Editors' Note

Hello and welcome to Q, a bi-annual literary arts journal produced by the students and staff at Montreat College. Our aim is to showcase the best new work produced by our diverse and talented group of poets, story writers, essayists and visual artists. More specifically, we seek to create an open dialogue on the subject of contemporary culture and the Christian faith. We believe that the life of faith, like the human experience itself, is best expressed through a wide spectrum of voices. As such, every issue of Q will feature a broad range of creative works from freshmen as well as from upcoming graduates—essays, poems, short stories, and visual art meant to challenge, provoke, inspire, and entertain. Enjoy!

Kimberly Angle
Faculty Advisor

Kristen White

Kara Fohner

Alyssa Klaus

Anna Mittower

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This drawing symbolizes my mother’s fight against Lupus, a deadly disease.

Romans 8:37 states, “In all these things we are conquerors through Him who loves us.”

This verse is especially close to my heart because no matter what hardship we’re facing, I know God is in control.

artwork by Liz Brady
The Dream by the Sea

Daniel Sellers

I picked up a dream that was lying by the ocean;
Holding it in my hands, it felt so real;
But fragile, like a shell, so easily broken;
Tell me, who dropped this here?
I put it to my ear, to hear its song:
A melody whispered on drafts of sea breeze;
The most beautiful music, weaving along,
Made me sink to the sand on my knees;
This dream, tell me, who dreamt it up?
I had to discover the source,
But the dream grew silent, sealed itself shut;
I waited, but heard nothing more,
So I set it back down near the surf,
While waves came and nipped at my heels;
I stood and I walked away from that place,
And wondered if its song had been real.
“We aren’t supposed to be outside the gates, Marcus!” The boy huffed as he tried to keep up with the long strides of the older boy in front of him. “Father will be angry if he finds out!” A leafy branch snapped back, smacking him in the face, and he let out a small whimper. “Marcus!” Marcus whirled around. “Just shut up, Sean! Father’s the reason we’re out here. Now come on,” he grabbed the boy’s wrist, dragging him further into the woods.

Sean stumbled after his brother, glancing over his shoulder a final time at the quickly receding city wall. He bit his lip as he thought of what would happen if they were caught. No one but the High Police was allowed outside the city on pain of death, or even worse – banishment. Not to mention the Bars; creatures that lived in the surrounding mountains. They were beasts as tall as a man, wider too, with charcoal black hair covering their bodies and long, sharp nails on all four of their limbs. Some people thought they were a myth, but Sean didn’t think that anyone could think up something so terrible.

They continued to bushwhack their way through centuries of overgrowth until they burst through the tree line into a small clearing, sending surprised birds flapping into the air. Marcus didn’t stop, pulling Sean through the waist-high, willowy grass until they stood in front of the remnants of a large stone structure. What was left of the two columns on the right side rose up taller than Marcus’s head, the inner side of the columns curving outward before crumbling into ruins. The other side was more intact, the cracked rock creating a gentle arch before meeting two wide pillars in the middle. Had it been whole, it would’ve made a large ‘M’.

Sean stood transfixed, unable to picture it in all its glory. Why had they used stone to build this? Metal was so much more practical and malleable.
Still, he couldn’t take his eyes off the rocks that seemed to glitter in the sunlight. “What is this place?” he breathed.

“Our past.” Marcus folded his arms across his chest, ignoring his brother’s questioning glance. “Three hundred years ago, before The Council, places like this were everywhere. They twisted the minds of the people, letting them form their own ideas and making them weak.”

Sean’s eyes widened. A learning institution of the Old World - places he’d only heard about in his history lesson. Where people gathered together in rooms to be taught by their elders and had whole buildings devoted to keeping their information on thin, leaf-like screens—‘paper’ if he remembered correctly—with words permanently etched on them. He was fascinated by the fact that they were capable of allowing people to teach others when those who taught were prone to mistakes themselves. Surely chaos would ensue if everyone thought and believed what they wanted to—how would anyone ever get along? Surely this was the reason the Old World fell and the Council was put in place—only when there were no differing ideas would peace prosper. “But what does this have to do with me, Marcus?”

Marcus’s lips pressed into a thin, white line and he shook away, taking a moment before he spoke. “The Council thinks you’re a problem, Sean.” “What?” He stepped back, face draining of color. “I overheard them talking with Father; they’re concerned about your influence on the other children.” “I haven’t done anything!”

“Someone reported that they’d overheard you telling outlandish stories to some of the younger boys.”

Sean chewed his lower lip. “They were just history stories...” Though that wasn’t necessarily true; he had changed them a bit to make them more exciting.

