Field of Bales

The sun was preparing to hide itself behind the mountains of Southern Oregon. A young woman of eighteen treads along in the fields of an old ranch restored by skillful hands. Hay bales were scattered about in a jagged pattern, wrapped in the ever-so-orange twine. She could smell the bales. The scent of a mowed lawn mixed with flowers and wet dirt. Flushes of wind pointed her black stained hair in the direction she was walking, pulling her onward. She gave a little whistle, and then shouted, “J.J.!” A big brown lab came running up next to her and began sniffing for rodents within the ground. There were so many times she had sprained her ankle running because of the holes J.J. had dug looking for game.

The young woman was aiming for the farthest bale from the barn, which stood diagonally opposite the end of the field. She stepped up onto the bale of hay and took one last calming breath. It had been some time since she had played this game. It was one of her favorites. The objective of the game was similar to what most children growing up called the ‘Hot Lava’ game. This entailed getting up on furniture and traveling from one piece of furniture to the next without setting foot onto the floor, because it was lava. Her game was a little different and took some strategy. The objective of her game was that she only got a certain number of steps to get to another bale and she needed to get all the way to safety, which was the main path near the barn.

Today’s lucky number was five. She peered around to see which bale was the closest. The one to her left was a good bet. With a big leap, she began racing for the bale. One… two…three… four. Now her heart was pounding and she was breathing slightly heavier once she got onto the bale. She recalled that she wasn’t young anymore. Where did all my energy go?

After a few more bales, she sat down and tried to relax her body. J.J. came over and sat next to the young woman lifting her head for affection. The sun was now almost gone and patches of clouds moved over her head. She turned away and looked at her shadow. It was thin and long, like the way she felt about herself. More thoughts raced through her head. Will I ever stop growing? Do I want to stop growing? What’s going to happen to me?

Turning back around, her heart stopped and blood rushed through her chest. For a split second she was racing with fear. The clouds are on fire! They are coming towards me. Oh my God! Last night she had a dream of being out in the fields with a bunch of people scattered around her. Her mom was missing and she was asking people whether they knew where her mom had gone. Soon a wave of fire in the sky came climbing over the mountains. The tops of clouds were gleaming with fire. She ran to the nearby river in a frenzy of survival. People were screaming and running, and there were shouts of, “It’s the second coming!” She then awoke with a start. It’s okay. She realized it was only her imagination and settled back down to watch the sunset grow red.

The biggest habit she had was dwelling on the future. Every moment she got to think, the topic usually landed on her life and what was to come. Her excuse to keep the habit was to state that she was an Aquarius. She never was very good at debate. At school she always felt out of the mix, seeing things in different perspectives or doing her own thing from time to time.

“What do you think is going to happen to me J.J.?” she said while brushing the dog’s hair with her fingernails. “I am supposed to leave one freedom to gain another. Why?” J.J. just looked up at her with her puppy dog eyes and wagged her tail vigorously.

She got up and started walking back home. Soon she stopped and took one last look around. For all she knew, she was leaving what she knew to be beautiful and young. In truth, she would end up finding blue skies in human eyes, a sun-setting beard, and oat in his hair.