive brain hemorrhage. The bleeding on his brain was irreversible. There was no way for the doctors to repair the damage to the blood vessels that had ruptured, or treat the parts of his brain that had died due to the lack of oxygen. My parents made the ultimate decision that no parent should ever have to make: it was time to take Tyler off life support and let him pass in peace.

When my baby brother passed away at the tender young age of six, my world came crashing down on me. How could the world ever be right again if someone so innocent, so full of life and love, so perfect, could suddenly be taken away? The answer became very clear. Tyler was brought onto this Earth to save, to heal and to love. Before he passed away, my parents arranged to have his organs donated. As the day of his memorial service loomed before me, I wondered “How will I make it through this day?”

The memorial service was a celebration of Tyler’s life. We laughed, we cried. We played silly home videos of Tyler being himself, movies of him running back and forth between two couches, bouncing off of them and laughing hysterically. We shared stories and pictures. Everyone was given a Pokémon card to remember Tyler. We knew he had given the gift of life. Yes, Tyler had died, but his spirit lived on, in the other people whom he saved with his organs, and through my family, our friends and our community. There isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t think of him. And instead of feeling sad when I think of him, I smile. I am reminded of all the silly things I should be doing with my own daughter on a daily basis, starting with teaching her a good Knock Knock joke.
I am knitting a blanket on Tuesday. The rhythmic click of the needles is the only aural testimony to that which is unfolding before me, and I am discovering that the monotony is seizing my mind’s ability to do anything but reflect upon the parallels between what I am creating and who is creating it. I remember when I first learned how to knit, my project in question was a scarf, and it managed to warp itself into a rolled up, holey cord, narrowing as I went on; it seemed to resemble a noose more than anything of comfort and beauty. As my knitting skills matured, however, I began to understand the interconnectedness of the stitches, their purpose to the whole, and I began introducing new colors and patterns into my blankets. This is where I am now, on this idle Tuesday, creating my newest masterpiece.

Isn’t this what we are all doing here on this Tuesday, though? We are all weaving together our own grand masterpiece, our giant tapestry of being, something to hang on the wall with a resounding, “Sarah was here!” I am the master knitter of this blanket and I am the master knitter of Sarah, and they both seem to be consistent in that I try hard and I screw it up. Perhaps I have used the wrong stitch, or god-forbid I drop a stitch, or maybe I have chosen the kind of yarn that will create a stiff, itchy, and unfriendly blanket. I have made my share of unfriendly blankets, and I have made my share of life’s mistakes. It is with a deep and rich understanding of these prior tumultuous choices, those past times where I created a stitch not understanding its purpose, which has led me to this point.

It was about a year ago that I began weaving together a whole new kind of blanket. There was this moment, a brief but incredible moment of clarity. It was on a Tuesday too, one much like this day, when the dawn came creaking up the horizon and with it the clarity that became my lullaby. It was the kind in which the whole memory of my life finally became less segmented and seemed to tighten together into a more reliable dichotomy, the right and the wrong, the dark and the light. I was finally able to see what had made me the person that I am; how the past had evolved into the present and had continued to distract my hopes for the future – the yarn wrapped around the needle, intertwined with another, pulled through and created a stitch, one that would never be undone.

Up until that moment, I was someone who would have been a ghost of a memory had it not been for the whimsy of my curious nature to throw open any curtain of anonymity that I had
I was rediscovering myself. Of course this is not always followed by immediate action; all in due time and process…Nothing can truly be revealed in sincerity without imagining the gifts in return. Tiny trinkets of empathy, sprawling canvasses of imagination, bells and whistles of dream and memory, grandiose displays of depth and desire, a need to salve the sweet tooth of existence.

Casting off the webs of compromise did indeed come with the gift that strength rewards: liberation. Liberation from the inability to breath, liberation from the inability to control my circumstance – as a human, as a woman, as a mother; liberation from the inability to believe that love truly exists. My gifts came all-inclusive with the knowledge that love does exist, but it does not define me, it does not bind me, and it does not conceal me. I find myself regretful that I ever sought out salvation in others before ever giving credit to my own strength. How else could I have survived thus far, if not for a kind of strength that has been in my body and soul since the beginning?

My life as a fabric has become strong, unbreakable even. Taking a step back from the intricate, fanciful stitches that I had tried to cast on to a weak and unsteady foundation, I instead started with the most basic stitch – survival. Onto this base, I have slowly begun to experiment with different knots, seeing how they would sit in my blanket, and pulling them out when I was dissatisfied with the progress. The change in me happened with my refusal to continue on when the pattern left me unfulfilled and disgruntled with the overall project. It was easy to throw on a stitch, intertwine it with another, have it not quite perfect and yet still be proud of what I had made, for hadn’t I come so far from where I first started? It is not easy, however, to realize how much one little stitch depends on all the others to hold it together, and makes it almost impossible to undo in retrospect. Reversing the outcomes manages to be much harder than grasping the initial decision with accuracy and dignity - I have begun introducing a different beauty to my woven palate now, from the very foundation upon which it is created.

I know how I want this blanket to go, at least I can picture it, frame it in my mind and carry it around hoping to find steps of progress that make it all the more real. It can happen, it can be real, it can be there as a form of hope and solace… the spark, the fire, the electricity of the soul giving light and breathing life into what once was the darkness of my reality. It can be as real as the rain that drops from the sky. It can be as real as a candle that illuminates the darkness in the night. It can be as real as the embrace of a completed blanket, warm and peaceful, on this Tuesday morning.
honorable mention, art  Ginter Conservatory by David Center

When Emilie B. laid her head down on the pillow, she did so in a state of exasperation, because there was nothing left to do but wait, and a small chance that she would fall asleep in her present state.

She reached over and picked off her night stand a slim hardbound red book with the title *Je Ne Sais Quoi: A Young Lady’s Guide To Mastering French Sophistication* by Madame Maureen. Emilie did not understand a single word, primarily because it was written in French; but her mother had given it to her on the eve of her eighth birthday, and it was now the single most important possession she owned. Within the week she would turn ten, but her mother was now dead and had been for over a year.

Carved on the headboard of the bed, above the pillow that Emilie’s head rested upon, was the phrase:

“*In Splendid Fashion.*

L.B.”

Part 2. Damien B., who returns home from an opera he did not enjoy.

“All can fall apart so quickly.”

