The Realization:
A Short Story Inspired by “Thank You, M'am”
By Constanza Nicolini

It was a beautiful night; the stars and the sky made great contrast. One was black like tar and the other, bright like diamonds. He wondered to himself why didn’t he say anything. Not even “thank you”. He felt guilty. Maybe I should go back inside and thank her, but then again, no. I don’t have the guts to go back inside, Roger thought. He looked at his clean hands--which Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones made him scrub--they had his ten dollar bill wrinkled. It was ten dollars! The boy couldn’t believe it. He could even buy two pairs of suede shoes and his lunch for tomorrow! Suddenly, he came back to reality. Roger had to get some sleep, but he couldn’t go back to his house. Not at this time of the night. His dad would shout at him or even worse, hit him, but he had to stay somewhere. So, he went back to his house.

As soon as Roger got there, he opened the old, wooden front door. It was pitch dark. The boy tiptoed inside trying to make the least amount of noise possible. He glanced over his right shoulder and he saw him there. His dad with twelve beer bottles around his feet lying on the couch with the news on the T.V turned on. As if he cared about something other than himself Roger thought. A relieved feeling traveled through his body. Roger went straight to his room still holding the ten dollars tightly and got some rest.

Next morning Roger was woken up by his father’s shouts outside his bedroom. The boy could see his reflection on the window. His scar hadn’t healed yet. He opened his door and there he was, his dad. His eyes were black pits and his jaw and fists were clenched. Roger’s first reaction was to run and so he did. It was a bad decision because he came running after Roger. Thankfully, he didn’t catch him, but that was because of the alcohol’s effect. The boy raced down the road until he knew he was safe. He stopped at a park and took a seat on a bench. He could see brothers and sisters playing tag and parents playing hide and seek with their kids. Roger wondered why couldn’t he be one of them. He finally concluded that life is just not fair. His head rested on his shoulder and he fell asleep.

He woke up three hours later or at least that’s what he thought and decided to go for a walk. Roger saw a very old man begging for money. He had a dog resting on his lap and he only had a coat to protect himself from the freezing cold weather. Roger peeked inside his cup; he only had three cents. The sun was beginning to set so he decided to return home before his father had returned from buying beer. He took a shower after five days. The cold water ran through his body. “Ouch!” He screamed as the combination of soap and water hit his scar on his back. As soon as he heard the front door slamming, the boy got out of the shower and put on his clothes. He laid on his bed and when he heard his door open, Roger faked to have fallen asleep. His dad furiously slammed his door and went downstairs to the “drinking” couch as he had named it. Half an hour later, Roger tiptoed downstairs behind the drinking couch and opened the fridge. Two thirds of it were beers, but the remaining third was rotten beef and lasagna from two months ago and some fruit. The boy grabbed an apple and started to work his way upstairs. He
heard him stand up and he suddenly felt two big hands grabbing him tightly around his waist. Roger tried to free himself, but he couldn't. His dad punched Roger on his ribcage. He let out a little shriek. Ten seconds later, he let Roger go. Roger sprinted to his room, locked his door, gobbled his apple and tried to get some sleep.

Next morning was the same. He woke up, got chased by his dad and left the house. Roger passed through the same streets as yesterday. The old man was still there, but his dog wasn't. “Hi,” Roger said, “I saw you yesterday with your dog, where is it?” “You know, little boy, you can’t get everything you want in this life. Life’s hard and you need to find solutions, not cry over them.” The old man said. That small phrase made him open his eyes and change the perspective he was living on. Did he have a house? Yes. Food and clothes? Yes. Education? He did, but he barely went to school. At least he had the basics to survive. He might not have a family that cares for him, but he did have other things unlike that man. “Did they take your dog away?” Roger asked. “Yes, they did. They think I don’t have the resources to keep him healthy and alive,” he answered. That is unfair. That poor man has nothing. No food, no clothes, not even his dog and I complain about life, Roger thought. He put his hands on his pockets and he felt a little paper brush against his fingers and took it out. It was the ten dollars Mrs. Luella Bates had given him. He still hadn’t spent them. He was starting to leave when he realized that there are some people in the world who need money more than he did. So Roger did something that he never imagined he would do. Roger went back and left them. He left the ten dollars in the man’s cup. Tears started to accumulate in the man’s eyes. “I-I’m speechless,” the man said, “thank you, young boy, thank you so much. I’ve never gotten that much money.” “You’re welcome, use it wisely,” Roger answered. He started to walk away and Roger noticed that the old man had said something he wished he would’ve said. He said two magic words: thank you.