“Those aren’t to be told outside your lessons, you know that!” Marcus grew frustrated when he didn’t get a response. “I don’t think you understand the seriousness of this, Sean! They want to banish you!”

“Not for one thing!”

Marcus gave him a look. “We both know that there’s more to it than that.”

Sean hung his head; Marcus was right. He’d always been different from all of the other children, never satisfied with an answer, always wanting to know more. He’d been told time and time again that he asked too many questions, and now it was coming back to haunt him. “Father wouldn’t let them,” he whispered.

“He wouldn’t have a choice, not if it’s for the good of the Community.”

It was true; Community came first in everything. Even if Father didn’t want him to be, he’d allow it for the sake of the whole. Sean felt his knees tremble and his throat clenched tight. He could never survive out here.

“Look,” Marcus said a little softer, “we both know that they’re just trying to protect us from that.” He pointed to the stone structure. “Can you imagine what would happen if it was up to us to make all of our own decisions? Society would crumble. Everybody would want to go a different way and there’s the possibility that we would do the wrong thing.” He shook his head, as if he couldn’t even imagine it. “It’s far better to let those who are capable decide for the good of the Community.”

Sean kept his eyes to the ground. He knew he should agree; after all, it was much more logical than the Old World and those were just old stories anyway... But he couldn’t let it go. Something deep inside rebelled against the expectations and he feared this something was growing.
stronger every day.

The silence stood until it was broken by a soft buzzing noise, which stopped as Marcus pulled the thin communicator from his pants' pocket. He glanced at Sean as he lifted it to his ear, then answered it as he turned back towards the trees they'd come through. "Yes Father, we're here. No, no one saw us. Sean," he called over his shoulder, "don't move, I'll be right back. Yes Father, I'm sure..." He disappeared behind the tree line and Sean eventually tuned him out and went back to his own thoughts.

Banishment. The word echoed in his head. What was so bad about asking a few questions anyway? He scuffed his foot, tearing up tufts of grass and sending dead leaves swirling into the air. Could he act normal enough that they would leave him alone? His toe dug further into the ground as he his thoughts became darker and darker. Was there even enough ti... He paused as his shoe smacked into something, then slowly he kicked again to make sure there was really something there.

Dropping to his knees, he felt through the grass in front of him until his hand hit a long, rough edge sticking no more than an inch out of the ground. He gripped handfuls of grass and tore them away as a wooden box began to take shape before him. Fully uncovered it was about two feet by two feet and made of a dark wood that had begun to turn green with plant life and rot away.

Overcome with curiosity, Sean examined the latch. A large piece of metal hung from it, holding the lid shut. Obviously it was some kind of lock, but he'd never seen one like this before. There weren't even any buttons on it! Nothing but a small, irregularly shaped hole at the bottom. He yanked on it with a sigh of frustration, willing it to open. To his surprise, it gave just a little. Glancing over his shoulder for his brother, Sean tugged on it again and was rewarded with the distinct sound of snapping wood. One final yank left the lock, latch and all, in his hands and splintered hole in the box where it used to be. Without further contemplation, he threw it aside and slowly lifted the lid.

Inside, nestled among musty, brown rags and a layer of sawdust, lay the box's treasure, something more valuable—and more dangerous—than anything he could've imagined. He gently lifted it from its resting place, marveling at an object he'd only seen in his lessons. The blue cover was faded beyond any recognition and the binding was frayed and unraveling—altogether an ugly sight but holding him transfixed nonetheless.

His fingers slipped underneath the edge of the cover and for a moment they rested there as he wrestled with his thoughts. This was illicit material; the consequences if he were to get caught with this were unimaginable, yet the tips of his fingers ached to feel the paper between them. Surely just one look... Just a glimpse to slake his curiosity... Trembling hands flipped it open and his eyes began to soak up the words before him.

"In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort. It had a perfectly round door like a porthole, painted green, with a shiny yellow brass knob in the exact middle..."

Sean flipped further into the book.

"The sun was shining brilliantly, and it was a long while before he could bear it. When he could, he saw all around him a sea of dark green, ruffled here and there by the breeze; and there were everywhere hundreds of butterflies..."

He stopped, suddenly struck with an overwhelm-
ing feeling of alienation from everything he'd been taught—like somehow things were not the way they were supposed to be. Something was missing, but he had no idea what it was. The very strings that held him together started to unravel as question after question came flooding in. He stared down at the book in his hands. How could they've taken this away from them? Why had they let them?

"Sean?"

He jerked his head up as he heard his brother call his name, eyes widening in panic as he saw the mess of grass, dirt, and wood before him.

"Sean?" Marcus’ footsteps could be heard crunching through trees.

