

THIRD PRIZE
\$50
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Fire Time

By Melia Flowers

I climb into my muddy home and feel the harsh wind against my tattered clothes. Our house is small but smells of Mama's warm comfort. My baby sister, Kaina, is crying, like always.

She's hungry.

We all are.

I try comforting her when Mama comes in. Her skinny hands pick Kaina up. I may be hungry, but Mama is worse. The little food we have Mama mostly gives to us.

Her beautiful voice sings one of our sacred African songs and I'm flooded with the sweet-tasting words; like this *cake* English travelers talk about. Kaina stops crying and listens. I touch Mama's cheek. She smiles. I try to smile back, but a teardrop falls from my eyes. She hugs me, with the baby then leans in close to me; close enough that I can feel her and Kaina's breath on my work-worn cheek.

Then she whispers in a silky voice, “I hope Kaina’s a lot like you. Strong, Brave...” She latches my hand tightly. “and absolutely beautiful.”

Her neck smells of sweet pineapple, my favorite.

I hear a horn in the distance. It’s Fire Time. Mama’s face goes pale.

We walk quickly.

My memory from what happened... last time still gives me nightmares. General Peter doesn’t forgive quickly. Mama’s gripping Kaina tightly.

Hours later there’s another horn. Louder. We’re getting closer. Mama hands me Kaina. We take turns holding her.

My legs ache. The ground is extremely rocky and hard on my bare feet.

Suddenly Mama’s legs give in.

She falls. Hard.

She bangs her head on a sharp rock before hitting the ground.

Mama!” I scream.

There’s blood. She’s lying there slipping in and out of consciousness, her foot in an unnatural angle. Mama suddenly screams in pain. I quickly place sleeping Kaina on a smooth patch of ground.

As I run toward her my heart beating, beating, beating, I quickly grab Mama’s hand. She’s breathing hard, unlike me, who can’t breathe at all. She whispers something I can’t hear. I lean close to her.

“Go.” Her voice is small and broken. Unlike her usual full of laughter voice.

“Leave.” A tear drops from my face onto her arm.

“No.” My voice is shaking. “No. I-I won’t.”

She smiles a sad smile. "I love you." As she takes a last breath her hand falls from mine and her eyes close...

Forever.

I sit there for a while not knowing what to do until I hear a small wail. I run over to Kaina, pick her up, and start to sing the song Mama sang this morning. How long ago was that? Seems like ages.

I stand up with Kaina and start to walk to Fire Time....

