

Jodie Al-Mqbali

Ottawa, ON

Broken

Molding, lace curtains encompass the bay window overlooking the park; a kingdom of sandcastles and swing sets, slides and scooters, it is a popular destination for the neighborhood's many young families.

A small boy stands awkwardly, holding a heavy baseball bat. Gently prodding his son into an acceptable stance, a man, whose looks claim unmistakable ownership of the child, commences his lesson. No one observes this frail slither of reality from behind the bay window.

Inside, a man approaching his fifty-fourth year performs his daily parade; first perusing a freshly delivered newspaper, now pouring coffee into a stained mug whose various chips appear slightly menacing. All the while, the man ignores the sights beyond the window.

The man, bending, turns on the television set and sits down in the only chair – a patched-up, shabby affair. Seeing the program, but too late to change the channel, the man gasps. A baseball game blares on the screen. The man jerks, spilling his coffee, "Ach! God damn it!" expostulates the man grumpily.

Snatching a paper napkin from the table, he dabs at his clothes while rummaging behind the cushion for the television remote. After some moments, his hand emerges triumphant and the man successfully turns the television set off.

He then sinks into his chair and lapses into a pensive silence, permitting old memories to plague his mind.

Summer heat infuses the air. Parched plants droop in despair, doomed even in their desperation. Everywhere is dry. At home plate, a small child stands crying.

"It's ok son, you'll get it next time," coaxes his father.

"But I'm just no good at this!" the child wails in reply. Two salty tears track paths down the child's face; wiping these away, the boy's father encouragingly exclaims, "I'll teach you son; I'll be here."

"And you'll help me practice every day until try-outs?"

"Every day."

Sniffing, the child raises his serious face to meet his father's grin. The storm on his brow clears, and suddenly, a smile splits open.

Shaking his head aggressively, the old man grimaces and rises, unsteadily, from his chair. Opening the refrigerator door, he scans the shelves, eyes locking on a bottle of Keith's at the back. Though stretching his eager hand toward the brown glass, resolve triumphs and the man hastily snatches up a coke, "Ach, to hell with it all!"

Returning to his chair, the man, curious as to the source of the noise, pulls back the moth eaten curtains. Dust alights into the air and the man coughs. Wiping a grimy sleeve across the equally grimy glass, the man stares out to the park across the street.

The small boy is crowing, delighted at catching a particularly fast ball. His father sweeps him into a crushing bear hug, sharing in his victory.

Irritably, the old man draws the curtains tightly together, shutting out this cheerful scene along with his broken memories.

Chiming too happily, the clock on the mantelpiece declares the hour; three o'clock in the afternoon. Firmly advancing toward the timepiece, the man is soon arrested by a piercing pair of eyes staring out from an ancient photograph.

The picture transports the man briefly to a far place called happiness before surrendering him to agony.

Flying down the street, the car, but a blur, barely notes the affronted pedestrians. A few blocks away, the lights signal for the little boy to cross the road. Screeching brakes

announce the vehicles intention to turn the corner. The small boy steps onto the road. Drawing attention, the car continues on its destructive path. A man cries sharply. The boy raises his head, smiling in recognition before seeing the motor. Having only time to widen those piercing eyes in stunned surprise –

Choking, spluttering, crying; the old man cannot hold back the tears that have poured incessantly for twenty-six years. Grasping at the air, he tries to sit down, but stumbling, finds himself on the floor. Ten minutes pass before the man can be brought by some iron will to rise. As he does so, he turns to face the window, enshrouded by lace. Simultaneously, a great cry erupts outside and a crash shatters the still air. An airborne object sails through the window, randomly dispersing glass across the floor.

Shocked, the old man approaches this demon shakily. Tentatively picking it up, he hears a knock at the door. Slowly opening it wide, he is greeted by a youthful, apologetic face.

"I'm sorry mister," squeaks the voice, "I didn't mean to put it through your window!"

A grin begins tugging at the old man's face and he cannot help but laugh at the child's tone of agonized self-disgust.

"Don't worry son," he says gently. Extending his arm, he offers the stray baseball. Relief flushes the tension from the boy's taut face and rigid body and, practically tripping over his own exclamations of "Thank you!" he rushes away excitedly. Still smiling, the man walks back into his house. He closes the door and inhales the fresh air, pouring in from the hole in the window.