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Instructor's Name

ENGL 1013

Date

Mother's Peonies

When I was a child, my mother had the most beautiful and extravagant peonies in the county. The huge, superb pompoms of white, pink, and burgundy spectacularly embraced an entire corner of our yard. When the wind came to dance among the blooms, their intoxicating aroma beckoned as if it were a long arm extended all the way into the house, tugging at a sleeve. In May, when the honey-scented peonies bloomed in concert with the fragrant lilacs, dozens were gathered and brought into the house. For weeks, every room of our house brimmed with blooms. Any container that could hold water was temporarily transformed and used as a vase. After the flowers gave up their velvety petals, they were made to last a bit longer. Mom would gather them into wicker baskets and allow them to dry. The dried and brittle petals made excellent potpourri to be enjoyed during the bitter-cold winter months.

Each year progressed this way until one spring when no one seemed to have the time to tend to the peonies after they'd sprung from the earth and erupted into blooms. Eventually, vicious weeds crept into the extravagant bushes, and soon the normally well-tended peony corner of our yard was transformed into a thicket of neglect. One evening when I arrived home from softball practice, my father was standing in the front yard with our faded-green lawnmower. With a cough and a sputter, the metal beast roared to life and attacked Mom's peony patch. Dad pulled, and he pushed until he had consumed every square inch, leaving no stem more than a few centimeters tall. I watched in horror as Dad placed the machine back into the garage. Didn't he

know just how heartbroken Mom would be when she discovered that her flowers of spring had been destroyed?

I did not question Dad about his actions but merely followed him into the house as the once-brilliant, now-dim sunset signaled my bedtime. All night I wondered if Dad had forgotten that those peonies were planted years ago by my grandmother. I thought of how disappointed that everyone would be next spring when the lilacs bloomed unaccompanied. Apparently, Dad knew something that I did not.

The following April I tagged along as Mom checked on spring's progress in reclaiming our property. We picked at the daffodils that were peeking through the earth, and we peeled a few lilac buds to see how soon we could expect the tiny, fragrant flowers. Then Mom walked forward to her favorite corner of the yard. She bent over the area where the peonies had been ravaged and said, "Ashley, look at these bushes!"

I thought she was joking. "Surely there's nothing to look at," I thought to myself.

As she rose and walked towards the house, she called out, "I think we'll have a beautiful crop this year!" Puzzled, I slowly turned around and looked down at the ground. I saw, not bare grass, but hundreds of tiny red and green sprouts, fueled by the warmth of spring, reaching up to kiss the sun.

The neighbors shook their heads in agreement and declared that Mom surely knew the secret to tending flowers, especially peonies. It's that year that the peonies are best in memory; I can still recall the sweet aroma of the pinks that scented my room.

A few years ago, I planted my own peony bushes. I too am learning the lessons of nature: there is a time for growing, a time for blooming, and a time for harvesting. There is even a time for mowing everything down and starting over again.