When an opera begins with a narrator, drowning in the ocean of ruffles on his shirt and emphasizing his words as if he was uncovering a verse of the Bible that everyone had accidently skipped over, launches into a drab monologue like...

“All can fall apart so quickly. This is a tragic truth that the Count Burg and the Duchess learned much too late...And so, our story begins...”

...then I know I’m in for a disappointment.

A disappointment that comes to a man, who not only expects it but anticipates it, subjects the victim to a magnified suffering that is most unfortunate.

...At least in my opinion.

Part 3. Emilie B., who thinks of herself as a princess.

“If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more, to dream all of the time.”

-Marcel Proust
“La première chose que vous devez comprendre en devenant une jeune femme sophistiquée, c’est que…”

The words in this book are so pretty, like Susanne when she did her hair like the princesses we read about in history class, with her pretty yellow flower tucked behind her ear.

The teacher always scolds us for giggling so much. I’ve always thought of myself as a princess. Susanne was still laughing a little, and I remembered how she bowed while lifting up the ends of her dress. It’s called a ‘curtsey,’ she explained. She must have seen how confused I looked.

Then I remembered seeing a curtsey in the old movies I like to watch with Father, especially the ones with Shirley Temple. Most of the time I don’t really understand them all that well, but I think it makes Father especially happy if I enjoy Shirley Temple movies.

Father tells me that Mother loved Shirley Temple movies. She would laugh out loud and say things like, I love her curls, Damien! and point to the screen. Isn’t she just splendid? she would say.

At least that’s what Father tells me.

I tried to do my hair like Shirley Temple once. That was when Mother was still alive. I got her to curl my hair and everything. I didn’t look much like Shirley though, even with the curls. It’s because you were created to look like Emilie B., not Shirley Temple, she said. But I know that wasn’t why. I still think God wanted all little girls to look like Shirley Temple. I can’t imagine how sad that must make Him.

Just yesterday when I was combing my hair I noticed how dark my hair has gotten. I wonder if Mother would like it. She liked everything though, as far as I can remember. If I had my way, my hair would still be blonde, or golden blonde, or whatever you call it. I remember the nights when she would lie next to me in my bed and stroke my hair.

Your hair is absolutely splendid, Emilie. It reminds me of when I was your age.

How so? Nothing excited me more than hearing my mother’s stories.

Growing up in Lorraine. Repeat after me, Emilie, Lorraine. Splendid. Growing up in Lorraine, everything had that golden color to it. Especially the wheat fields. I used to go running through them, reaching up and trying to grab the heads off the stalks. My girlfriends and I would spend all day lying in the grass, talking about the boys we liked. Not like girls these days. You spend all your time cooped up in your room, and if you communicate with anyone it’s through the cursed internet.

I’m sorry, mother.

I remember how she used to sigh so deeply, like she was letting something out that was way down in her soul, and stare at the ceiling.

I wish you could understand, Emilie, just how beautiful the world can be. I promise you that someday, someday soon, I’ll take you to Lorraine. Show you the Place Stanislas, and the town where I grew up.
Sometimes she would turn to me, with her blue eyes (I’ve never seen more beautiful eyes). Maybe I’ll even show you the wheat fields. Would you like that?

I would love that.

Part 4. Stuart, who knows little about operas.

At about the same time Emilie B. was holding, but not reading, the red hardbound book entitled *Je Ne Sais Quoi*, a Rolls-Royce Phantom Coupe was crossing over the intersection of 3rd and Main St. Its driver was a middle-aged chauffeur named Stuart P., and his passenger was an extremely well-dressed man with close-cropped dark brown hair. Seeing that the well-dressed man was staring silently out of the window as though perturbed by his own thoughts, Stuart P. did something he rarely did and preferred not to do. He engaged the well-dressed man in conversation.

*How was the opera, Sir? If I may ask…*

Being jolted from his rather serious thoughts, the well-dressed man gave a little start.

*Just fine, Stuart. Just fine.* He returned his gaze to the window.

*That’s good to hear, sir.*

The well-dressed man turned back to Stuart.

*What am I saying? I hated everything about it. Bloody atrocious. I would’ve rather sat through *Cats II.**

He chuckled to himself, then looked back out the window.

*That’s a shame, sir. Absolute shame.*

Silence. The well-dressed man sighed deep and slunk back into his leather seat.

*Stuart, can I ask you a question? Of course, Sir.*

*Have you ever been to an opera? I can’t say that I have, Sir.*

*You absolutely must see one. At least one.*

*I don’t care if it’s bloody *Carmen.* Remind me later…or better yet remind my secretary, Nancy; she’s better with that sort of thing… and I’ll get you some tickets.*

*Why that would be a very gracious gesture, Sir, though please don’t feel obliged to do anything on my behalf.*

The well-dressed man dismissed that notion with a wave of his hand.

*If you do go, Stuart, make sure to bring your wife. You do have a wife, right?*  

*Yes, Sir. Been married for thirteen years.*

*Well, bring her. Women love operas. They seem to find them romantic in some way.*

*I can imagine, Sir.*

*My wife loved them. I never understood it though.*

The well-dressed man thought about what he had said for a moment.

*Maybe women understand music, or at least musicals, on a different level than us. And even though we don’t fully understand it, they communicate it to us through their love.*

*That’s a very poignant way of putting it, Sir.*

For the first time in the entire
evening, the well-dressed gentleman let a genuine smile creep across his face. Then he placed his hand on Stuart’s shoulder in the same way he used to greet his old comrades from the university.

Stuart, you are the only chauffeur I have ever met who uses words like poignant. I have to say, you are too intelligent to be driving around a smug bloke like me.

If you say so, Sir.

The well-dressed gentleman fell back into his seat and watched the buildings go by. Stuart could not think of anything else to say, and even though it was unnerving to him, he was forced to let the well-dressed man relapse into his harrowing thoughts.

The last thing Stuart heard was the well-dressed gentleman quietly muttering to himself. Though he could not fully identify exactly what was said, he understood it to be something to the effect of:

Bloody waste of an evening.

By the time the Rolls-Royce pulled on Concord Ave., Stuart had heard such little noise coming from behind him that he concluded either the well-dressed man had been consumed by his grief, or he had fallen asleep.

Part 5. The last journal entry in Emilie B.’s composition notebook.

When I hear footsteps, most of the time I think it is Father. I think he has come home from an especially long day at work, taken off his expensive shoes, and is walking softly up the stairs to see me. I assume he is being careful, in case I am asleep, not to wake me up. If I am still awake he will ask me how my day was, what Sylvia prepared for dinner and whether I enjoyed it, and if I did well in school today.

