



The Burning Jacket

Nel Rand

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Eleven-year-old Raynie lives with her mother, Molly, in Anaheim, California, watching over her rescued desert tortoise, Erma Geddon. Raynie's goal is to save endangered species, particularly reptiles, from environmental threats.

Molly, recently divorced from Raynie's father, owns a bakery but dreams of being a successful visual artist. Granny Tooley, Molly's mother and Raynie's grandmother, lives as a squatter in the forest of the Southern Oregon coast range, running from childhood demons and determined to stay off the grid.

Raynie's visits to Tooley's forest during spring breaks are the perfect time to burn last year's trash in bonfires and the perfect time to regale Raynie with stories about her ancestors, the caregivers of the earth. An important part of the bonfire experience is Granny Tooley's threadbare burning jacket, a heavy, felted monstrosity the color of urine, spotted with black rimmed-craters where wayward sparks from past fires burned through the dense wool. The jacket smells like sour milk and lanolin. Washing the jacket is not allowed. Neither Raynie nor Molly are aware that Tooley's secret is hidden in the hem of that mangy burning jacket.

After loggers clear-cut the forest, Tooley becomes a nomad, living in her old truck, Dorothy Ann, with her two dogs. The three protagonists, Raynie, Molly, and Granny Tooley, struggle with personal challenges against a backdrop of rapidly growing environmental and political concerns. Touched by dreams and death, the three prevail and grow, as each stumbles through chaos toward a cadence that synchronizes with her own heart.

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