Candle World and Maggie’s Rebirth

After the divorce, the starkness of Sunday mornings had become painfully apparent to Maggie. The girls spent the weekends with Philip, and wishing to escape the enveloping solitude, Maggie found herself wedged in the backseat of her mother’s car on the girls’ annual pilgrimage to Candle World’s discount day. For Maggie’s mother and her three friends, this was their mecca. Not only did it provide the women with a respite from their monotonous domesticity, but also allowed the four of them to discuss their husbands’ antics and their childrens’ achievements. Maggie’s mother, of course, was the envy of all today, for her fine daughter had found time to come along.

Upon entering the parking lot, Maggie’s mother announced that next year’s departure would need to be earlier. Crowds of women already lined the entrance, many veterans with their own personal shopping baskets. Maggie watched with disbelief as her mother and friends seemed to shed thirty years, racing from the car to the entrance with the alacrity of her own daughters on Christmas morning. Maggie waited for the hordes to trample by before reaching for a basket. Even amongst the crowd she felt alone.
Inside, to Maggie’s surprise, the gigantic candle warehouse unfolded like a garden of memories. Maggie’s nose twitched and eyes watered as an arsenal of aromas swirled around her head. Ethereal warmth led her in every direction at once. She picked up a glowing jar filled with rays of sunflower. Instantly transported to a time of cartoons and cartwheels, she tenderly placed the candle in her basket. Around her, women were buzzing about, popping jars, thrusting their noses here and there, and cleansing their palates with a whiff from the ubiquitous coffee bean tray.

Nearly bowling over a woman with a walker, Maggie blindly staggered toward the scent of her sweet daughters. “Clean Cotton” was the fragrance, reminding Maggie of the cool summer evenings when after the girls had their bath, Philip would play go fish with them at the dining room table. It’s an important memory, she decided, and carefully placed it into her basket.

Maggie’s toes dragged across the floor as she floated among her bottled memories: her grandfather’s cherry tobacco, the deliciousness of mother’s banana nut bread, the lilac blossom corsage from prom night, Philip’s leather jacket, the candy corn necklaces the family made on Halloween, her daughter’s overabundance of girl scout cookies, the scent of Philip’s shaving cream, which always coated the sink along with the little hairs behind the faucet. Each scent, a chapter of her lost happiness.

The candle jars, small and large, were placed in the basket with the utmost precision, resembling some sort of three-dimensional puzzle exploding with color. But as the basket filled and time tripped by, a rising panic emerged. Every candle was a reminder to Maggie of a day that had passed. Which candle would define her future, her own future? Which candle would burn brightly, singing a silent ode to her new found
freedom and independence? Which would she burn as a beacon to her strength? Which candle would emit a fragrance of contentment and self-sufficiency so she could forever escape the pitying gaze of those familiar with the story of Philip’s infidelity?

All her calmness and composure, the traits that so many marveled at throughout her terrible ordeal, dropped to the floor like a vale, exposing a young woman who had aged quicker than her days demanded. And as the initial imperturbable mood of her pleasant parade of memories ended, it was quickly replaced by a frenzied hunt for the candle of Maggie’s days to come. Her eyes darted in every direction and the hum of the fluorescent overhead lights steadily rose in pitch like a June bug screeching on a late August afternoon. She was no longer there. The calls from her mother not heard. The endless bouquets of scent batted her about the aisles, her misty eyes continuing their perusal. But in the distance, Maggie spotted her grail – The Inner Peace Signature Collection.

With legs rubbery, she stumbled forward. The majestic collection gleamed with promise and a well of emotions buckled Maggie’s thin frame. Each label touted a beautiful woman, in traditional yoga pose, wearing an expression of complete tranquility. Maggie fondled them admiringly, tracing their titles with her shaky fingers as if reading braille. Before sampling their scents, Maggie slowly read each title aloud, meditating on its appeal. Motivation, Inspiration, Morning Muse, Strength, Courage. These candles were unlike the rabble of others; these candles promised more. Desire, Determination, Feminine Spirit, Pride, Rebirth. Rebirth. Flickering warmth kindled in her chest. Rebirth. I will be born again. The thought spread a tearful smile across her face. She imagined how all the pain would evaporate in a stream of black smoke, replaced with a new,
stronger, independent Maggie. She saw her life effortlessly reshaping, her hours filled with all she had once thought herself incapable of doing, her girls silently admiring their mom’s newfound solidity. Maggie: the rock, the one to look to in times of crisis, the one never rattled, the one with unbroken spirit.

Maggie nearly dropped her basket when the woman in the blue dress elbowed her way past with brutality. Shaking her head of the daydream, Maggie witnessed a mob of women snatching The Inner Peace Signature Collection out of mid air. Far in the distance, she heard the rumbling p.a. system, announcing discounted items. Swallowed by a sea of arms and baskets, Maggie frantically swam toward the Inner Peace display. With arms outstretched, she grazed the last jar of Rebirth as the woman in the blue dress swept it into her own basket. Maggie’s eyes burned, her mind raced. Never will I submit to the dark shroud of loneliness. Never will I roll over and die. I will not be the victim. A deathly groan escaped Maggie’s lips, as she savagely swung at the woman in the blue dress. The memories from her past life would only serve as painful reminders of what had been. She had turned her back on them now, her variegated basket of fragrant memories shattered on the floor. Maggie’s fist held tightly to a clump of hair and she swung. Aboard a merry-go-round of spectators, she swung. Wildly swinging for herself, her daughters, her Rebirth.