If I have just woken up, or am about to fall asleep, I imagine that the footsteps belong to Mother. In my mind I can see her beautiful golden hair that is now as long as my own. She has it pulled back with her expensive hair pins, but a few curls are still hanging down. She is the most amazing woman I have ever seen, and when she hugs me her arms swallow me up in her love.

One of these days, the door will open and it will be Mother. She will lie next to me in the bed and stroke my face. Her face will still be young, and she will whisper in my ears, “You are growing up in splendid fashion, my love.”

But every time, the door opens and it is just Sylvia. She sets my freshly-ironed outfit on the end of my bed and leaves, quietly shutting the door and returning to the housework.

Part 6. To dream all of the time.

Dear God, L., I wish you were still here. When you died I thought that I would never be able to sleep again and now I’m realizing that I don’t feel like I’m ever going to wake up because every opera I go to and everything I touch feels empty except when I hold Emilie’s hand when we cross Main Street or when I stroke her hair and we sit next to each other and watch old movies that you used to love so much because of little Shirley Temple and her beautiful curls that Emilie wanted so badly because she wanted you to love her even
more even though that was ridiculous because you loved her more than you loved me which took me a long time to come to terms with because there was a time when our love was the only thing we cared about back when I first met you in Paris outside of the Café Aperitif and I knew that all of the French girls I was constantly falling in and out of love with would never mean anything to me again and you told me when we were lying together in that hotel in the Fifth Arrondissement that I had a certain special quality that you couldn’t define and you said they called that Je Ne Sais Quoi in the hospital bed when you were holding Emilie and I couldn’t take my eyes off you both and I still can’t take my eyes off her and I still can’t take my mind off you and I still love you and I will always love you every day of my life till I wake up and you are still here…

Part 7. An ending.

At 9:03 the Rolls-Royce Phantom Coupe pulled into the driveway of a Victorian mansion belonging to Damien B. Still very drowsy, he stumbled out and walked through the front door. He ate a few bites of the dinner that had been left out for him by his full-time maid Sylvia, and put the rest on the floor to be eaten by Alexander, his Labrador Retriever.

He proceeded up the two flights of stairs and walked down to the end of the hallway and into his bedroom. Then, realizing something, he retraced half of his steps until he aligned himself with his daughter’s bedroom. The door was shut but nonetheless light was escaping from the crack between the door and the floor, which was very peculiar at this time of night.

He softly opened the door and entered the bedroom. On the bed, which was perpendicular to the wall opposite of him, was a young girl. She was fast asleep, and had a slim, red hardbound book laying across her chest. A composition notebook with the words “Diary” scribbled in cursive across its cover was lying near her feet.

He walked to the foot of the bed, picked up the notebook and flipped to the last entry. He read every word on the page then quietly laid it back down. He then sat down next to her on the bed. For a long time, he just stared at her without making a single noise or moving a single muscle. Finally he picked the slim, red hardbound book off her chest and read the book’s title.

For only the second time in the evening, he genuinely smiled.

He set the book on the night stand, kissed the girl gently on the forehead, looked at her one last time, turned the light off, walked down the hall into his bedroom, took off his clothes, got in bed, and fell into a deep sleep from which he never woke up.
The heat made the pavement stick to the bottom of the runner’s shoes. Sweat escaped from under the brim of a faded John Deere hat and found its way down her sunburned nose and into watery, pollen-contaminated green eyes. She labored up the largest hill on her route, distant mountains coming into view as she reached the top. Slowing to a walk, hands on hips, she took in the view. A humid haze transformed the landscape into a blurry watercolor. Over the mountains, dark angry clouds had gathered. Purple, black, and green, they added a sinister element to the otherwise peaceful neighborhood.

In yards up and down the street, homeowners were hurrying in the hot afternoon sun to have perfect lawns cut, bushes trimmed, and deck umbrellas up before the storm hit. Two small girls ran through a freshly cut yard, their polka dot sundresses smeared with grass stains and pigtails awry. They laughed, tumbling over each other with childhood abandon. The runner laughed as an older woman came out of the house, scolding and waving a dish towel at the two pixies.

Beside his chair stood a small folding table. A pitcher of water sat untouched surrounded by three empty beer bottles. The fourth half empty bottle sweated on the table, closest to the old man’s chair, a pack of Red’s soaking in the pool of condensation surrounding it.

She met his clear blue eyes with bloodshot ones. “You look a might bit peaked, missy. Now, how abouts you sit down a spell ‘fore my nice peace’n quiet gets disturbed by someone scrapin’ you off my frying pan.” His voice was deep.

The runner looked down at her dust and pollen covered shoes. They hit the pavement heavily with each step. Thump. Thump. Thump. The tempo matched her throbbing heart. There was a burning pain in her chest and lungs. She liked it. She kept looking at her feet. Thump. Thump.

She felt someone’s eyes on her. Sitting at the end of a driveway in a weathered Adirondack chair was an old man. His skin was like cracked leather. It was the look of a farmer. Or a sailor. A white button-up shirt was tucked into ironed khakis. The kind with the crease down the front. They were held in place by a cloth belt with shined buckle. What hair he had left had been buzzed to soft looking white fuzz around the back of his head. As she got closer, she could see the inked tail of some mermaid poking out from under the crisp sleeve on his upper arm.

**second place, fiction**  
*Storms and War* by Katherine Wingfield

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and gravely. She could tell the cigarettes weren’t a new habit.

“Frying pan?” She raised an eyebrow inquisitively. He tapped the asphalt with his shoe. “Oh. Well, I can see where you could get that from.”

“Aren’t you a smart one? Well come on then, don’t make me strain my neck lookin’ up at you.” He motioned toward the Adirondack’s foot rest that had been set on the other side of the table. Not knowing what else to do, she sat down and looked back down at her shoes. Brown and yellow.

“Go on and take it.” The old man was holding out an unopened bottle that he had magically pulled from somewhere. “Don’t think I don’t know why you decided to sit your pretty little butt down.” His eyes danced mischievously and she smiled.

“You caught me.”

Throwing his head back he laughed. He had a nice laugh, deep and booming. “I like you missy. You got some spunk in ‘ya.” She smiled and popped the top off the cold bottle. He held his bottle up and she clinked hers against it. It was cold all the way down her throat. “Hits the spot, don’t it?” The old man placed his empty bottle with the rest of his collection and opened another one from his hidden stash.

