John drove slowly through the drifting snow. Usually he enjoyed this drive from Manchester to Addison; it gave him time to think, but tonight, the weather made it almost impossible. Seeing his father the way he was tonight wasn’t making it any easier either. John had no idea that cancer could be so destructive when he first heard that his father had been diagnosed with the disease. With all the new advances they were making he was sure that his dad would be cured. A couple of months of chemotherapy and then, bang, the cancer would be killed, and his father would be OK. The doctors said that Mr. Reeves would have two or three months at the most. That was six months ago and now they said it could be any time. John made a habit of visiting his dad every Sunday night. They would talk, and their conversations would help John feel better about letting him go. His dad told John about his life, the hopes he would never accomplish and the dreams he would never achieve. He also told John about his mother, a woman he had never known. Each week got harder for John to take, though. His father’s mind had started to wander, due to the drugs, they said, and his stories never made much sense anymore. Like tonight. John turned on the car radio as he began to think back on their conversation.

His father had been asleep when John arrived, later than usual tonight, due to the heavy snow fall. The nurse ushered him into the room, and told John to pull up one of the brown vinyl chairs that lined the walls. The small county hospital hadn’t been re-modeled since it was built in the 1940’s as one of FDR’s Alphabet Soup programs, and so
the chairs had been patched more than once. John found one that looked half-way decent and moved it over to his father's bedside, carefully, so it wouldn't scrape across the floor. IV's, cotton swabs, and needle packages littered the bedside table. The nurse gently spoke to his father and raised the bed a bit so that he could see John. The darkened room disguised the now permanent black hollows under his father's eyes. It would also hide the tears that John knew he would shed as he watched his father struggle with the pain.

"How's it going, Dad? Did you have a good day?" John watched his father's blank face for awhile, stood up and then moved toward the window framed in plastic curtains. He stared at the falling snow. His thoughts turned to dying. Why does death have to be this way? Just let him go, please. I can't stand this any longer. I'm suffering just as hard as he is, can't you tell? John had never been sure that God existed, but tonight it seemed only natural to plead with someone. His pain and his suffering had finally reached its peak and he had no one else to turn to. He was alone.

In a few moments he tried to talk to his father again. "The Bears won today, did you hear?" John spoke slowly, afraid that the lump in his throat would melt into tears if he spoke any quicker.

"It's a long road, John."

"What did you say, Dad, I'm sorry." John shook his head and looked to the nurse inquisitively. She just shrugged her shoulders and went about straightening the equipment around the bed. Every once and awhile Mr. Reeves would just speak out in his drug-induced sleep. The doctors and nurses ignored it, they called it babbling, but tonight John thought that the tone of his voice sounded different, urgent almost.
"John, it’s a long road."
Nothing that John still didn’t understand, he tried again.

"Life, John. Life. Can’t you see?"
"Sure, Dad. I see, but I don’t understand what brought that up?"

"Don’t you remember? Addison Lake and our fishing trip?" Mr. Reeves fell back heavily against the pillows.
John thought hard to remember any kind of conversation that he and his dad might have had at their lake house about life and a long road, but nothing came to mind.

"Sure, Dad, I remember. Out in the boat?"
"Mr. Reeves, I’m afraid you’re going to have to leave now. Visiting hours are over and your father needs to get to sleep. He has a drug treatment at 8:00 tomorrow morning. I wish I could allow you more time since you got here so late, but, you know, rules are rules."

"Yeah, OK." He turned to face his father one more time. "Dad, I’ll be back next week, all right? Take care of yourself. Please. I love you, you know."

At the door, John stopped, and he slowly turned again. The nurse had lowered his father’s bed and was now adjusting the pillows behind his head. Comfortable was the key word now, he supposed. "'Night, Dad. I love you," he whispered.

