

Her hands worked diligently and carefully, her every motion smooth and controlled. Every strip needed to be just right, every stitch just so, otherwise the quilt would not come out right. She took pride in her work and this quilt was special. Each swatch of fabric had a story of its own, each colour a meaning.

That blue one there (the one with the little white flowers) that was the one she had made a dress out of for her daughter 40 years ago. The material had barely faded, most likely do to her careful packing and protection. The red stripes, they were from the same material as the patches she had put on her son's jeans. Even the paisley strips she had once made curtains out of for a neighbor when they had moved into the neighborhood back in the 60's were there. So many different memories in one place and it was as if she were stitching each and every moment together, catching the loose (and almost forgotten) remembrances of an entire lifetime.

She had been working at that quilt for so long that her hands started to ache. She looked at her fingers as she rubbed them. The repetitive jabs from the needles and pins didn't seem to draw blood anymore, in fact she barely even noticed when she did that now. It was the arthritis and weather that were taking their toll. She couldn't work like she used to; In days past she could have completed this quilt in just a week or two. This one had taken twice as long, but every hour was important. She didn't have much time left.

The sun had just set and the last stitch was in place. She turned on the light, spread the labour of love out in front of her and gazed at it with misty eyes. Brushing a few loose threads she tested the hand quilting she had done. They had machines to stipple quilts now, but the very action of hand working a quilt breathed life into it where before simple fabric had been. Now all those odds and ends with their memories (the place holders from that fabric and the vest made from the brown one) patching material, bits, pieces and thread had come together. She strained to read the story it told.

It meant so much to her, the pieces of life all pulled together in a single canvas. She could never tell the whole story in words but her life was all there. She took a deep breath, exhaled and put out the lights in the room. It was the last time she would look upon her work of loving art, in fact it was the last thing she would look upon in the world for any length of time.

She undressed, put on her night-clothes and climbed into bed as a gentle breeze blew through the slightly opened window. She had never been able to sleep with all the windows closed. Something about the stillness and isolation from the rest of the world made her uneasy and unable to sleep. Even in the middle of winter as the cold New England wind blew from the northeast she would leave that window open just an inch or two. She turned out the light, rolled over and took a deep breath.

Her mind was filled with images, conversations and memories of events long past. Working with all the bits of her life these passed few weeks had brought them all up to the surface again and they ebbed and flowed through her mind's eye like the shore of some tropical island that she had never seen. It lulled her to sleep and the symphony of images continued to play out in her dreams. As if viewed through a gossamer curtain she watched her and her husband standing at the altar, exchanging vows.

He was a handsome man but not overly. His hair already showed signs of salt mixed into the pepper despite the fact that he was only in his twenties. A hard life of toil had already aged him. He was "put together well", as her sister had put it, and she always remembered the way his smile lit up the room.

Their wedding was a small affair, with only the direct family in the sun-lit church. Dust played in the streams of sun like tiny krill in the ocean. The wedding was small, not because they had no friends, nor because it was "rushed". It was small because they needed to keep it small to save money. They didn't feel the scrimping and saving was a hinderance to their happiness. Everything about their wedding was planned to be simple but full of meaning. The one thing that wasn't planned was the tear in his coat. A nail in a pew seemingly reached out and grabbed the arm of his coat.

Her husband, so graceful and kind, made no motion that anything was wrong. His face stayed focused on her's and his stride never skipped a beat. It wasn't until long after the last dance and every guest had left that he had shared what happened.

The square of fabric from his coat was there in the top right corner where her cheek would be. In her mind she could actually smell him still, even though he had long proceeded her.

Lights shimmered on the scene like the sun reflecting off of the summer ocean and the image she saw shifted to a snapshot of the two of them. They had been talking with friends in the back yard of the small house they had just bought while she pondered how to tell him of the big news she had just heard from the doctor.

Janice and Tom, their best friends since school, had taken the picture soon after she told him that their little house was about to get more cramped. He was always so calm and steady, rarely showing much emotion, unless the situation called for it. This day it must have called for it as he spun her around. He had to stop and steady himself after gently placing her down, just as Tom snapped the photo.

The blue and white plaid piece from her shirt conveniently lay over her heart as she lay dreaming.

She liked these dreams. They were filled with loving emotions which seemed to make the quilt even warmer.