They sat in silence for a few minutes. Both content, absorbed in their own daydreams. The humid air carried the sounds of lawn mowers, children playing, and bugs humming. The noises of summer. Behind huge oaks and willows the sky grew ever darker with the promise of an early summer storm. A breeze began to blow out of the distant mountains making the trees sway. Neither the runner nor the old man paid much attention to the coming storm. The cool breeze was a welcomed relief to the early afternoon heat.

“Daughter hates me smoking these damn things. You won’t tell on me though, right?” The old man pulled a Zippo out of his shirt pocket, lighting the cigarette that hung loosely between his lips. “She says these are going to kill me. She’s probably right ‘ya know, they almost have already.”

The old man laughed shaking his head at the memory. The runner smiled. He had the kind of laugh that when you heard it you couldn’t help but smile too. “But now you wouldn’t want to hear some old man’s war stories.”

“If you want to tell them, I want to hear them.”

The old man chuckled, “Good answer, missy.”

He sat with his beer nearing empty and a cigarette burning itself out in his right hand. He ran his left over his white peach-fuzz hair. “You know, back in my prime I was a real ladies man.”

“And here I thought you still were.”

“Well I guess you’re right.” He took a long drag from what was left of the cigarette. “You know, we used to live for these damn things. We would be in
the middle of some Jap infested goddamn jungle and hear those planes coming and hell, high water or damn snipers wouldn’t stop us.”

“You were in the Pacific?”

“Sure was. 37th. We were the ones that made it safe for those Jarheads.”

“So you were Army.”

“Damn straight I was Army, missy. You look up the 37th, we were the best.”

He took another cigarette out, lit it and held it between his fingers. The smoke drifted towards her as he motioned with his hands.

“There was this one time, the first time I almost got the Purple Heart, where I near liked to have blown myself back home ‘cause of a damn cig. See missy, they would fill these drums slam full of gasoline or what not and bury ‘um down in the ground. Put up a ‘squito tent and you got yourself one high class latrine. Now how much you know about gasoline?”

“About as much as the next person, I guess.”

“Did you know that it’s not the gas that flammable, but the fumes?”

“No, I didn’t actually.”

“See? Learn something new every day. If you just listen. That’s the problem with most you young people, just don’t take the time to stop and listen. I like you missy, you listen. But that’s ‘nother issue. Now, where was I?”

“Gas?”

“Right. So like I said they would fill these drums slam up with gas, keep everything smellin’ okay and keepin’ the bugs away. So they would fill these up and after few days the fumes would be gone so we could just drop our cigs right down in there pretty as you please. Well this one day I have to go pay a visit over there, one thing I got against the Army, they need to pick their cooks better. All the good ones end up in the damn Navy. No wonder those boys are so soft. But our cook was working for the Japs, swear to this day he was. So I finish my cig while I’m sittin’ there cursin’ his mama and without thinkin’ drop it right under my bare white butt.”

“Oh no.”

“You got that right. Fly right out of that tent, and dropped me wrapped up like one of them mummies in ‘squito netting right on Little Sully’s table. Sent the stuff he called food flying everywhere. And poor ‘ol Sully hits the deck thinkin’ we’s under attack!” The old man’s laugh carried down the street joined by the runner’s.

“So did that really happen?”

“Did it happen? Swear on that mangy cook’s grave it did. Wan’ta see the scars?”

“No, I believe you.”

The old man chuckled, “Figured you would.” He took a drink, draining another bottle. “You want ‘nother?”

“Sure.” She tried to see where he pulled the cold bottle from but she couldn’t tell. He handed it to her.
“Pretty neat trick, hmm?”
“Very impressive.”
“Well maybe someday I’ll let you in on the secret.” He winked, blue eyes dancing again.
“So what about the other times?”
“What other times?”
“The other times you almost got the Purple Heart?”
“You’re a nosey one aren’t you?”
The runner blushed, “Sorry, If you don’t..”
“Don’t go being ridiculous now, I like your spunk. Seems ‘t me like you’re not afraid to say what’s on your mind.”
“Not always a good thing.”
“Ha! They just can’t take it. You don’t go changing.”
The runner laughed, “Okay.”
“You really want to hear some old war stories?”
“Yeah, I do.”
“Well, all right then. Don’t know why.” The old man looked sideways at the young runner, a half smile on his face. “But since you insist. We had been backed into a corner, those Japs were sneaky little bastards I’ll tell you what. Smart as all get out too. Every night we would be down in our holes, not gettin’ any sleep thinkin’ it would be us gettin’ jumped on next. A buddy of mine got his that way, Jap crawled up to his hole in the middle of the night, we couldn’t do a damn thing ‘bout it. That’s what they would do, get one of us screamin’ trying to get the rest to come out. Snipe us off one by one.” The old man stopped for a moment, putting the burned out cigarette to his lips.
“So we get our orders, puts us on the offensive, we almost had ‘em too. But those sneaky bastards knew that island, and that put us at a somewhat disadvantage. But we were good, don’t think that we weren’t.” The old man looked at the runner to make sure she wasn’t thinking less of the Army. “Even the best can get backed into a corner. But they got their comeuppance, right?” The old man smiled, weathered skin wrinkling around his eyes. “Yes they did, missy. You better believe they did!” Seeing her faith in the Army was still intact the old man continued, “So there we were, stuck down in the middle of the goddamn jungle, heat like you never felt before and ‘squitos the size of birds. None of us were feelin’ none too happy, and there wasn’t a cigarette to be had in the whole camp. So when we got the news that they would be dropping supplies, whew. Yep, that morning when those birds went over and we saw those white ‘chutes, I was almost as happy as the day my girl was born. Don’t tell her I said that though.”
“Your secret’s safe.”
“Good. Well like I was sayin’ we saw them boxes comin’ down and the whole camp started buzzing. But then those boxes drifted as pretty as you please right out in that open clearin’.”
“No!”
“That they did. You ain’t ever heard
cursing like was going on then. So ‘bout
an hour goes by and we’re just a’sittin’
there looking at those boxes. And we knew
those Japs were looking at those boxes
too. That’s when we see one of those Japs
movin’ on the edge of the jungle. Well
our guys let him have it and he turn tail
mighty quick. That was the last straw. Me
and two buddies crawl out all nice and
slow. Made it all the way to the boxes too.
Told you we were damn good. Course they
leave the one closest to those Japs for me
but ‘fore I get it one of those dumb-asses
starts movin’. Japs see that box a movin’
and they let loose. Well, my two buddies
hightailed it back an’ left me in the middle
of that goddamn jungle clearing tryin’
to protect myself with that damn box. That
box started lookin’ a lot like Swiss so I said
what the hell, stood up and ran. Told me I
looked like a goddamn rabbit, woopin’
an’ a hollerin’ zipping all around that clearing
tryin’ to get back. God must love my hide
cause I almost made it too, bullet got me in
the leg makin’ that last jump.”