Sean’s arms swept across the ground, pushing the torn grass and the lock into the box before shutting the lid. The book! He glanced down at it, and then his head snapped towards the forest as the trees on the edge began to rustle.

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"Sean!" Marcus emerged to find his brother sitting on the ground among the large amounts of dead leaves and flattened grass, twirling a red leaf between his fingers. “Why didn’t you answer me?”

The leaf floated to the ground. “I’m sorry, I didn’t hear you.”

“You didn’t hear…” Marcus ran his hand through his hair. He could believe it. Sean had that look about him, almost as if he were somewhere else. It was that look that had the Council talking – and worrying. There just seemed to be no way to get through to him. “Come on, we got to get back before it gets dark,” he sighed.

His brother stood up slowly, glancing one final time over his shoulder before coming to stand next to him. He noticed Sean’s cheeks were flushed red and when his brother’s eyes met his own, he was struck by how odd they looked. Surely being out here for this short of time hadn’t made him sick? “Are you feeling alright?” he asked as they started walking.

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

They trudged on in silence, and the further they got from the arch, the stronger Marcus began to feel that maybe bringing his brother here hadn’t been such a good idea after all.
While most people who enjoy camping as a recreational activity would probably describe their camping trips as refreshing or relaxing, very few would say that their trips were horrific encounters with monsters of the deep, escapees from the realm of myth and legend. There may be occasions (in the experiences of casual vacation campers) of great challenge or discomfort or perhaps even real danger, however most of the people who go out camping do so expecting to have a pleasant time. It must be told however, this may not always be the case! Peace and rest may be what we expect when setting out on a camping trip, but heed the old sagacious motto, “expect the unexpected!”

On a night spent in the woods not too long ago the last thing I expected snuck up on me and left me sleepless and petrified. My expectation was that upon hitting the sack, I would drift off to sleep slowly and not wake till morning when I would be well rested and greeted by the sparkling morning sun. Instead I was met with great ordeal in the night as I was confronted by what seemed to be one of the wild's most ghastly, fearful and malicious creatures. None at all would expect to be met with such a grotesque devilish fiend.

I was camping with a ragtag group of eight. The sun had set, our dinner was finished, and a coolness set into the air. Arrayed around the fire ring, we entertained ourselves with conversation, and what is a campfire without scary stories? In reality no one told any ghost stories, haunted tales or even speculated about the supernatural. Despite this, the topic of conversation was still mighty disturbing. As the facts were swapped I acquired a strong case of the willies. Parasites, leaches, and other foul wormies were the subject.

“It turns out the noise in the wall was a squirrel. It was so obnoxious I decided to get rid of it so I shot it.” One of the guys was in the middle of telling a story.

“What, did you eat it?” was another's comment. Because of course to have shot it means to have eaten it.

“Nah, I wanted to but when I went to skin
it, it was infested with worms under the skin.” Everyone groans. I shiver, oh gross.

“Oh yeah, I heard somewhere that there’s a certain time of year when you can’t use squirrel or rabbit meat because of a parasite that lives in them.” The conversation continues to get less and less delightful.

“Did you know that there is a kind of parasite that lives in a mouse’s brain that makes it stop being afraid of cats? That’s how cats are able to catch them.” Another of my companions throws further random facts into the mix.

“Well in biology we heard about this woman and I don’t know how true this is- but she ordered a specimen of a parasitic worm from a scientific supply company, you know, where they get stuff for class labs. And she ate it because she wanted to lose weight. And then she died in like three days.”

General uproar.

“What in the world! Who would do that?”

“What did she think would happen?”

“Oh that is so sad!”

Such was the course of the conversation: thoroughly disgusting and yet strangely intriguing. It carried on until the unspoken cue was given and all began to disperse to their established sleeping spots. As my tarpmates and I wriggled down into our sleeping bags, I put on my wool shirt. Long sleeved, black and brand new, I was delighted with this my first chance to wear it. Synched up in our mummy bags like four segmented worms, we submitted to slumber, expecting that nothing other than perhaps roots, rocks and the bright moonlight would trouble our sleep.

I rolled over, and rolled over, and rolled over. It may have been the moonlight or the lumps beneath me, but somehow I couldn’t stay asleep. I felt with my hands the softness of my new shirt.

What was that? There was another softness; I had brushed it momentarily with my hand. My hands within the sleeping bag and my face without, I searched blindly for that strange squishy softness I had encountered. I found it there on my shirt. It was small and entirely unfamiliar. I picked it up and held it with one hand while the other hand worked to loosen the cord and widen the peephole around my face. With much contortion I succeeded in pulling the hand with the mysterious item far enough out of the bag that I could see what I held. I was grateful now for the moonlight. Staring, I tried to perceive what the thing was. It was shaped like a little tube, one inch long. It moved.

