Like Fireflies

They had filled the sleepless summer nights, dancing on the lawn beneath her window. She watched them stealthily; her wide eyes perched just above the white paint of her windowsill. They glowed and shone like hope, pirouetting graceful circles beneath the gibbous moon. Summer songs drifted past butterfly-wing curtains, inaudible to all but the most careful of listeners. The twilight melodies sang June promises of summer vacation, and the anticipation that accompanied the crunch of gravel as her father’s car pulled into the driveway every evening.

They were songs of Before. Before tense silent dinners and the chalkboard scrape of silverware on second-best plates. Before the too-early bedtimes, kicking her legs as she lay crossways on her bed, watching the fading sun crawl across her ceiling. Before arguments marched up the stairs in fire ant lines and crept beneath the scuffed and dented sweep of her shut-tight door.

Each night, she waited for the humid silence to return. Down the hall she crept, past her mother’s weeping door. Down, down the creaking stairs on tip-toes, slipping carefully through the ghosts of old arguments, past the soft snoring shadow of the couch, to the front door.

Out, through the creaky screen door, out, onto the damp lawn with a jar and a purpose. Careful, lest she catch her nightgown on the door handle. Ease the door closed... and then... and then... out! Out and across the lawn, bare feet barely touching the wet grass! She swooped down upon them with an owl’s silent determination. Her jar’s mouth gaped and closed with a tink of metal on glass.

Then back to her room to place the jar into the yellowed paper lantern rescued from the attic weeks before. She floated into sleep on the soft, buttery glow, listened to the gasping voices sing her memories of the time Before, wearily promising dreams of a happier After. Each night, it was harder and harder to fill the jar. Each night, the lantern flickered fainter and lit less of her room.

Fairies, like fireflies, only last one night.