



Honorable Mention

# The Place

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In Modesto, California, is a house of brick,  
red stones whispering of being placed by a loving hand.  
Behind the house, a five-acre property;  
a shielded wonderland away from the world.

This is the house my Grandparents built, a home in which to live.  
They call it “The Place.”

Here, my Grandparents have cared for plants: in the orchard filled with  
seventy fruit trees;  
in the vegetable garden, where lush vines grow;  
In the flower garden, where Nana weaves magic and bees frolic  
in the sunshine.

With hands weathered, creased, and worn by years of loving work,  
my Grandparents plant seeds, each carefully selected.

Then come seedlings, hand-germinated grown inside the red-brick house,  
shielded from the cold, warmed by growing lights, strengthened by fans,  
watered routinely.  
Now, they are ready to meet the world.

One by one, their roots are placed into neat rows of damp soil  
Cucumbers,  
    tomatoes,  
        zucchini,  
            beans,  
                peppers—  
all will be tended and nourished until harvest-time arrives.

In the orchard, fruit trees are waking, blinking bleary eyes,  
emerging from their Winter's slumber with branches raised  
as arms to the sky to greet Spring, exalting and lifting their bough  
to praise her.

Each day, my Grandparents emerge from the red-brick house,  
with the zeal and gentility only a farmer knows.

They water each tree seedling, and green stalk.  
leaves like the heads of young children poking up,  
peeking through the soil and branches.

Standing at the head of the yard,  
my Grandparents gaze proudly over the field of their charges.  
Tending the new growth, they are, again, parents fostering new life.

Warm sun shines brightly over The Place,  
a fiery yellow-orange, but its colors have  
NOTHING on what is emerging below.

NOTHING on the zinnias  
their reds, oranges, and magentas like a magical fire.  
NOTHING on the peach trees  
their flowers an inimitable pink.  
NOTHING on the sunflowers  
buttery petals basking in sunlight, aimed at the sky they seem to touch.

Drawn by the flowers, pollinators come. The Place becomes an ecosystem.

Honeybees and wasps pervade the orchard, making it hum with buzzing life. Butterflies and moths arrive, spreading their colors. Hummingbirds flit everywhere! Perching in the trees. They fill the orchard with their sweet calls, calls few ever get to hear.

To the sadness of its winged friends, the fleeting beauty of The Place fades. Delicate blossoms withering and falling, but promising a somehow greater beauty in their wake.

As the first vestiges of blazing Summer sun beat down on Modesto, Papa strolls out to examine The Place. His gentle hand caresses small, green orbs on the apple tree, the peach tree, the pluot tree, the fruitbasket tree.

Papa smiles.  
Weeks pass.

The fruit grows bigger and the orchard turns from green to rainbow as pluots take on their purple tints, nectarines flush with shining crimsons, apricots take on their orange hues, peaches flaunt their rosy beauty.

Mid-Summer, cars arrive and from them pour over a dozen children. They run to greet their Grandparents.

They flood the orchard, standing on tiptoes and climbing ladders to reach the most scrumptious fruit. The Place fills with life as children run about, sticky fruit juice dripping down their chins.

As Summer harvest peaks, still another crop is planted. It's pumpkins!  
Big ones!

Small ones!

Orange ones!

White ones!

Cinderella, Jack-o-lantern, Black Kat, and all their friends.

They fill The Place with even more color.

The pumpkins are cut and piled,  
on the porch of the red-brick house.

But all things must fade, must return to the earth  
and so trees and vines must cease to yield the fruit, they gave plenty.

As the temperature drops, trees begin to yawn.

Flower plants wither sleepily.

Earth prepares to rest.

This is not a time of sadness or of grieving for warmer weather.

This is a time of peaceful rest, of hope in the promise of Spring.

As the fireplace is lit in the red-brick house, the last tree falls asleep.

Winter does not last forever. Winter never will.

Dawn will come and Spring will rise,

Sunlight flowing over The Place once more

as the family gathers to thank Earth for this bounty and  
the cycle begins again.