Panic. In an instant I had thrown the thing away from me, which I now knew as some type of horrible worm. It landed in the darkness at the edge of the tarp. I lay on my back. A web of frantic thoughts wrapped up my mind. The hideous thing! It was a worm! It was in my bed. Ugh, what if there were more? I felt as though I was hooked into some electrical energy source as I scrambled to feel over all of my body and every fold of the inside of the sleeping bag for more worms. My thoughts moved from roaring alarm to freakish paranoia. They are infesting me. What if that worm has laid eggs on me; I’ll go home and find baby worms hatching everywhere. Or worse! What if it is a parasite that will grow under my skin and slowly eat me alive? Any rational voice I may have found in my mind had no power to dissuade the bone deep chilling fear that had taken over me; I tried to tell myself to ignore the worm and the fear.

Reasonable thoughts
couldn't overcome the fear, but eventually another equally strong emotion did. As I lay there scouting around with my hands for the terrible squishy worms for the eighth time, I discovered a hole in my shirt. A hole in my brand new, expensive, beloved, long sleeved, wool shirt! My prized possession had been maliciously marred by a worm. I was so angry. I was irate. That stupid worm! First it had shocked me with its presence in my safe place, then it had tried to lay eggs in me and use me as its host and now it had eaten a hole through my shirt. What was wrong with this worm? Was it simply evil; bent on inducing torment? I stewed for a long while. But the thoughts gradually lost volume and worn out by the raging feelings, I drifted into a fitful sleep.

The sparkling sun eventually did greet me, as I expected it would. Morning came. The sun did not fail in its faithfulness; it rose as it has every morning since the creation and as it will until the end when its purpose is finished. And as I expected I felt rested and refreshed. The worm was completely forgotten and it was several minutes before I remembered my distress in the night.

“How’d you sleep?” my companions asked of one another. Then it all came back; the worm, the fright, the dread, the anger (even the mouse that ran into our tarp, but that is another story.) I sat up and searched the area where the worm would have landed when I flung it away.

There it was a harmless little inchworm. An inchworm who if discovered in the day would have been an instant friend; the comedian of the caterpillars. I had to laugh at myself. How had I been so afraid? How had the darkness so distorted the little creature into some unearthly terror and plausible threat? In the night a lizard is liable to become Godzilla and an inchworm a legion of serpent spawn. But the sun comes up as expected and the light shows the true measure of the dreadful thing; it is inconsequential. The sun came up as expected. I daresay, expect the expected.
darkness
all around me
it surrounds me
enfolds me in its embrace
it's cold
and frightening
but it's all I know
it goes on forever
I'm trapped
I'm alone
I'm cold
I'm afraid
but look
a candle
flickers to life

the darkness
flees
the light is warm
I do not
fear it
it chases away the endlessness
the confinement
the loneliness
the cold
the fear

this small candle
flickering so gently
can free me
from
everlasting

darkness
Yours has been a secret name, a name obscured by shadows,
    Nothing more than a stealthy whisper.
    Yet now it blazes forth before my eyes;
    I cannot look away.

Why? Why now? Eighteen years have come and passed;
    You didn’t want me, you gave up your right.
    Nary a hint has been given that you thought of me.
    Till now.

I gape at your name and your odd request – is this the best you
can do?

I sit in silence, too stunned to move; my shaking fingers poised
over the keyboard, waiting,
    almost typing.
    Almost typing...
To fit in is to conform
To mold oneself to a predetermined set of obligations
To adhere to another's definition of you, to be owned
But we are owned
We do belong
But not to one with self-serving requirements
To belong to Him is to act in love
To defy the lists of societies desired qualities and reach
To truly love is a sort of intentional intrusion
A tearing down of walls from both sides
A long held gaze
A confusion of souls
Light upon our inner darkness
Truth shouted if whispered into the abyss of hell
“We are not made to be alone”
I Don’t Wear a Mask: A Letter of Sorts
by Kayla Michelle Newsom

You are always telling me to “take off my mask” and let the “real me” show through. After all, you tell me, this is a loving, Christian community; I should feel comfortable letting my face be visible. And I might be willing to take off my mask – if I was actually wearing one. I don’t wear a mask; I wear a full body suit, zipped all the way up.

Do you want me to take off my suit? I would, but it would be horridly messy – much more of a mess than I’m sure you’re willing to deal with. For, you see, I don’t wear this suit because so much because it’s the way I want to be seen, but because it’s what you want to see. You want me to be perfect; you want me to not have any problems and to have my life together, so I do. In appearance, at least. I can’t be messy and broken, because you can’t even handle your own brokenness, much less mine.