The old man rolled up his pant leg,
showing her a white scar on his calf.

“Wow.”

“Damn straight wow, missy. Got
shot servin’ my country the best way I
know how, rescuing them cigs from the
Japs.” Their laugher mixed with the deep
boom of thunder.

“Looks like that storm finally is
a-comin’ in.”

“Sure does.” The runner looked up
at the multi-colored sky above, “Going to
be a wet run home.”

“Now just you wait missy, you ain’t
goin’ to go and abandon me now, right?”

“No, I guess I don’t want to do that
now, do I?”

“Right answer. See? I knew I liked
you, you got some spunk in ‘ya.”

The old man reached down beside
his chair as the rain started to fall. He
pulled out a big black umbrella, sticking
the handle into a PVC pipe that had been
attached to the back of his chair. “Pretty
nifty, ain’t it?”

“Very nice.”

The sounds of lawn mowers had
stopped, children had retreated indoors,
bugs had been silenced. The rain pounded
on the top of the umbrella, a hard and fast
tempo. The runner looked down at her
shoes. They were gray. A small river flowed
around them, running brown with dirt and
yellow with pollen. She looked over at the
old man, he gave her a small smile. She
returned it and then stared back into the
deluge.

“I always loved that smell.” The old
man looked up at the runner, a sad smile
on his face.

“What smell?”

“The smell after it rains. Something
perfect about that smell.”

“I couldn’t agree more.” The
runner smiled at the old man, sitting in his
chair, new beer in his hand.

“You come back and sit with me a
spell now missy.”

“Oh, I will.”

“All right then.”

As she started down the hill the runner turned back one last time before the old man disappeared from view. He waved and she returned the gesture.

The old man watched the girl fade away, her bright red pony tail swinging behind her from under a ratty old cap. He shook his head. Carefully, from his shirt pocket he pulled out a faded black and white photo. He looked into the eyes he knew were green, and smiled.
In the land of shining light bulbs and sparkling silverware, a young girl whose name was Estella lived quietly. From the day the stern doctors placed her in this magnanimous world of fortune, Estella was different and caused her well-meaning family great dismay. Aunt Avaricia shook her dark head sternly, “Tut-tut. She sits content with naught but blanket and food. She won’t even take toys from other children. This will never do.”

But even the polite manners of the waif were not as concerning as her lack of interest in the world of voluminous smokestacks and colored glass. In the daytime, she refused to drink from her diamond goblet or practice smiling. She would sit in the weeds of violets, speaking softly near the crystalline brook that served as an irrigation ditch to the successful garden of iron vines and robotic roses.

Her family would take her to the Park of Glorious Gold, encouraging her to play with the round pieces of success. As the nanny let the child down one day, Estella picked up a few pieces and looked at them fondly, rubbing them with their solid sharpness clicking rhythmically. “Good,” said Aunt Avaricia, “now she understands.”

Just then, Estella’s face fell and she dropped the coins sadly. “It’s not here,” she said sadly.

Next she was taken to the Beneficial Establishment of Magnificent Electrical Illumination. Rows of purple, blue, and orange glass orbs shaped like squares, cones and octagons hung from the vaulted ceilings in sparkling series of seventeens. Estella’s father held her close to one of the iridescent fixtures and turned the brass handle. Light filled the empty vessel in crackling blades of electricity. Estella’s eyes filled with hope as the globe filled with modern science. “Oh no,” she murmured, and squirmed away from the view of the electric light. “It’s not there,” she whispered.

And on and on the field trip went. Estella’s relatives would take her to a marvel of their world and for yet another time, she would shake her head politely and say, “It’s not here.”

The years passed and the family grew more perplexed. Time was no longer their friend—Estella was now fifteen and gentlemen callers should be coming with bags of gold and electric chariots and handsome compliments. But Estella, with her affinity for silver-colored cloth, blue flowers, and quiet songs, was not a fit candidate for romance. She refused
to wear gowns of romantic intention in their bright pink loudness. No gentleman friends had even dared visit the house where the maiden did not practice the art of flirtation or giggling. Finally, on the eve of Estella’s sixteenth birthday, Aunt Avaricia, Aunt Ambinognia, and Aunt Clivia took her to the Fabulous Hall of Beauty. “Surely that will make her understand,” huffed Aunt Avaricia.

At 8:00 they arrived at the Hall. “Estella, you have always been searching for something,” said Aunt Clivia, “I know you will find it here. This is where you will learn what beauty is—how you become beautiful—how to fulfill your heart’s desire.” They drew back the royal blue curtain and displayed the most beautiful clothes and women ever manufactured. Most were tall, elegant creatures with short, fine hair perfectly posed to flaunt their exclusive jewelry. Every face was flawless. Estella passed the women one by one until she came to the last. Surely hers was the most beautiful face in the Hall. The skin sparkled and the hair shone clustered with diamonds. Estella reached out her hand, touched the face and drew back in shocked anguish. The face was painted porcelain that cracked to her touch. Estella withdrew a few paces from the hollow shell and empty eyes. “It is not here,” she said trembling. A single tear trembled in her woeful eyes before she turned and departed the Hall of Beauty. “Really, Estella,” the aunt cried, “this is too much. Stop this instant.”

Estella turned around to gaze at her aunts. “Oh,” she cried out and pointed her finger above her aunts’ heads.

“What’s the matter, girl?” they asked.

“What is it?” she asked in awe.

Her aunts turned. “The building you just left,” said one annoyed.

“No,” insisted Estella, “look up.”

High, high above the pinnacle of the Hall of Beauty was a large, round shining sphere—dazzling and solitary in the late sky. Aunt Modra tossed her red head and said aloofly: “It is called the moon. It was once the only source of light after the sun set. Now we have no use for either sun or moon. That antiquated trash is worthless—now replaced by our fully equipped plasma lanterns.”

