



Triple

Austin Bowles

I turn the corner. I try to hurry into the sunlight. My fingers get cold if I stay in the shade on these cold days. The sycamore has lost all of its leaves since I last walked here. From the sycamore I can see the old lady's stand. The old lady named Maya sits behind rows of flowers. Sunflowers tower behind her small frame. Her wrinkled hands are grasping a cane of dark mahogany. The ivory handle clinks against her large rings.

"Hello, nice day isn't it?" I ask.

"Yes," she says. Her black eyes stare out at me as her wrinkles crease into a smile.

"Can I please have three sunflowers?"

"Certainly dear. Which three would you like?"

"That one in the corner, the one by itself in the yellow bucket and that baby one."

"How would you like them," she asks.

"With tissue," I offer with a smile, "plain and simple for me."

"Okay, simple it is."

The old lady is very wise. I've talked to her before. She told me that her husband died on his way to the ice cream shop back in 1960. She talks about death like it's no big deal. She doesn't seem to be afraid of whatever it is that comes after we stop breathing.

I stroll away from the stand with a smile and three sunflowers. As I walk by a fire hydrant on Main and Cross streets, I see a dark little bird on the iron fence around one of many fichus. He flits up to the telephone wire as I walk by.

I'm headed north on Cross street now. There is an old black man on the bench with the chipping brown paint. He has both arms spread over the back of the bench. He looks at me as I walk by the bench.

"Mister, you got the time?"

"Three o'clock," I answer.

The old man looks at his hands and then at the bus schedule on his lap. I wonder what he's thinking about, what kind of shit he's seen. He

must have grown up during the civil rights movement. I wonder how it makes him feel to see white people now. I wonder what it feels like to be a black person. Wish I had as much culture in my body as a black lady has when she laughs real loud.

Sycamore leaves are twirling down the street past me. Some of them still have green on them. I come to the corner of Frankin and Elizabeth streets. My hand is sweaty from gripping the tissue paper. Sunflowers aren't as heavy as they look. You just have to carry them lightly.

I hate this corner. The pedestrian cross button doesn't work. Alley is already waiting there.

"Hey Alley," I say, coming up to stand next to her on the new handicap friendly corner.

"Sam, hey, what's happening?"

"Not much, would you like a flower?" I ask.

"Yes I would!"

I look at Sam's face. His cheeks are red. The tissue paper is wrinkled around the middle. He must have been carrying these for a while. These must be Farm Fresh flowers; why else would he give them to me? I haven't gotten flowers from a guy in years. I wonder what he's like in bed. He seems so young. I bet he thinks of nothing but sex. He probably gave me these flowers just to be nice though. I am going to be late for my appointment.

I glance down at her purse as she walks down toward the shopping district and see her book sticking out; *The Universal Baby Name Book*. Is Alley pregnant? Hmm.

Hope she likes her flowers, I think with a smile.