So we zip ourselves up in our little suits and talk about shallow things and our Stepford-wife version of Christianity and pretend that the dirt we’ve swept under the rug doesn’t exist. The suits have become our reality; what lies beneath is simply the stuff of dreams and nightmares.
The walls were wounded. I knew the holes had been inflicted by fists or boots in a fit of rage. As we meandered into the dim bedroom, I tried not to inhale. Tyler, a failed army wanna-be, flicked his cigarette butt onto the dirty mattress. His eyes registered surprise when he saw me. “Oh, hey! ... Will is coming, just so you know.” I rolled my eyes, hoping that no emotion had flared up at the mention of my ex.

I was out of my element that evening. Amber, my co-editor from our high school’s literary magazine, had invited me out with her friend David Allison. We were at Josh McPhearson’s house. I had never really spoken to him, but he had been infamous since my freshman year, and I felt as awkward as a bowling ball at the pitcher’s mound. Josh sauntered into his room, shirtless, and nodded in my
direction. I glanced at the floor quickly, hoping he didn’t notice that I found him attractive.

“Do your parents know you’re here?” Tyler asked. I shifted my feet and breathed out a cautious reply. “What do you think?” Josh casually rested his body against the wall, darting his dark eyes in my direction. “Do you do drugs?”

“Nah, not really.” My voice remained steady, but he laughed anyway.

“You will. You’ll get curious and want to try. I did.” Josh spoke with an unassuming air that still reeked of control. I imagined what his father must have been like, a loud obscene man with enough sexual appeal to seduce a hopeful female and then walk out. According to the rumors, Josh already had. I forced my thoughts to the present. “I won’t. I’m 18, and pretty much know who I am at this point.”

Josh snorted in amusement as he pulled a thin t-shirt over his head. “I don’t... But then, I was nine when I started.”

“God... I need a cigarette...” Amber interrupted, stretching her arms above her head and arching her back. Tyler’s eyes scanned hopelessly for a figure, but it was obvious that she smoked more than she ate.

The door swung open. “Josh... Could someone help me get the pizza out of the oven?” A wide eyed girl scuffed her shoes against the thin carpet. He cursed at her. “Get out of here Jackie.” Jackie’s eyes hardened with hurt, but showed no surprise. Despite everything, I could tell she loved and desperately admired her brother. “Why do you have to be such a jerk?” she mumbled.

“Why do you have to be so pathetic?” he spit back. “Get out.”

I got up quickly. “I’ll help you.” Josh blurted out something in protest, but I was already out the door, ready to be anywhere else.

His mom was prone on the couch, a glass of wine
in her hand. I passed her cautiously, noticing how
the dim lighting emphasized the hollows under
her eyes.
We were waiting for Will to arrive with the drugs.
Or rather, they were. I studied the hairline cracks
in the walls and their morals until I thought
that my eyes would fall out. Their conversation
sketched drugs and sex in explicit terms, giving
me a queasy feeling in the back of my mind. I
hoped my attitude wouldn’t give off the stench
of their bitter apathy when I returned home, the
way I knew my clothes and purse would reek of
stale cigarette smoke.

We were only there for around 30 minutes.

David glanced over at me on the
ride home, and the first words out
of his mouth were, “Why don’t you
do drugs?” Nobody had even asked
me that before. I guess they just as-
sumed that it was because of my faith.
“..Like, is it for moral reasons?”
“I love my family.” I started. “It would
completely destroy the relationships that I’ve been
trying to build, as well as my health. Plus, I’m a
Christian, and I don’t believe God would like the
type of person I would become. My younger sib-
lings look up to me and my parents already think
I’m a bad influence on them.” I trailed off, study-
ing him. He seemed sincere in his questioning, so
I continued. “Why do you do use?”
“It improved my life. It made me more than just
some loser. Before I smoked, I just walked around
campus like some depressed emo kid.” He cursed.
“I wanted to die. Now I’m cool though. I have
somewhere to be, more of a life.”

“We both had faults in our lives...”

