The Painting

Tomorrow will be the yearly writers' conference. It was a time Julie looked forward to. The writing contest was dominated by one man. He perpetually swept all the categories. It left slim pickings for the other entrants. There were several respected authors that entered, and they came away with little or nothing.

The frogs were croaking; the last wave of birds were calling their mates to hurry home. The hens were singing their bedtime song. She loved the rhythm of the sunset. Everything was winding down, exhaustion trailing like Vapors of fog. Time for folks to drink their coffee, to unwind, and start planning the new day coming with the sunrise.

Julie wasn't nervous about the conference. It was like the tides coming in and ebbing away. Months of work coming down to a half hour when the winners were announced, the prizes awarded and checks handed out. Some years it was an honorable mention, the next three victories and the next nothing. It was impossible to predict. The only predictable element was that Ron would walk away a rich man.

The smell of late blooming honeysuckle, blended with woodsmoke, tickled her nose. Faintly beneath them were the smells of coffee brewing, beans and ham cooking and cherry tobacco. They were comforting scents; they soothed the spirit. They were gentle reminders that she was not alone. Ross may have joined his ancestors, but his spirit remained. She never made coffee, and rarely cooked beans. His great uncle loved them both, and cherry pipe tobacco was his great grandfather's choice. In the blend ran a thread of peanut butter, Ross's signature.

The sunset was fading slowly into dusk, then darkness. But it wasn't true darkness as the rising harvest moon was a spotlight in the velvety blackness. Julie was not nervous over the

conference. She had done her best, submitted, and now she waited to see if she could win something, maybe a leftover crumb or two.

The only thing nibbling at Julies mind was the decision to give one of her paintings as a door prize. The painting she had chosen was flowers on the windowsill. All her life she had been ridiculed by her father. Nothing she wrote had ever been good enough, her paintings an even worse joke. So many people were telling her how special her paintings were. She had wrestled long and hard over the question of, was she good enough, or would everyone laugh.

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It was evening, the sun was setting. The rhythm of the night was settling into its cadence. Julie felt exhaustion wrapping its arms around her. She enjoyed the conference . Her painting took top honors, being among the first door prizes chosen. The smile on the woman's face had been so uplifting to her. She had one a second place and two thirds. Her friends were left out, rebellion was stirring…. Ron's run may soon end…. but how did you stop a freight train?