

An Old Peach

by John Wentworth Chapin

Uncle Allen came to live with him for a short while, between retirement and nursing home. Allen would stroll the remains of the orchard, reminiscing with Tad, flirting with dementia. One row held a decrepit peach which yielded a host of sad fruit over the decades. In amongst a cluster of old trees that produced reliably, all of which were planted before Tad's folks bought the place, this tree bore hard nubs ripe with promise which wizened to black before July. "This tree," Allen said when they walked the property together, "will never amount to nothing. It sucks the life from the trees around it. They'd all produce better if it was chopped down." Once, he added, "And that's what my mother always said about me." He didn't repeat it.

The nursing home was a horrid, low-rent affair that shamed both Tad and Allen; it was easier for them both if Allen just died, which he did eighteen months later. Within weeks of the funeral on the north slope, that tree bore luscious peaches the likes of which Tad had never seen on his farm. He plucked one at first ripeness and carved a slice with his pocketknife: sweet and juicy. He wolfed the peach down and wiped his bristled chin.

In his palm lay a blackened, shriveled pit the likes of which he'd never seen on his farm. He took the old peach down himself with an axe that afternoon, leaving the fruit to rot in the grass.

