THE RING

It had been so long since they had felt their lips together, felt a tight embrace, felt anything at all. The ring had broken months ago, cracked and bent, no longer worn. Their love, like the ring, had succumbed to the ravages of neglect. Left to tarnish, no longer held dear and shielded from the elements by the two souls that had lived as one. Time found the ring and their union unprotected, then twisted and tore at the metal until the day the small crack became a coarse, jagged gap that brought nothing but pain. In haste, it was ripped from the finger and thrown by an unhappy man wishing only to be free from the torment.

 They allowed each other to drift further away, forgetting that glorious moment they had found each other. Forgetting the emptiness of those long, lonely days when they had waited, searching, hoping for this very love that now slipped away like sand sifting through outstretched fingers.

 Hours became days, became months, and the distance between them grew like weeds blocking out the sun and suffocating the once beautiful blooming flower. And in the dark and rainy shadows, the fragile bond finally broke, rendering them as strangers sharing a bed.

 A voice spoke to him within a dream, revealing what it all meant, what had been lost, and where this path would end. He saw the signs, felt the danger, but still did nothing to mend the break in the ring or their hearts, thinking only of the need to distance himself from the pain.

 Time streamed steadily away until a lingering dark cloud seemed to pass, the one that had blocked his view of long-lost love. He awoke from that place where life flowed past him like a river while he stood on the banks and watched as all things that ever mattered washed slowly away just beyond his reach. Fear and urgency overcame complacency. He now understood what must be done as he cradled a glimmering hope that there was still a chance for them.
 He took her and the ring to a jeweler and inquired how to make it right, but was told the fracture had become too great and that the time to mend the ring had come and gone. The only choice now was to start anew.

 He asked if she would consider a new pair of rings to show that love could still survive and flourish if they would work to rekindle the flames that once burned so bright and warm.

 She said no.

 She said the distance between them had grown too great, and it was time to take her ring off as well.
 Now, the bond completely crumbled as two people stumbled up the court steps to make the final break. This former loving couple, husband and wife, now plaintiff and defendant.
 She left with her independence while he carried away the shattered remnants of a life together, along with a document signed by his best friend, his lover, his confidant, his everything. A standard court form in cold, black ink that read, ‘I'm going to leave you now.’ And then she was gone.

 The ring grows dusty in a tray upon his dresser, a forever reminder of what was and will come to pass when love is left to whither.
 Seasons came and went, and a lonely man continued along, barely taking notice of the steamy August nights, the crisp colors of autumn, or the snow-covered branches of winter. The summer winds returned and brought a warmth back into his heart, so badly broken, only now remembering how good a smile could feel.
 An unexpected conversation became a first blind meeting, and what seemed impossible a few short months ago began to grow until he found himself in love with one who took his breath away. He waited to be sure, but deep down never doubted that she would be the one to whom he would give and be given.

 Love grew from the ashes, nourished and nurtured by two souls that had felt the emptiness of loss and embraced the hope of another chance to love. Hand in hand, cheek to cheek, heartbeats in perfect unison. And they smiled for the rest of their time.

 He came upon the ring again, its significance reduced to a faded string of memories, a permanent reminder of the misfortune that can befall a love unguarded. Hope and joy had so refilled that empty heart that there was no longer room for the burden of its unhappiness. He stuffed it in his pocket and set out to free himself of it forever. Standing on a bridge, the old, broken ring tumbled gently from his open hand and down into the clear flowing river below. It danced and flickered with the currents before settling beneath a smoothed boulder, never to be seen again. A parting cloud allowed a ray of sunlight to reflect upon the band he now wore on his left hand. He smiled, finally understanding the deeper message that had come from all places but a jeweler, who had said the only choice was to start anew.