SR-54 was piling up with snow and the howling wind wasn’t making visibility any clearer. John slowed for each winding curve. The road from Manchester to Addison was filled with them. "At least I’m coming down instead of going up," he thought. His father’s confusing conversation filled up John’s mind for part of the drive that wasn’t so bad. "Life is a long road." The phrase made sense, but he had no recollection of ever hearing his father say it before. "Addison
Lake and one of our fishing trips. God, there were so many
good times there. Which one, Dad?" John spoke the last
sentence out loud for only himself to hear. All of a sudden
it seemed important to him that he remember what his
father was talking about. He searched his memories for one
that stood out, but his mind wouldn't focus. It was as blurry
as the night outside.

A song on the radio drifted to John as he tried to
remember. It interrupted his thoughts and John noticed the
words. It was an old Beatles tune that only got playing time
on Classic Hits stations. The words rang with familiarity.

"The long and winding road that leads to your
door." Staring intently ahead of him, John listened to
George Harrison sing the rest of the lyrics. As the song
continued, a memory stirred in the deep recesses of his
mind. He and his father walking along a trail that took them
around Addison's Lake. John remembered complaining to
his dad about the distance and the curving of the path.
Thinking back from there, John was finally able to picture
the scene that Joe had mentioned earlier.

It was the first time that Joe had taken his small son
to Addison Lake. They went in March so that John could see
the wilderness in its blooming glory. The trees were budding
and the animals, asleep all winter long, were slowly
appearing in the brush. Small patches of snow, still
untouched and white, lay on the forest's floor, waiting for
the sun's warm rays to melt them into the thirsty earth. The
two began their day with an early morning fishing trip.
They ate their packed lunch, John's favorites, PB and J,
potato chips, and pop, in the center of the lake, surrounded
by the blue-green water. After they returned to shore with
enough fish for dinner that night, Joe suggested seeing the
forest and its growing beauty. A small trail surrounded the
lake and the two followed it around on their nature hike.
John was thrilled at seeing his first deer, a mother and her young fawn, and the rabbits nibbling at the tiny shoots of grass. Blue jays chattered to them from the tree’s highest branches, while robins were too busy pulling at worms to notice the intruders. Joe pointed to plants and trees, teaching John about them all. By the time they reached the half-way point, the excitement had worn off and John was beginning to get tired. After much complaining and a few tears, Joe finally agreed to put his son on his back and they returned to camp like that. All the way home Joe talked about life and its trials and tribulations, while John enjoyed the scenery from his father’s point of view. John didn’t remember that event until just now. And now it seemed like the most important part of his life.

“Yes, Dad,” John said to the windshield and the blowing snow outside, “I understand.”

Through the storm, John noticed his exit and pulled off SR-54 into Addison. The town’s three traffic lights were blinking and cast a yellow glow on the new fallen snow. The streets were quiet; the only sound being John’s tires crunching on the virgin covering. Up ahead on the right was his home, the one he had shared with his father for thirty-one years. He pulled into the driveway slowly. After he was inside and had shaken his coat and boots, John turned on the radio and tuned it to a station that took dedications in the evenings. He walked to the phone in the kitchen and dialed the station’s number.

“Easy Listening 101, what song would you like to hear tonight?”

“Yes, I’d like to dedicate ‘The Long and Winding Road’ by the Beatles, for my father. Thank you.”

Outside the storm continued to howl. John watched the snow from the living room’s bay window and listened to the opening strains of the music. His thoughts ran from
his first trip to Addison Lake to his last trip, a year and a half ago. That time it was his father who had tired from the hike and they returned to camp for his sake. From the kitchen, the phone rang and interrupted John's wandering memories. Jumping slightly at the noise, he slowly turned and stared at the phone on the wall. Its bright blue plastic made it stand out on the cream-colored paint of the room. On the seventh ring, John finally picked it up. Nodding every few seconds, he put the receiver back after only a couple of minutes. He quietly returned to the living room, pulled a rocker up to the window, and as the storm swelled outside, he wept.