

Thanksgiving in the Neighborhood

Rickety, crack, vroom. Rickety, crack, vroom. Vroommmmm. “Finally, my sweet baby is on. Welcome back, Velma.” Velma, otherwise known as a Mustang GT500, is Mr. Melbourne's “*sweet baby*.” He has been working on her for as long as I can remember. He calls her a “*beauty*,” but she is downright ugly. Rust has taken over, and the bright red coat of paint is long gone. Beyond Mr. Melbourne's fine-tuning, she needs proper fixing. A fresh coat of paint, like Robin Egg Blue or Splashdown, would do wonders. But Mr. Melbourne never explains why he cares about her so much; I suspect it has something to do with his recently absent wife, *Velma*. She adored this car so much that it is the only thing he thinks about nowadays to remind himself of her.

Bored from listening to Mr. Melbourne talk to Velma, I headed back inside. “Susan, come to the kitchen! I need your help!” Mama calls. “Just a second, Ma, I need to...” “SUSAN, get your behind in this kitchen right now! All the neighbors are coming over for a Thanksgiving potluck tonight. I cannot cook everything myself!” “Fine, coming, Ma.” I roll my eyes and grab a towel to dry the dishes piling up in the sink.

As I wipe a plate, the familiar notes of the neighborhood echo through the open window. Mrs. Thompson is juggling her three kids and her famous stuffing recipe, the scent of herbs and butter tickling my nose. I would rather be outside, enjoying the fun. “Mama, can I go outside for a bit?” I ask, trying to sound as sweet as possible. “After you help me with the potatoes,” she replies, pointing to the mountain of them waiting to be peeled. The rough texture of the peeler against the smooth potatoes makes me gag, yet I still grab it.

Mr. Melbourne's old radio crackles in the garage, blasting soulful sounds of Betty Carter classics. Suddenly, the horn of a car interrupts my thoughts. I peer out the window just in time to see Velma sputtering out of the garage. "Look, Danny! He is driving it!" I call to my little brother, who is half-buried in a pile of toys. Danny runs to the window, eyes wide. "Whoa! It is moving!" I laugh, they say, "That thing looks like it's ready for retirement." Mr. Melbourne waves at us, a huge grin plastered across his face. But just as I turn back to the kitchen, Velma backfires with a loud bang! The sound rattles through the air, making my heart race. I jump, nearly dropping the potato I am holding. "Keep peeling!" Mama shouts from the other room, her voice sounding tired.

I cannot help but smile at the chaos around me. There's Mrs. Thompson with her perfect turkey, Mr. Melbourne with his rusty car, and us—just trying to make it through another Thanksgiving dinner without too much drama. Once the potatoes are finally peeled, I rush back to the window. Velma is now parked on the street, and Mr. Melbourne stands next to her, admiring her like a proud parent. "Mama, can I help him?" I ask, feeling a sudden urge to join the excitement of the neighborhood. "Just for a minute!" she calls back, moments before I dash out the door.

As I step outside, I take a deep breath, inhaling the mix of turkey and spices that fill the neighborhood. Mr. Melbourne spots me and beams. "Susan! Want to help me wash her?" As I walk towards Velma and see red splattered everywhere inside her, it was quite disturbing. My

heart starts to beat faster as I approach. "What is with all the red splatters in your car, Mr. Melbourne?" I say, reaching for the handle, my fingers trembling. "What do you mean?" he questions, turning around, his smile fading. I open the car door, and the red substance starts to look browner. As I touch it, it feels sticky, like blood. A chill runs down my spine. "DON'T TOUCH THAT!" he yells suddenly, yanking my hand out of the car. His eyes are wide, and I can sense the nervousness in him.

"What is that?" I ask firmly, my heart racing now. "None of your business," he answers, trying to brush it off, but I see the fear in his eyes. "So, do you want to wash her or not?" he adds, glaring at me. "Sure," I reply, but my mind races with questions. "But we should paint her blue or something. That rusty red is just... sad." Mr. Melbourne laughs, a strange sound that echoes, like a *killer clown*. "Don't worry, that will not be necessary." *Then everything goes black.*