

**Flowers Lean Toward Sunlight**

## Contents

Shopping Cart to the Moon or Mars 3

Flowers Lean Toward Sunlight 4

The Kids Who Don't Smile 5

Mami, Curly Hair 6

## Shopping Cart to the Moon or Mars

Self-imposed parking lot security man with the beach ball belly fiddles a toothpick in his mouth. Sits on a party rental plastic chair. Waves a cane in response to the rumble of Gramma's shopping cart. We hang on for dear life because *touch cement, lose your foot*. This is summer camp at Gramma's.

The cart hobbles. Broken wheel, veers left. A foot touches ground. A shriek: *that doesn't count*.

The disabled twins, a few doors before Gramma's, smack their faces against a window because they want out; howl at the wheels running through pavement cracks. A cousin giggles. Gramma pinches her crazy; shocks her to the core. Borderline call-protection-services. Like the one time we did for play.

The rumble is loud like breaking waves. Or the busted washer we all share. Gramma parks the cart at her blue-green door. Building 3, apartment 23. We peel off.

Across, the *señora* with the crooked mouth waters a slouchy flower, eyeballs us with the seriousness of a hungry pitbull. Her kids aren't allowed out when we're around.

Later, we'll tip the cart over for flying to the Moon or Mars or anywhere to keep us from bedtime. A gunshot echoes. A gunshot we shrug off because we're flying, nearly touching the Sun, the Moon, Mars.

## Flowers Lean Toward Sunlight

My best memory of you is at dinnertime. Gramma sits by you, unwraps the day in front of you. At this same table where an uncle brought 20 cheeseburgers and dished them for Christmas gifts. You cough a storm into a calloused hand. Leathery, and a thumb hooked like a question mark. *Those* dirty, frowning fingernails. When I broke my hand I understood why you do *that* with yours. Open, close. A flower blooming. Every one of us at one point loaded tools in your truck that meant American Dream. You eyeball that familiar Western on TV. Say a lot without speaking. You spit loogies into a red handkerchief, and tuck it into your back pocket. *Look, Grampa's a Blood*, whispers a cousin. The one we call Fat Boy. The one you toss a few more dollars when we line up for Sunday allowances. It's only fair when you grow up with no father. For you, one less son. The one who dished us cheeseburgers for Christmas. Gramma watches you eat, and the silence is soothing like wind chimes. And I know you're finally happy by the way you lean into her like a flower leans toward sunlight.

## The Kids Who Don't Smile

My neighbors were a bunch of kids who didn't smile. Who never invited us out to kick a ball, tug on a neighbor's droopy mandarin tree or spit at the neighborhood dog who's got a few extra lives tucked away. They came to my birthday party once, but I don't remember them bringing a gift. Only frowns as big as their father's bushy, black mustache. Sometimes their handballs would come into our yard, brand new ones, not even lopsided yet. But they never came to get them. So the balls became mine, until I slapped them too hard off the wall and into their yard. One day, I watched an old school bus from my window. It screeched to a stop next door. A baby girl I'd never seen before busted out in a wheelchair. Behind her, a mother with wild hair like tornadoes and one of those kids who didn't smile, or can't smile, I don't know. A cousin had told me it was rude to stare at the sick. But it was beautiful the way she paraded: tongue out, waving like palm trees, while lifted sky-high into the old school bus. Not a care in the world that she wouldn't ever experience the joy of tugging at a drooping mandarin.

## Mami, Curly Hair

I always believed  
Super Mami's hair  
was a force field,  
her *nopalito* green eyes  
laser beams.  
And I still do,  
sit next to her  
in silence, sometimes.  
Because Super Mami  
doesn't always know that  
silence is thoughts  
becoming poems.  
Her presence calm,  
but wild at the ready.  
Like my childhood scribbles,  
her black hair.  
Curly, warm, nice  
to put your nose into  
when she holds you  
and you feel safe,  
and dare to dream,  
unafraid.  
Each insecurity  
a super human power.  
The scar across her belly,  
smiling when she sits.  
The time she said metal fillings  
allowed me to chomp through anything.  
Anything imaginable.