“But—” said Estella, grasping for words, “—it’s beautiful.”

“Hush,” urged all her aunts, “and stop being so foolish. To home with you now.” The aunts rushed her home and put her to bed as if she had the plague. But they could not keep her there. As soon as they had gone, she climbed out of her bed and stepped out onto her balcony, watching that strange ball dance through the darkening night above the sputtering plasma lanterns.

“There it is,” she whispered quietly.

For days, Estella would do little but watch and speak of the moon. Her family whispered wildly about the predicament—
whispered because it simply was not done to speak of problems aloud. “She is a child of the past—a misfit concerned with the dusty and forsaken item we have made obsolete. She is a child...of darkness,” said Aunt Clivia. So the family concluded there was only one thing to do—put an advertisement in the flying sign as follows: “Needed: a particularly clever individual or association capable of curing unusual habits.”

The sign did its work and the manor house was filled with quack doctors, debonair suitors, and knowledgeable thinkers. But all left scratching their beards and shaking their heads. Finally, a young man came forward with an astonishing silver ring. “Estella, if you marry me, you shall have all the finest furs and largest homes and the grandest parties. All people will admire you and you will be mine and all will be yours...Just leave this house and come away with me to my stronghold. You will be comforted and safe forever.”

“Do you love me?” she asked.

“Love? That is as old an idea as the moon itself—”

“Then I cannot marry you.”

The physicians left. The suitors left. Even Estella’s family left. The strange girl could not be cured of her peculiar taste.

Years passed. The manor house where she lived fell into decay. Rumors abounded in school halls and masked balls about the strange inhabitant of the ruin who never left the room and believed in old things. The Dark Recluse became the topic of dares and jokes among all the townspeople.

“I dare you,” a child said one day to Winslow, a curious boy of twelve, “I dare you to go into the ancient ruins and speak to the old woman who lives on the upper terrace.”

A dare among young boys is a thing of unequivocal cost—so Winslow visited the dilapidated mansion. No automated servant greeted him at the rusty still door. He crept in—all items of worth were decaying in their solitary spaces: the plasma lanterns showed the dust of several decades.

“Hello,” said a voice. Winslow looked up through the cracked plaster to see a woman’s kindly face. “Are you the Recluse of Darkness?” he uttered in awe.

“I hope not, but that is what they called me. I tried to tell them many times when I went to market...but they never understood. Now I cannot walk very well. Come up the winding stairs and I will talk to you.”

Winslow mounted the steps to the wide terrace. There was a rosy glow in this wide open place high above the city. “Do you see that?” said the woman, “it happens every day when the great glowing sun goes to bed. When the sun is awake, it is warm here and when it goes to bed, the air grows cold.”

“Are you mad?” he blurted.
“Mad? No, I am not mad. But people think I am.”

“What?” he said.

“Because of what I think.”

“What do you think?”

“That it is a sad and sorry thing we spend so much time striving to create beauty when beauty is already there. The great scientific workers invented the grand luminary balls—they were imitating the moon. But the spark of beauty in the moon is not there. It’s like they wanted moons—but only to control it.”

“Well…” Winslow said slowly, “people in town say you are strange… and you cling to the old ways of stories and chivalry and magic. Do you think the moon is magical?”

“No…and yes, if magical means it is beautiful and wondrous and strange. I am drawn like a tide to it. It pulls me upward in this world where we all look down. It makes me think I am meant to go on an adventure. I do not know where to begin to tell you about all that I can see from up here.”

Winslow took a step across the dusty floor. “How can I see what you see?”

“Come see the wonders of the sky. Come watch the moon with me.”
The woods around my community college closed in around me. It had been a breezy day, with the wind frolicking in the lush treetops, but now the voices of the breezes were hushed. The air grew still—hot—and the branches were still as death. Straight ahead, on this path in the woods between the highway and me, there was a deep brown puddle framed perfectly by the interlocking boughs above. My name is Crystal Jones, and the puddle behind the college is one of my calling places.

What do I mean, you might ask? A calling place is where I feel most strongly the beckoning of the Otherworld. It’s usually in the woods or somewhere mysterious. And yes, there is another world, and otherworldly creatures. I’ve seen them. I’ve talked to them. At sudden, unexpected times I will enter into a trance, seeing visions of Otherworld or talking to its citizens. If I have my notebook on me, the magic of the Otherworld makes my hand move, and in seconds there is a beautiful portrait on the paper before me, although I never commanded my hands to move. Am I crazy? No—but I might be just slightly insane.

As I walked to the puddle in the warm afternoon, a small breath of wind moved in the trees to my right, and the feeling of magic overwhelmed me. I felt like I was being pulled, stretched, drawn, much harder than I could resist. It was agonizing. A moan escaped my lips and my stomach churned. A single current of air circled around me, making brittle leaves rattle in laughter. Then, suddenly, the wind materialized into something solid.

A hand touched my cheek, and a voice said, “Finally.”

A Dryad stood behind me. His arms were loosely around my neck and his leafy breath was all over me. “Firthcalder,” I said, gritting my teeth, “we’ve talked about this. Don’t touch me.”

I detached myself and faced the spirit. He looked almost human, but his long hair was streaked with green, and his skin was at times soft and at times like tree bark. His feet and hands resembled twigs. Besides the leaves that covered his waist to his thighs, the Dryad’s skin was bare. Locks of green hair framed his wild, handsome face, and he hovered like wind with a train of leaves. His name was Firthcalder.

“Oh really, Crystal,” he crooned, “Must you be so dry? I do so love fawning.”

“Why did you call me?” I asked brusquely. “You better have a good reason.” The Otherworld creatures, you understand, constantly use me as a puppet
to carry out their “funny” little raids.

“My dear Crystal,” said Firthcalder, “surely you know, I do not see you as a toy like the others do. You are a rare collectible.”

“Thanks,” I replied dryly, “but I’m not too keen on being stored away in a Dryad’s china cupboard.”

Firthcalder sighed. “All right. I called, my dear, because you were lonely.”

“Lonely,” I muttered. How could I not be lonely? There was no human to whom I could entrust my deepest secret. Nobody would believe that I was the liaison between two worlds. …Not unless they saw it themselves.

“Hey,” I said, suddenly inspired. “Supposing you let a couple Creatures come to school? Mess around the campus a little. That way, the other humans will believe me. I can chase the Creatures back to the woods when it’s over.”

