

Unexpected Harvest

“Sweet peas.” DiMelli’s shoe kicked at the dirt and he poked his cane into the ground. He drew a wavering line in the rich soil, outlining where he was going to plant them. It was hot for October, mid 70’s with invigorating sunshine. By nightfall it would be in the 30’s, but for now it felt like Spring. DiMelli could remember few mornings like this, but these days he could remember very little.

He reminisced about all the harvests he had during his 86 years. Some were grand, some meager, but lately the yield included failing legs, an aching back and fading health. But this morning was so inviting he needed to walk in his backyard field. “Sweet peas,” he repeated again, as a vow to plant his seed.

The noise of a screen door opening startled him. His neighbor, Mrs. Markum just exited her backdoor. She was putting on a dark coat, over a black cocktail dress. Mr. DiMelli checked his watch. He was sure he just saw the school buses drive by. For a brief instant he could see the way her dress clung to her thighs. The neckline plunged, accented by her fair white skin. She turned in the doorway and pulled her coat closed.

“Tomatoes,” he whispered to himself. “Ripe, plump tomatoes.” With his cane he drew another line in the earth, this one much straighter than one he made for the peas.

Mrs. Markum walked swiftly through her yard. His eyes followed as she crossed the empty lot behind their homes and reached the next street. A car was parked there, with a man behind the wheel. The passenger door swung open and she slipped inside. He saw their silhouettes merge, the motor raced and they were gone. His eyes watched them disappear down the street.

“Hot peppers,” DiMelli sighed, “and melons. Lots of melons.” The tip of his cane dug deep and he cut a gash across the rear of the garden.

He looked back toward his home. The garden was a maze of first wandering, then long rigid lines. He saw Edna standing at the kitchen window, washing the morning dishes. Her dressing gown was aglow with the morning sun. A smile crossed his face.

“Zucchini,” he said, driving his cane deep into the ground. He left it there and hurried in to his bride, before this fertile moment had a chance to pass.