“Ok. I’ll see ya.” I opened the car door and got
out. As his car disappeared in the distance, I went
inside to wash the evening from my body and
mind. We both had faults in our lives, crevices
that cut through our center and left us in pieces.
I wouldn’t have been there if I wasn’t broken, and
he wouldn’t have drawn me into
his fold if he didn’t somehow sense my inconsis-
tencies.
We never really spoke again, and near the end
of our senior year he was expelled. I’m sure we’ll
meet again in that cliché way characters usually
do. Until then, I hope he eventually learns to
believe in more than himself.
Prayer moved past your aluminum foil eyes
Those crumpled spheres of imperfect animosity
Shifting disappointed secrets in denial of your present failures

My sin is left breathless in your wake
Constricted word spittle steaming onto cracked foundation
Quaking lust strands ensnared between copper palms

Handprint intellect devastates innocence
And if I entangled my fingers in your bristling conceit
Drawing it out by the roots to banish from our mutual respect

Your foil lies might dissolve into a silver-tinged whirlpool of

Possibility.
She was holding on a little too tightly
She felt she was falling ever so slightly
Didn’t like who she saw when she looked at herself
Didn’t like who she was but that’s all she had left
She smiled at the crowds that lined the street
And envied the people that danced to their own beat
She didn’t understand that she was made for more
She didn’t see that right before her was an opened door
She didn’t understand that God made her a treasure
That she was His creation and in her God took pleasure
It wasn’t until last night when she felt that push and shove
That she really saw the light and experienced God’s love
Finally, there was true peace on her face
And of that past sadness, well there wasn’t a trace
Now her life is not perfect, all people hurt and all have to grow
But this gift she finally saw is amazing to truly know
Through this alone your life is made for, and yourself, you’re free to be
Thank you, Lord Jesus! It’s so good to be free!
Now please Lord God I beg you since we’re completely free
Use us as your instruments so the earth may come to see
What you have in store for them as well as for me
When first you hear the word snow—especially if you are from a warm, sunny climate—you think of beautiful landscapes covered in unbroken white, stretching for miles and so very far removed from your world. But what happens when those two worlds collide? Pure chaos. Those who live up north where snowfall is plentiful are well prepared for snow of any kind. An army of snowplows prowl the streets keeping them clear so school kids can go to school even if there is two feet or more of snow on the ground. When I was a child, we lived in such a city that was prepared for snow, even the type that buried the first floors of buildings. When a city is so well prepared, living in snow is very fun and becomes a routine. However, down south it is a different story. Where I live now, two inches of snow can cancel everything and cause multiple wrecks and multiple snow-covered streets which no snowplow has ever found. Of course, during the winter, snow is expected so some preparations are made. However, if you proposed the idea of snow in April you’d get laughed at. But that’s exactly what happened.

It was a cloudy, dull kind of day in April, and we were going on a trip up north to Indiana to visit family. At home, we all piled ourselves into our 2001 station wagon, along with our suitcases, cooler, and even more stuff and headed out. The typical route, us living in North Carolina, was to take I-40 through the Appalachian Mountains to Tennessee, where our first stop would be. But we had to travel for about an hour before we even got onto I-40. I pretended to take a nap while my little sister attempted to wake me up. I just knew I was going to have bruises on my arm by the end of the trip. Eventually Mom started up a story that she could listen to and, since it was played on the car CD system, I half listened while the other half of me bumped along in dream land. I can enter-
tain myself a whole trip long by half-sleeping and wandering around in dream land. However, on this trip, the clouds outside kept my attention too well for me to be truly focused on spinning dream fantasies in my head. As we travelled along, the clouds kept getting darker and darker and they crowded together in one great, gray mass that blanketed the sky above. Since we were travelling west, the clouds built up faster than they normally would because the storms around here travel west to east. The storms that make it back to our area have battled their way through the mountains and come spilling into the plain, dumping whatever remains in their watery bowels after the mountains have nearly cleaned them out. The weak storms don’t make it as far as us, only the strong storms. This was a strong storm.

Under the increasingly dark clouds, the landscape changed from flat land shrouded in trees to hills and then finally mountains loomed up on the horizon. Their slopes were filled with fresh budding trees that hadn’t quite clothed themselves in the color of spring. I love the mountains so I closed my eyes less and instead stared out of the window watching the trees and cars whiz by. Slowly the slope of the road changed till we were curving around deep bends one after another. My ears started hurting due to the sudden increase of altitude. I had to keep popping them to relieve the pressure and so I could still hear properly. I always liked the part of our trip that went through the mountains because there were three tunnels to go through and I normally pay quite a bit of attention when we go through one. The sudden darkness lit by dim orange lights is such a contrast to the bright outdoors that jerks my attention away from my daydreams. I knew that the first tunnel on our route would be coming up in about a half hour so I grudgingly let my pretense of daydreaming go as I fully turned my attention to the landscape outside the car. My little sister, of course, was delighted to see me awake and commenced her pestering of me to do something with her. I usually can fool her when I pretend to sleep simply because I am trying to fool myself into sleeping to pass the time. Long gone are the days when I would read the whole trip long. This, of course, has lessened my tolerance for reading in the car without getting carsick. And for a trip all the way up to Indiana, I would run out of books to read on the way up there so there was no point in bringing more than one or two if any.

