

Linda Martin

Selections from *I Follow in the Dust She Raises*

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“Running through Shadows”

1.

June 1952. *On your mark.* We're hands and feet in warm dust, barefoot so he can check our tracks for that straight stride he preaches. No pigeon-toes. No toeing out. *Get set.* We imitate track stars, crouching, eyes straight ahead, small eager coils ready to run. *Go.* We're off, Chic and I, arms and legs pumping, racing between alfalfa fields to the fence line, a hard right and uphill to the pole gate. We touch the poles, whirl back toward our coach, our timekeeper, our laughing father. Meadowlarks sing.

2.

October 1945. Our parents call him Twinks, because he twinkles. I see him in black and white. A lock of dark hair falls over his forehead as he stands arm-in-arm with his two best friends. He holds the state high school record for the mile run. In a forest near our farm a hunter with buck fever mistakes him for a deer. Our parents give Chic our brother's name, just as it reads on the tombstone.

3.

April 1929. The crash is coming. He takes his mark with two hundred others in New York City. Will Rogers fires the starting gun. Our father runs to Los Angeles, seventy-eight days away, where our mother waits with our sister and the brother we never knew. Newsmen name the race Bunion Derby, follow our father across the country telling of rain and mud, sun and dust, preposterous effort. He finishes in the money, prize never paid.

“Widowmaker”

Dad builds a canny camp trailer
out of plywood and tarpaper,
prow-fronted like a boat.
In the bow, a woodstove,
storage for his chainsaw.
He puts his bed on hinges, nails
leather loops for kitchen tools,
then hauls his wheeled house
to logging jobs in the woods.

Back home, Mama keeps
cows milked, pasture gates closed.
Sometimes she warns me—*Don't*
marry a man who works away.

Our Holstein bloats on alfalfa,
Mama meets a bobcat in the chicken coop,
the pump loses its prime. Some afternoons I sit
on the riverbank with Mama, learning to worry.

On a job up the Lochsa River
Dad works alone and late,
bucking logs pushed over
by a D-6 dozer.
He revs his Homelite
one last time,
cuts through a leaning hemlock,
close to the butt of the tree.

“Artifacts”

If my daughter asks
about the man before her father,
I might confess to keeping a box of pictures
on the top shelf of the sewing cabinet
under these quilting scraps.

Here he is beside the green Chevy,
this is me with an ice axe on Mount Rainier.
There you see the two of us
in matching ski sweaters.

In the kitchen I could dig up
an eggbeater, a rolling pin,
several plates in a pattern
I no longer care for. As for

the wedding ring, I dropped it
into the silverware drawer
when I left, taking exactly
half of the stainless.

“September Clouds”

Yellow kayak nudges a silver shoreline,
three cellophaned bouquets bungeed to the bow.
I slip into my spray skirt, zip up my life vest.

Kayak swings like a compass needle on the bay, east
toward Halibut Cove, south to Haystack Rock.
High September clouds, waves like folds in a comforter.

Grieving my daughter’s infant daughter, I paddle west,
unwrap her birthday roses, set them lavishly adrift.
Mountains curve toward the open sea.

One tiny feather skims lightly on the tide, white,
fine as baby hair, beside me a moment and gone.

. . . for Zoey