

Adult Essay 1st Place

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The Heirloom

She came west from the Midwest. Her memories of Minnesota, sometimes North Dakota in the winter, they came with her. And the stories, her mother, Rose, her father, Lyle, and the stories told, and the stories not told, were forgiven, and forgotten by innocence only. All plots have peril and transcendence, children and grandchildren, all plots have her hard hands working the soil into loam, the doubts into love.

Grandmother

Her mother, Rose, taught her how to take grandchildren into her lap, to cherish them as she could not cherish her own children. That first grandson with blue eyes, a grandad but no dad, and her daughter giving birth and raising her baby boy just after high school and the stroke that fallowed her brain. This tragedy, near death, made her only daughter, made all of them stubborn. Every Mother's Day, her daughter and her grandson were in the dirt to work. They honored her with toy cars, hammers and stakes, seeds sowed beneath strings, and the garden was drawn into a map. Her daughter working all day, all week, for the next twenty-five years taking care of her son and herself, and the garden was drawn into a map.

Daughters teach us that mothers need mothers. That you plant the sweet corn west one year, east the next, then south into the hills and last to the north, so, the tassels in August bowed to the crowns of the Cascades. That second grandson with green eyes, teenage parents, and that

one was a quiet baby. His dad, her son, would drive across the river to the trailer park and bring him home. Every weekend, for the next fourteen years her green-eyed grandson would spend with her and her son. He would take his son fishing, mushroom hunting, and on the way back home on Sunday, they would cast thoughts into the ripples and eddies of the Skagit River, and they caught words like goodbye, see you next weekend, and I love you.

Valleys show us the shape of the rivers. That third grandson, blue eyes, a dad but a dad who was taken to another dimension where the sun was neither dawn nor dusk, where the moon was both prophecy and plague. Her son gave her a gift like a garden...salvation if they worked. And it is hard work to plant the Tarheel beans that Grandma Ina loaned her in the worn paper sack, that Grandma Ina bewitched with the do's and don'ts of sowing and reaping, how if you neglect your garden, your world will end. That third grandson, like his dad, smiles at the moon. Of all the women, that one, Grandma Ina, could grow green beans on a slab of granite. Of all her children, the world exiled the one who needed to be home, who wanted grace and got the gruel of addiction. Taken to another dimension, where dreams are neither dawn nor dusk, where what is lost cannot be found. She raised his boy in the cucumber patch, and she knew, as all mothers know, her son would find his way back.

Mother

Her garden gave her weeds with her green beans. Every year her daughter and her grandson worked the till with rakes, shovels, and toy cars. Of all the people who helped her out in the garden, her daughter understood how to rake the soil until it rippled into loam. Still, the weeds collapsed on every sprout and seed. Mother's Day was do or die for her garden. Mother's Day is stones struck from her soil. That daughter and that boy, they were tough, they overcome, and they loved a few of those men with lunchpails and tools, who told her daughter I'll fix all

your problems. And they did for a time, but there is winter, spring, summer, and fall to consider, and it's hot and it's cold, and those men were right for one season and wrong for the next. She remembered mistakes, stories told and not told, and so did her daughter. But in the garden, they found each other.

The moon gave her the sermon of the crescent. In the beginning there was joy. In the end there will be grace. Her first boy would run into the berry bushes like a bull. He'd tear into their thickets and bring back a coffee can of huckle and salmonberries. Sometimes she made her son a pie with those berries or put them in a bowl for him to eat with milk and sugar. Sometimes she had to choose between her garden and her children. Plant in May, grow until the equinox, and harvest into November, the season of her garden was a prophecy, a divine guessing game, and the difference between joy and hunger is work. Like the life of her son, like the lives of all her children, the droughts and floods were unplanned. His exile from her world would only end with work. She remembered him when his boy took naps in the strawberry patch, when his boy took his mask off as children sometimes do, smiled at the moon in a blue sky, and she found his father then.

The forests gave her songs of silence. Her second boy, her third and last child, did not speak a word for the first two or three years of his life. He listened to the breeze that fell down the draw of maple and cedar trees that bent to the creek to hear to it murmur. He listened to the stories she read him of Huck Finn, of King Arthur, he listened to the stories she told him of Rose and Lyle, of her sisters and brothers, of the golden glade of Minnesota lakes and trout, he heard his mother curse her garden for the lack of daylight and hands. She strung a cowbell around his neck to find him when he wandered into the forest. Evergreens, Cascara trees that flowered under the canopy of firs and hemlocks, the yews that savored the wet gray light on the forest

floor, this is the garden of God that boy seeks. When his son was born, these forests had been cut down and replanted with the seeds of man...hybrids that hang private property signs. And that boy kept wandering, but he no longer had the cowbell around his neck, and when he became lost, she could not always find him.

Daughter

Of all her years, seventy-five, some were bad for bush beans, some years the blue jays cloaked in the fleece of dusk took every last corn seed before dawn, some years the potatoes were so specked and spotted that the hogs wouldn't eat them boiled, peeled, and mashed, some years had more aches of the body and the heart, some years her children were hurt, and she gave them everything and anything of all her years. From the Minnesota sky, from the Skagit and Sauk River, she made seeds of salvation. In the mirrors of golden lakes, she did not see her face, and she followed these rivers through the valley, and she found their hills, and amongst their canyon and spring she did not hear their song, and then hills beneath her feet became mountains and she gave her seeds to the sky. She saw herself as she was at her birth, a daughter, and she heard her mother sing to her with wind and whistle.