To divert her pestering, I pointed out the clouds to her, trying to focus her attention on the now extremely dark clouds hanging above our car. And that’s when it all let loose. Heavy rain pounded the car, drowning all sounds inside and outside of the car. This caught my little sister’s attention quite well. I could care less about her at that moment. I was gazing intently at the curtains of rain obscuring the road ahead of us. I wasn’t worried at all. Dad is a very able driver having driven buses on the icy roads of Alaska when he was in the military. There were a few exciting moments at which we almost hydroplaned, but nothing went seriously wrong. After all, we were still climbing up the mountains; flat land is required for true hydroplaning. The rain only increased its pounding as we climbed further up. The noise was such that Mom had to turn off the audiobook because we couldn’t hear it anymore. The rhythmic drumming was lulling me off to sleep with its regularity, but before I could do so, I noticed something white outside the window. I couldn’t believe my eyes. The heavy rain had turned into heavy snow!
This only made me even more excited, because we hardly ever get snow at home, but these were almost blizzard like conditions. The heaviness of the snowfall was threatening a whiteout. On the interstate. In April.
The snow continued to fall, clogging the road and thereby clogging traffic. It wasn’t until a few minutes later that the true extent of this was realized. Semi-trailers are supposed to keep right in the slower lane when climbing or descending a mountain. We soon found out that there were some semis that had not obeyed this rule and they were stuck, not being able to get traction on the slippery, snow-covered road. The smaller cars and trucks were able to crawl their way up through the snow, but not the heavy semis loaded down with shipping cargo. And because they were stuck all traffic was brought to a halt.
While we attempted to prevent ourselves from sliding back down the hill, we watched the snow pile up around us and also, the antics of the other people around us proved amusing. Shortly after our halt, the two people in the car in front of us decided they were going to get out to investigate. What made it so funny to us was that the male driver had on pajama shorts and flip flops. My only thoughts, while I was dying of laughter, were that he must be cold, and why on earth had he even bothered getting out of the car in the first place when he was dressed as inappropriately as that!
I wanted to get out of the car and play in the snow, but Dad and Mom wouldn’t let me. However, my Dad did get out of the car, but only because he had an urgent need to take care of. Thankfully the woods besides the road provided enough shelter for him to do his business in the absence of proper restrooms.
By the time he returned, however, the line of cars was starting to move. Most had realized there was no progressing further up the mountains so cars were turning around and heading back the other way. Thankfully, there was an emergency vehicle turnaround located before the area the trucks had blocked so all of us were able to turn around.
Dad climbed back into the car and we slowly crawled up and through the turnaround. The descent was made slowly in the snow, but soon enough we reached a low enough elevation that the rain turned back into the heavy rain from which it had come.
Easily enough we located a detour on the map and proceeded on our way, only delayed by an hour or two. However I will never forget the lovely sight of snow in April.
Psalm of Praise
by Serena Graham

Glory and praise are yours, O Lord
   Worship and honor belong to you.
Worthy are you to be lifted up
   Above all to you we sing.
Your glory shines in the colors of fall
   Your wonder in winter’s wind.
Springtime blooms with blessings from you
   And summer brings the warmth of your love.
Your magnificence displayed in mighty mountains
   Your beauty in the rippling stream.
Your power manifested in the changing of tides
   Your majesty in the heavenly lights.
Your joy in a newborn baby’s cry
   Your peace in the sparrow’s song.
I will sing as the sparrow to you, O Lord
   For all eternity long!
Marble pillars carry lofted rocks weight,
Time takes His aim at temples aged late
Man’s labored kingdoms cycle in the dust,
Leaving one rock left that our feet may trust.
Christ calls us to be the Saints of Heaven.
Through His holy bread, ours is made leaven.
Now we are golden columns of His Church,
Hold His name high, let the world end their search.
We must never let a column fall down.
Reconcile! Before this Church finds ground!
Forgiveness like Christ’s, we must imitate,
Crumbled marble is soon to dissipate.
  Now, grow thou soul like quick heavenly Birch,
  And soon may the Holy Spirit find Perch.
St. Patrick’s Prayer

I bind unto myself today
The strong Name of the Trinity,
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One and One in Three.

I bind this day to me for ever.
By power of faith, Christ’s incarnation;
His baptism in the Jordan river;
His death on Cross for my salvation;
His bursting from the spiced tomb;
His riding up the heavenly way;
His coming at the day of doom;
I bind unto myself today.

I bind unto myself the power
Of the great love of the cherubim;
The sweet ‘well done’ in judgment hour,
The service of the seraphim,
Confessors’ faith, Apostles’ word,
The Patriarchs’ prayers, the Prophets’ scrolls,
All good deeds done unto the Lord,
And purity of virgin souls.

