Picnic

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by Mary Lou Lifka

Home Ec. Journalism, Sr.

He is coming to take me to the forest. I am ready; I have been sitting at this table since dawn, singing to myself. I've packed a lunch for us: cheese on black bread and apples, many apples. He likes apples. How the food will taste in the forest—thick sweet, brown bitter and apples that bubble when you bite them. I wait, rocking and singing, softly.

The gate groans, stones bounce. He is coming up the path. I take the basket from the table and walk to the door. I meet him there. We are going to the forest. We smile to each other, to ourselves.

Together we leave the house, the yard, and start down the road. The earth is hard and hot beneath our feet. With dust in its eyes a breeze follows us. Cows watch from fields at our sides. We reach an unfenced meadow, turn into it. He whistles, and birds answer him. Strange grasses scratch our ankles. The meadow is quietly inclined, and when we reach its highest point we look down into the eyes of the forest. He starts running into the trees; I follow. The forest pulls us.

When I catch up with him, he is standing in a clearing large enough for a picnic fire. The clearing glares brown in the green tree light. He is breathing deeply; he turns and smiles to me. His eyes are seablue and edged upward at the corners. The eyes of his grandfather. I first loved him in this forest, in this spot. A tender force squeezes my heart and tears blur into my sight an image of him that bright sunny day, a day like this. I move toward him, then stop. I am no longer that fresh daisy girl; I am lavender talc and pressed rose, a grandmother on a picnic. The boy and I sit down on thick logs to eat our lunch.