

Women's Business

by Alex Reece Abbott

My grandmother's words are stitched to my heart with blackberry thorns.

In sun and cloud, I trail behind her, wandering the autumn countryside in search of free fruit.

I watch, and listen, learning all I can.

Not too gritty, not pecked by birds nor chewed by bugs. Not too green, not too squishy.

Berries won't ripen once they're picked from the vine.

Her wisdom seeps into me as I pluck and feast, fighting the vines for the best fruit.

She examines my brimming ice-cream container with a nod, then licks her thumb and wipes the blood from my bramble scratched arms. She rubs my purple-stained cheeks, traces of the harvest that never made her basket.

We head home.

Jam is best made right away.

In the dimming days of a northern winter, on the freezer shelf, my fruit of the forest wait.

The wisdom is printed on their re-sealable plastic bag. Five hundred sanitised grams. Tame. Instant.

No vines to fend off, no mosquitos to slap, no thorns to extract from my punctured skin.

I guess that's progress.

The thawing berries stain my fingers.

Watch your shirt, she says.