“You want to be understood so badly?” The Dryad shook his head. “Poor darling. But you realize that allowing any Creature to pass through the puddle is dangerous.”

“I can handle it,” I promised, grim and yet hopeful.

Although I can be controlled by any strong Otherworld creature, I do possess skills that cause the creatures to be reluctantly obedient to my will. They are drawn toward their own world anyway, and all I have to do is work on their weaknesses, push their buttons, to persuade them back to the woods. Knowing this, and well aware that my skills were improving every day, Firthcalder consented to my little scheme.

I threw my arms around him. “Thank you!”

“Ah, you little tree hugger,” he grinned.

Later that day, I was sitting outside the student lounge consuming a taco salad. It was much less appetizing after being squashed in a bag for three hours. My picky eating was interrupted as a couple of my friends (acquaintances, actually—they cussed too much) came outside to smoke. John, a rotund redneck, offered me a cigarette.

“No thanks,” I said disgustedly. “Not a fan of lung cancer.”

John and the others proceeded to laugh and then ignore me. I thought of them the same way I thought about the average goblin: dirty and uncouth. But as I watched them laughing stupidly, I was suddenly aware of such a creature in their midst.

There was an Imp on campus.

The little devil was only a foot high, with a thin layer of leathery, magenta-colored skin over his long, crooked limbs and emaciated body. His eyes glowed like coals between pointed ears as he weaved in and out among the feet of my human friends. Imps are not physically dangerous, but they are masters of mind-twisting, deception, and mischievous spells.
“Look out!” I shouted.

John nearly swallowed his cigarette with surprise at my exclamation. However I pointed, though, and wherever John looked, he apparently couldn’t see the Imp. I blushed and withdrew, drenched with embarrassment. It was clear that the Otherworld Creatures had tricked me: they agreed to come to campus, but not to be publicly visible. They could make themselves invisible to everyone but me.

“Get out of here,” I snarled at the Imp.

The laughing creature vanished up a gutter, to wander back to the woods. But danger was still far from absent. I saw a massive creature emerge from an earth pile on the edge of campus, where bulldozers had been at work recently. The beast that came out was huge, some nine feet tall and bulky, like a grizzly bear whose body was covered not by fur but by tough, rock-like skin. The creature possessed a swollen nose and a wide mouth, and his small, boorish eyes glinted evilly. It was a Troll.

People often make the mistake of confusing Trolls and Ogres. Both are considered unintelligent or—if we want to be abrasive—just plain stupid. However, in my personal experience, I have found that Ogres are frighteningly crafty, and usually far more knowledgeable than I am. Trolls, however, have little capability for learning, and while Ogres are highly adaptable, Trolls are elemental creatures who stick to what they like: rock. The confusion between these cousins is a horrible discredit to both—comparable to confusing man and ape.

In any case, what I saw barreling around the community college was quite definitely a Troll. Iron-bodied and lusty for destruction, he would undoubtedly make for the students at the top of the outdoor stairwell. Without wasting a minute I leapt up to deal with the Troll, but I suddenly lost control of everything.

My body was halted, as if frozen by a blast of ice, and I was forced, jerkily, back to my seat. There was a pen and paper on the table, and against my will I began drawing a striking and realistic portrait of a Pixie spirit. Behind me, I could hear the shrill and tingling laughter of the fairy responsible for my distress. Desperately I tried to stop my hand from moving, but the Pixie’s magic control was stronger.

“No!” I cried, struggling frantically. “Let me go!”

Apparently, the spirit laughed so hard she released me from the spell. I dropped limply to the ground. The release may have been unintentional, but I didn’t stop to ask. I raced up the stairs and yelled hoarsely for the other students to move. For once, they obeyed. Instantly the Troll galloped past with a rush of wind and a crack of concrete. I looked around; nobody was hurt, but nobody knew what had happened either.

“Wow!” I heard one girl exclaim. “Where did those rocks come from?”
It took me some time to decipher from various exclamations that all the students had seen was a shower of crumbling concrete; there had been a boom, and it was mutually agreed to be a small earthquake. This caused a great deal of excitement. I shook my head in frustration. Why wouldn’t the Troll show itself to these people? Why was I the only one who could see him? I sighed heavily and went to supervise the Troll, feeling cursed.

Several similar events took place that day. I saw a Centaur and a Fawn talking in the grass, unbeknownst to passerbys. It took all my effort to keep the Ghouls from breaking into the cars, and the Pixies were beyond my control. Close to the end of the day, I finally herded the creatures back to the woods and had Firthcalder usher them through the puddle. When it was all over, I went back to the patio outside the lounge.

A friend of mine, Lisa, was looking at an object on the table. “Hey Crystal,” she said, smiling. “Did you draw this? It’s amazing!”

I came over and looked at the portrait I had magically drawn. A winged sprite danced in the shadows of ink upon the paper, beautiful but hellion, her mouth wide open in a wicked laugh. I sighed again. This drawing was the only peek my friends would ever get into my secret self.

“I am crazy,” I stated, and shouldering my backpack, walked off into the woods, cursed and terminally alone.

“Okay, I’ve seriously never seen a picture this good,” Lisa raved. “It’s crazy!”
Michael Allman watched the paramedics unloading his mother from the back of the ambulance. The wheels of the gurney extended to touch the sidewalk leading to his mother’s house with some small, but gentle, bumps. The figure on the gurney didn’t even react. Michael felt sad bitterness rise in his mind watching her not moving and not reacting to the world around her.

“Alive in name only,” Mike thought, looking as the almost alien form rolled its way to the house he grew up in. “The house my mother will die in,” he amended, looking at the structure with a mixture of nostalgia and resignation.

Head bowed, he followed them in and closed the door behind him.

Five o’clock. Doug always came home at five o’clock on the dot. Iris would be in the kitchen on the far side of the old Victorian “Painted Lady” house that they lived in. She had thought he was insane when he bought the old dilapidated thing on the outskirts of town. It was a huge place, much too big for just the two of them, and it had been empty for as long as she could remember. The once vibrant colors had dulled with the years, boards covered all the windows in a vain attempt to keep out vandals. Iris almost cried when Doug opened the door to the drafty, dirty old place and called it home. She stood in the doorway refusing to move her 4’11” frame at all. Doug had just smiled his smile, put his large arms around her shoulders, and hugged her close, his calloused carpenter’s hands holding her ever so gently.

