

Heirloom

by Joey Delgado

“Have the tomatoes come in yet?”

“Dottie...”

Mrs. Dorothea Tilden pointed a trembling finger at Harriet.

“You promised me tomatoes, Harry.”

Harriet put her hands on her hips, a stance Dorothea knew well. One more sharp word meant fight; two more, flight. Unless it was the right word, maybe. Maybe Harriet would listen.

A different tack, perhaps. Not pointed, not accusatory, no venom.

“All this waiting, Harry.” Gray words. Misty words. Chilly words heavy with rain.

“I’m going.”

It was flight, then, thought Dorothea. Harriet, her need for the last word, the simple strategy of walking away, making any parting shot from Dorothea a shot in the back. Not today, thought Dorothea. She wouldn’t be the only wounded party. Today she would cleave the iron sky and drown Harriet in her words.

“My love to George, Harry! All my love,” she yelled down the road. Harriet didn’t stop. She winced.

Thirty years of this. Thirty. Dorothea didn’t have another thirty in her. She was sixty-seven. Frank had been dead eleven years. Roberta and Phoebe were married and gone and Phoebe didn’t want anything to do with dear old mother, not since she found the letters.

Dorothea Tilden walked home, running her hands along the picket fences, up to the apex, to each splintery point, down, up, down, up.

She’d dream the dream, again. She always did when Harry left her on the street.

They’d meet, halfway between their respective houses, the usual place. Harry would have her grocery bag. Dorothea saw it was heavier than usual, maybe with clothes, framed pictures of her children, an old tobacco tin of George’s filled with money, and a tomato.

A perfectly round, wildly red tomato.

That's when she'd wake up. Wake up and wait.

