SCHOOLED: *the Graduate*

The big day lay before him…*and* his classmates. As he walked into the gymnasium, a loud cheer erupted from the sea of blue and white flowing before him. Whitecaps literally bobbed on most every head, and cascading blue robes with golden tassels dotted the sea of friends meeting his gaze. A handful of students stuck out their hands as they parted so he could walk through, and he thought of the Israelite children, tiptoeing over a hardened sea floor while walls of water stood at attention on either side of them. They didn't sink in a wet and muddy ground, and neither had he. He'd done the best he could with what he had to work with, and it hadn't been easy, but he was aware now more than ever of all Jesus had accomplished on his behalf. God's faithfulness was everlasting. Today, they would graduate, but he knew he'd never leave behind these lessons. Jesus had used all of it, every stitch. He'd woven it together like a fine seamster, until the tapestry became a masterpiece. Until it made sense.

"Something beautiful. Something good. All my confusion, He understood," he whispered. "All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife. He's making something beautiful out of my life." All his life, his grammy had been singing that song over him. She wouldn't be here today. The memory pricked at his heart like a syringe drawing blood. But she'd be watching. He had no doubt, she'd be watching. From a space Jesus reserved particularly for saints when they came home to Him. Grammy almost made it, but Jesus had other plans. Today, she would know they'd made it. He looked up then, as he adjusted his graduation cap and zipped up his robe. He smiled, swiping at a stray tear. 'This one is for you, Grammy.'

A short while later, the young man cleared his throat, stepping to the podium to give his valedictorian speech. Amid boisterous applause, he began speaking; soon a hush fell over the room. This wouldn't be the usual speech everyone expected, and he hoped he could make it through it without cracking in pieces. The teaching staff had been so kind when he first approached them with his idea. They'd worked out all the details, right down to crossing the last 't' and dotting the final 'i'.

He talked about how cute they had all been as five- and six-year-olds, although truth was, he really didn't recall. Back then he was just trying to survive two parents who couldn't leave the dope alone long enough to show up for him. He then shared the growing years, when some of his classmates shot up like well-watered gardens and some, like himself, seemed to shrink. He didn't have a grow chart scrawled along a door jamb lovingly marked there by a parent. What he had was a box of memories he tried to shut out when he closed his eyes of the frequent visits by the cops and the numerous arrests and the black-and-bruised marks all over his mom. But he kept those memories to himself. He reminded his classmates of the medals they'd achieved and the trophies they'd won, the spelling bees and the band competitions, and the last four years they took State because they were the best in their division in football. The recollections for him were enhanced by late night study sessions and the completion of someone else's dreams which were far more important to him than his own. Again, he cleared his throat

'At this time, it is my honor to call forward this year's recipient of 'Student of the Year.' He fought back the tears burning his throat and drowning his eyes. 'This year's recipient just happens to be my mother. Mom, please come up and accept your reward.' His mom stood, shock transparent on her face, and she began to walk toward him to thunderous applause and cheers. A hundred memories played like a slideshow in his mind. The woman who had od'd and almost died because of the brutal beating his father perpetrated on her lifeless body. The long road back, the climb, the struggle, the detox, the fight. Then the victory, meeting Jesus and the reconciliation with Grammy, and lastly, his mom's will to achieve. A diploma of her own!

His principal had allowed him to be her tutor and his teachers helped him help her. While he studied and took his own exams, he likewise quizzed and homeschooled his mom all the way to the finish line. And tonight, she'd get to graduate alongside him; they both would receive their diploma at the same time. It truly was an epic story, a win-win that tonight was being celebrated by everyone. As someone once said, "Everything in your destiny is graduation." And Jesus? Well, He was the finest Teacher of all.

Joshua 3:5, "Prepare today because tomorrow I will do great things."