I bind unto myself today
The virtues of the starlit heaven,
The glorious sun’s life-giving ray,
The whiteness of the moon at even,
The flashing of the lightning free,
The whirling wind’s tempestuous shocks,
The stable earth, the deep salt sea,
Around the old eternal rocks.

I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, His might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need.
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, His shield to ward,
The word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.

Against the demon snares of sin,
The vice that gives temptation force,
The natural lusts that war within,
The hostile men that mar my course;
Or few or many, far or nigh,
In every place and in all hours,
Against their fierce hostility,
I bind to me these holy powers.

Against all Satan’s spells and wiles,
Against false words of heresy,
Against the knowledge that defiles,
Against the heart’s idolatry,
Against the wizard’s evil craft,
Against the death wound and the burning,
The choking wave and the poisoned shaft,
Protect me, Christ, till Thy returning.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the Name,
The strong Name of the Trinity;
By invocation of the same.
The Three in One, and One in Three,
Of Whom all nature hath creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:
Praise to the Lord of my salvation,
Salvation is of Christ the Lord.
Jeff woke up on Christmas morning, way too early of course, and ran into the living room expecting to see all manners of joy untold encompassing the glimmering tree before the window. His hurried, stumbling stride halted quickly as he noticed the lack of ribbons and bows and boxes he was sure would be there. Startled, Jeff noticed his father standing before him in the doorway of the kitchen. His father looked as if he’d been weeping. He had dark circles under his eyes like he’d been hit with baseballs and his face looked older and more wrinkled than it had just yesterday. Jeff looked up in to his father’s worried but loving glance with confusion and fear. Finally, his father spoke, “Son, I’m so sorry I have failed you.” Jeff in his 12 year old mind couldn’t comprehend what his father could possibly mean. They just stood there, staring at each other for what seemed like hours while fresh tears poured down his father’s face. Then the boy noticed his mother, mostly blocked by his father’s portly figure in the doorway. She was sitting at the table with her head in her hands sobbing. ”Come sit” she pointed to the chair adjacent her. His father led him with a large but gentle hand as they both joined his mother. The silence was broken only by the sobs and sniffles of his mother as she wept. After what seemed like eternity, his father finally told him that there would be no Christmas this year, but that was not the worst.
The family would have to move out of the home that they had enjoyed since Jeff was an infant. His father had lost his job back in the summer. He had worked at that plant diligently and faithfully for 17 years, but when the new executives took over and downsized, his father was given the boot. Since then they had struggled, but they had always made it work. His dad had searched long and hard for work, but there was none to be had for someone pushing 50 and no college degree. The few that he had applied for he had lost to younger folks and ones that had gotten their degree from the local tech school. Jeff’s father had started working when he was 13, and had never been without a job until now. He never made a lot, but he made enough to make ends meet and provide a modest but comfortable life for their small family.
Jeff’s mother explained to him that they had tried to work with the mortgage company, but were now so far behind that there was no way to catch up and foreclosure was inevitable.
“I know you are used to many presents for Christmas and a great filling feast, and we are so sorrowful that we cannot provide that for you,” his mother managed to moan through her sobs.

As Jeff thought for a moment, his father handed him a small, unwrapped and rather dirty white box. “This is for you for Christmas, son, it is all that I have.”

Jeff opened the box to find a tarnished old pocket watch, the hands stood still, and the crystal was scratched. Jeff stared as his father explained. “That watch belonged to my grandfather,” he pointed out the initials etched on the back. “He received it as a wedding gift from my grandmother. He carried it with him every day of his life, and when he died, my grandmother took it out of his pocket and placed it in my hand. She told me to always love like it was your last day on earth, because it just could be. She told me to always remember that even though there was bad in the world, to look to Jesus for goodness and light and grace. She told me that my grandfather had loved me to his death, and that he desired me to have this watch.”

Jeff joined his parents as he softly whimpered, tears flowing like a flooded stream down his face and soaking his pajamas.

Suddenly Jeff jumped up, and darted off to his room like a rocket had gone off under his feet. He came back to the table with a tattered old Bible. “Grandma gave this to me” he told them, “she said it was her father’s.” Jeff turned the old fragile pages until he found the page he was searching for. He read to his parents the story of a woman who had given all she had. “Jesus had said that she gave more than all the others who had given of their wealth. You gave me more this Christmas than you ever have, Father, and for that I am grateful.”
“To say the very thing you really mean, the whole of it, nothing more or less or other than what you really mean; that’s the whole art and joy of words.”

- C. S. Lewis