



Unexpected Harvest

By Ben Amato

“Sweet peas.” Mr. DiMelli’s old shoe kicked the dirt and he poked his cane into the ground. With a wavering line, he drew out where he was going to plant them.

It was October hot, mid 70’s with a deep blue sky. You knew it would get cooler, later, but it was so nice you didn’t care. Mr. DiMelli could remember few days like this, but, then again, he could remember few days.

But here in his garden he remembered the many harvests of his 81 years. Some were grand, some meager, but lately his autumn crops have yielded failing legs, bent backs and rapidly fading health.

But this morning he awoke to sunshine and youth so he decided to walk in his backyard field and dream of spring. “Sweet peas,” he repeated again, as if to pledge to harvest them next year.

The noise of a screen door opening startled him. His neighbor, Mrs. Markum, was at 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 tight 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 a bit more rigid than one for the peas.



Mrs. Markum walked swiftly through her yard. His eyes followed her as she crossed the empty lot behind their homes. She quickly reached the next street.

A car was parked, a car with a man in it. The passenger door swung open and she quickly slipped inside. He saw her move close to the driver and then the two forms merged behind the car's tinted windows.



“Hot peppers,” DiMelli signed. “And melons. Lots of melons.” The tip of his cane dug deep into the rich, dark earth. He cut a gash, deep and straight across the rear of his garden.

The car's motor raced a brief instant, then it roared and was gone. His eyes watched it speed down the street. He turned back to his garden. The cold, barren dirt had a maze of first wavering, then long rigid lines. He looked up to his home, and his wife Edna standing by the kitchen window. She was washing the morning dishes, her dressing gown 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.