

Creative Collection

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Groceries

“Do you think we’ll ever see him again?” Her question seemed rhetorical to him, obvious even, though he knew he’d ask the same if he was her age.

“I really don’t.” Seth scraped the heel of his worn shoe over an ant on the pavement as he spoke, “And you shouldn’t think about it much anymore.” Eve sat on the sidewalk with her legs straight out into the road. Her bare pointed feet stopped slapping together when he spoke.

“Oh.” Her voice was almost inaudible, and she wondered if he’d even heard her. “Did you tell Ma to buy more honey?” Eve looked down after a cool breeze passed, and she smoothed the hem of her pink dress. It was her best one, the one she wore to church and weddings, but today was just Tuesday.

“It wouldn’t make him come back,” Seth said as he cracked his index finger in his palm, “not even if she bought the good kind.” He knew it was coming—the fights foreshadowed it for months—he just thought they would at least wait until after his graduation. The muffled rumbling of an unseen engine caused Eve to perk up. Seth draped his arms over his bent knees.

“That’s Ma,” Eve said confidently. Their house was on an obscure dead-end street—the only people who drove down it actually lived on it.

“No way, that’s totally Gary. It’s diesel,” Seth said, sitting up and leaning backward as though it would sooner reveal the car coming around the bend. Two vehicles rolled around the corner. One was a green truck that should have stopped running four years ago, and the other was Ma’s 1987 Ford.

“We both get a point, then,” Eve said, holding out her hand. She grinned at Seth, sporting a snaggletooth smile that he hoped she never outgrew. Ma shut the passenger door of the car after pulling out a single paper bag of groceries, much less than usual.

“Gary was first, so I get the point. It’s thirteen to seven, now,” Seth said, pushing Eve’s extended hand away.

“You guys sit out here too much,” Ma said, towering above them on the sidewalk. “Evelyn Michelle Baumann, I thought I told you not to wear that dress. Get off the ground. You’ll ruin it!” Ma grabbed Eve by the wrist and pulled her off the sidewalk.

“I like this one, Ma! It makes me feel special,” Eve protested, trying to rip her arm away from her mother’s magenta nails.

“You can’t feel special if you wreck it before you can even grow out of it, can you? Go change.” Ma pushed Eve toward the front door. “And put on some shoes while you’re in there. I don’t buy them just for you to go and step on a sharp.” Ma thumped down next to Seth on the sidewalk, defeated, after Eve stomped inside their house to go to her and Seth’s shared bedroom. Ma let the groceries topple over onto the grass behind her. Across the street, Gary pulled some lumber out of his truck. He noticed both Ma and Seth watching him.

“M’lady wants me to build a, uh, swing bench for the porch,” Gary chuckled as he looked at the wood and scratched his head. “I ain’t build anything other than a birdhouse, but she don’t need to know that.”

“Why don’t you tell her?” Seth asked, ignoring the fluttering memories of woodworking with his dad that passed through his mind.

“I live to impress that lady; always have, I suppose.” Gary didn’t wait for a response before carrying the wood through his back gate. Ma looked over at her son, who was staring at the closed gate as if something else would happen. She wanted to pull a shiny hair that was catching the light off the shoulder of his black shirt, but her arms sat like sandbags on her lap, refusing to accept the motivation to move.

“Go over to help Gary after lunch, please,” Ma said softly. Seth gave a weak nod and picked at a blister on his hand.

“I applied at the grocers’ down by the station,” Seth admitted.

“You’re not going to work at the grocers’,” Ma snapped.

“I didn’t get the job.”

“I wouldn’t have let you go, anyway.” Ma resisted the urge to lie by saying that they didn’t need the money; she almost hoped he would protest more.

“Pride’s a bitch,” Seth said, knowing this would not stop him from slipping fives and tens into his mother’s purse when he did odd jobs around the neighbourhood.

“Better that than a reliant mother,” Ma retorted. She and Seth listened to the inconsistent hammering of nails coming from Gary’s backyard.

“The groceries are gonna get warm, Ma.”

## Poetry

### Perfect Grenade

Sing me a serenade, oh

sweet toil of perfection, grasp my calf

and anchor me to your grenade.

Dance with me a two-step, oh

ravishing cult of obsession, prick my finger

with your injection of the adept.

Compose for me a ballad, oh

consuming snare of correction, pressure my mind

into attending your masquerade.

Paint me a portrait, oh

enticing wave of satisfaction, grip my strings

to tighten this barbarous corset.

Shatter these chains, oh

deafening echo of destruction, prod at my throat

and spin my windpipe in hurricanes.

Pull my silver pin, oh

precious serenader of lies, ensnare my lungs

with pale smoke of perfection.

## Odious

A sight that pierces your eyes with false ebullience,  
he is a rupture to your clarity.

His words reveal a stench that taints delight, encourages abandonment,  
and withers away rationality;  
all enclosed in quickly swallowed capsules mislabeled  
as freedom.

He twiddles dandelions that unfledged think to be fair flowers,  
his consequences only revealed once they have already  
braided their crowns.

Enticing yet formidable, Odious pricks the needles that were meant to be sterile,  
infecting the stitch that was purposed for goodness.

With specious promises and sweet songs of peril,  
he strings along those who do not avert their gaze.  
An effervescent facade cloaks his intentions, his voice calls whimsically  
through the world's ironclad weight.

Following his orchestra provides a golden shield,  
beautiful in appearance, yet soft under the strain of reality—  
their search for satisfaction warps the delicate design.

Only when the crushed shield clenches around their hand,  
have the mislead realized the trap they have been  
enticed to enter.

When their crowns wilt like forgotten vases, their bandages  
seep with archaic foolery, and the once melodic call becomes a clashing orchestra,  
they finally see the cause of their odious melancholy.