Second Honorable Mention-Short Story

As Night Was Falling

by Julian Bleasdale

As night was falling the fog began to lie heavy and uneven in her memory. She could see his face clearly, or so it seemed. It was like yesterday and not the many years it had really been.

When last his face was seen, hers was young and beautiful. Now time had passed and lines and creases had ravaged the youthful beauty.

Raven hair now gray had shone with luster during their time together.

The place where they had spent their afternoons in the sun had been leveled and in its place had been erected high-rise office buildings. The place in the sun lived today in her haze of vague but loving memories, and nowhere else.

She lay on her bed, eyes closed, as she thought him to life in her mind. With his broad shoulders he would be swimming out into the ocean blue at sunrise, then pausing he would stop, look back at her and smile. How her withered body longed for his brawny arms to hold her as they had on their blanket at the beach!

To look at him and see his crystal eyes shine with mischievous delight and bid her come to him. To him she would go like a shy harem girl going to her Arabian Knight ready to fly on his magic carpet. Ready to soar the heights and depths of their passions and desires. Ready for the laughter and love they had shared when they were mere children in the game of life.

No longer a child, but now an aged form with labored breath not from passion but from the tiresome loneliness.

The years they had shared together had been short and their years apart too long. No man nor memory had stayed with her as he had. She had dreamed and remembered for more years than their ages together had been.

Now she was tired and cold. Her frail bones could not be warmed by a quilt of cotton and no evening rest would refresh her. How long she had waited and wanted. Why was she being punished by this aching torment? Having known love, lost love and never known it again had followed her through the years.

The sleep she had been waiting for was starting to drift over her. Yet, it was at that very moment her mind seemed so clear. The fog was subsiding and in its place a light as bright as the midday sun.

She saw herself as she had been so long ago, eyes bright, raven hair wisping across her arms, feet dancing and smiling rosebud lips.

There was music playing, why it was their old favorite “Harbor Lights.” She felt the need to stop her dance and find out where the music might be coming from.

The remaining clouds in her mind parted and gave way to beautiful rainbow-colored stairs, descending from the heavens. Pastels of every hue filtered through with what seemed to be a beckoning motion. Hesitantly, she stepped onto the first step and the woman could feel a warmth surrounding her. Taking yet another step the feelings of torment and punishment were vanquished from her soul.

It was then that she raised her head, and, standing there in the opening of the clouds at the head of the magnificent staircase stood something even more magnificent.

The man of her youth, the man she had remembered all these many years was descending the stairs, hands extended.

This was different. This was not a memory. He was real. She looked him in the eyes and instantly saw the mischievous glint looking back at her. Halfway down he stopped, and she knew it was because he could go no further. It was up to her to take the last steps. The steps that had separated them for so long. The old gray cat curled in a ball by the old woman's face was the last to hear her labored breath.