“Don’t you fret none, my flower. She ain’t much to look at now, but by all that is holy I swear I will make her the second most beautiful thing I have ever seen. You can count on me,” he whispered. She nestled her head in his barrel-like chest, feeling his warm assurance as the intensity of her misgivings slightly faded. If Doug said it, she knew he meant it. It was one of the reasons she had fallen in love with him. He was a man of his word.

Michael sat in the chair of the repurposed octagonal sitting room, reading a book to his mother. It had always been her favorite room of the house, and Michael could remember the countless evenings that he and his siblings would sit in a semicircle at her feet as she read to them. Every night, right before they retired to bed, the entire family would gather, and Mom would read a chapter of literature to them and follow it up with a section of the Bible. Michael knew The Odyssey, Jane Eyre, A Tale of Two...
Cities, and many other classical tales before he ever attended his first day of school, and he could quote scripture with any deacon at the church. The setting sun would come through the window as she read, the children’s shadows streaming out and racing up the walls to join the darkness from the top of the room. Now he looked at his mother as she sat in the adjustable bed, propped on pillows in front of the window. Sunshine glowed on her face and lit up her eyes, but she could not see it. She was somewhere else; some place that Michael could not reach her.

“She has stage six Alzheimer’s, Mr. Allman.” The doctor had told him.

“Shouldn’t she stay here, then? Can’t you do something?” he replied.

Dr. Bohner sadly shook his head. “It is only a matter of time now. She might have brief periods of lucidity, but for the most part she is unresponsive. When she does talk, expect her to say anything. She might talk gibberish. She may relive parts of the past. She might call you someone else’s name or just not recognize you at all.”

“So why is she leaving again?” Michael asked, annoyed.

“If she does have a lucid episode, she should be some place she is comfortable.” The doc gently put his hand on Michael’s shoulder, his voice softening. “The last images your mother will have should be of her home and her children, Michael. Nobody wants to die alone in a strange place.”

Michael looked at the doctor and then sighed and looked at the floor. “Yeah, fat lot of good it did Dad. “

The doorbell rang as Iris was looking into the open oven checking the meatloaf. “Five o’clock,” she thought, smiling to herself. Every day for the past fifteen years it was the same routine: Doug would come home from work, ring the doorbell to let her know that he was home and would head out to the workshop or the yard to do some work on the house until Iris called him for dinner. The kids would be finishing their homework and doing their chores. Iris looked around her and smiled. The broken down old house was now a vibrant, thriving home filled with the sounds of life. Gone were the rotting pieces of wood, replaced by Doug during the first year they lived there. The windows repaired. The shutters fixed and the five different colors of paint lovingly applied. It was slow going, but what was once a broken down wreck on the edge of town had become a beautiful landmark of historical tradition. Almost like a piece of the past transported out of time.

Iris opened the window in the kitchen and called Doug to supper while the children set the table. Usually Doug would reply, but today he was silent. “Must be caught up in whatever he was working on” she thought, and went to put the food on the table. She called him two more times, and got no answer. Worry boiled up in her as she told
the kids to stay put and went outside to see what was keeping him.

Michael remembered his mother's heartbroken wail rolling through the kitchen window. They had all run to see what had happened, but he had been the first to get there. Out the door, down the stairs, around the side of the house, following his mother's cries the whole way, only to pull up short as he saw her, sitting on the grass cradling his father's lifeless head in her lap.

She refused to let go even when the ambulance came, the medics having to check for signs of life as she stroked and kissed his face, bathing it in tears that streamed down her face.

She screamed and fainted when they put the sheet over his face.

"Massive cardiac arrest," the doctor had told them later at the hospital. Doug had been cutting some flowers for the centerpiece when it happened, something he had done a thousand times before. "Some flowers for his flower," he would say. It was there, face down in the flowerbed that Iris had found him, roses and chrysanthemums strewn around him like a pyre. He was dead before he had hit the ground.

"A new house. He is coming to take me to a new house." Iris said, her glazed eyes staring out the window, unaware of her children around her.

"Why does she keep saying that?" asked Pat, Michael's older sister.

"She has been saying it off and on for the past two weeks. Ever since they sent her home." replied Michael. "She is remembering Dad bringing her to the house." They all had heard the story of the first time Mom had seen the house many times, especially since their father had died. Bruce, the baby of the family, held Iris's hand and looked at her. He barely recognized her anymore. Gone was the strong woman who raised them. All that was left was a wasted form, a barren husk that breathed and mumbled about days long gone. "It was good of you to care for her until we got here Mikey. I wish I could have come sooner."

"For what? You all have families and I am divorced. I have nothing but alimony and time," Michael replied.

"Still, I know It wasn't easy, having to do everything for her," said Pat.

"She spent years changing our diapers and feeding us. It is the least I could do," Michael said, and then suddenly turned to look at their mother.

All conversation was interrupted by a rattle of breath. The children gathered around, all touching her as her breathing became slower and more labored. A few times her breathing seemed to stop altogether, making them think she was gone, only to have her draw another ragged lungful of air. Tears welled in Michael's eyes as he watched his mother fight, even now, to hang on. Pat sobbed gently on Bruce's
shoulder as they all stood deathwatch with the light from the sun coming through the window, making their shadows stretch towards the ceiling as they had so many times before.

They all wept as their mother hung on. Iris opened her eyes, looked at her children and said quietly, “Hush now, children. You wouldn’t want to upset your father,” and closed her eyes again as she sighed her last and final breath.

Right as the doorbell rang.

Michael looked at his siblings and back to his mother. The confusion, the pain and the slackness that had lined her face for so long was gone. Now she looked peaceful. A smile creased her wrinkled face.

They all ran…ran through the house to the front door. Like many years before, Michael was there first, throwing the door open to see who rang the bell. He blinked in the light of the setting sun, squinting to try and see anything. For a second he thought he saw a vague shape of a large man, his arms around a small woman…but when he blinked the image was gone. All that was left was the smell of flowers.

“Bruce, what time is it?” Michael asked.

“It’s five o’clock.” Bruce said, looking at his watch and then looking back at Michael, surprised. “Five o’clock, on the dot.”
Honorable mention, art Magnolia by Eleanor Rose
The Sherwood Forest Art & Literary Review has been an important part of Tyler student culture for more than forty years. The annual competition encourages student artists and writers to create their best work, and the Review showcases the winning entries and presents them to the College community.

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