

Best in Show Winner

Olympian in the Old Wool Coat

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Curling deeper under soft thick quilts,

Dreaming of the balmy summer sunshine tickling my face.

But awoken with the temperature gauge's repetitive ringing sounding in my ears,

I know the dream must wait.

Leaping out of bed onto the cold wood floor, I shiver in my bare feet and cotton nightgown, but I'm determined.

Hastening to get dressed in old worn clothes, I slip my blue wool jacket over my head, pull on my rubber boots, and run.

Papa waits outside by his old beater truck which he calls Little Rose.

Mama is there too, standing with little sister clinging to her hand.

Gusts of wind whip my hair violently around my face, the sharp gale stinging my cheeks and nose.

I want to dash back inside, want to climb back under warm blankets forever.

But a more urgent cause is at hand.

A whole cherry orchard could easily be lost in a single frost, our money along with it.

Tying a bright patterned scarf securely around my head, I climb into the truck.

Driving down the dirt road, great oak trees groan and bend under their own weight, and the moon shines down from its perch in the inky black sky,

Little Rose's headlights, a beacon of illumination in the swirling fridgeness around us.

Soon we arrive at the orchard.

The dark outline of the cherry trees against the night is unwelcoming, their long twisted branches stretching out towards each other, as if to snatch at anyone who passes by.

Grabbing a flashlight I stumble out of Little Rose, to the dusty ground.

Papa hands me a torch and a thick pair of gloves, and I'm ready.

I begin to run.

Faster and faster, I carry the torch, a great ancient olympian athlete in an old wool coat.

Stopping at the first rusty, round pot, I carefully open the little disk, and the torch goes in.

Great roaring flames burst out of the tall chimney,

full plumes of ashy smoke belching from the magnificent iron beast.

I crinkle my nose at the old diesel smell that burns my lungs and clings to my clothes.

Again I dart through the trees.

Flashlight bobbing, I stumble on immense tangling roots, twigs snapping loudly underfoot.

On the shadowy hills behind the orchard, a coyote howls her dismal song, urging me faster.

The next stop holds a shocking surprise, a prickly nighttime visitor nibbling on the tree's pale bark.

The porcupine spits out a threatening hiss and turns, slipping into the darkness.

Rosy cheeked, I continue, the bright stars of the crisp cold night reflecting off the dark waters of the Columbia River.

A massive barge blares its horn through the stillness.

I marvel at the beauty of it all, the twinkling sky, and the budding pink blossoms of the cherry trees, though I can't ignore the biting of the cold on my face.

Finally, sweaty, tired, and dirty, I'm back where I started.

Mama smiles, handing me a thick blanket.

Papa soon returns, and we climb into Little Rose.

Grabbing the thermos from its place in the glove compartment, Mama pours the tea.

Each holding now-empty, chipped coffee mugs, we drift slowly back to our warm dreams of summer.

Sleeping soundly, we know we'll soon have to wake up to put out the fires.

But despite the cold, the tiredness, the dirty state I'm in, I fall asleep content. Surrounded by my family, I feel warm, not only under the blanket, but in my heart too.

There is nothing quite like lighting the smudge pots on an early spring night.

*Although this poem is fictional, It was based off of the stories told by my Grandmother and Great Uncle, whose father owned a cherry orchard outside of Kennewick, Washington when they were young.