

Weight

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Short Story

When he came to live with us, my brother taught my son L.J., Lionel Junior, about subtracting decimals and the importance of pooping on a daily basis by having him weigh himself before and after he used the toilet. You see, I bought this scale a few years back at Wal-Mart, the fanciest scale they had, with point this and point that, weights down to the decimals, when I'd signed myself up for Weight Watchers because Lionel Senior told me I was getting fat as a cow. Weight Watchers was long gone by the time my brother Wes showed up—I hadn't stepped on that scale in ages, didn't want to know the damage—but that scale kept going strong. Hadn't even changed the batteries and those little red numbers still popped up no problem. So if L.J. weighed 60.8 pounds before pooping and 60.2 pounds after, Wes would say, "Whoop whee. A big one there, kiddo," and then L.J. would say, "Point six pounds," and then I didn't know whether to be disgusted or proud about the fact that my seven-year-old could subtract decimals. I guess I was just glad that Wes had solved L.J.'s pooping problem.

About a year ago, Lionel Senior skipped out on us and that's when L.J. started having problems with his bathroom activities. He wouldn't go for days and days and his stomach would swell and it'd remind me of those little African children I'd see on TV when I was little, back when everyone would say, "There're starving kids in Ethiopia. Eat your peas." Finally, I dragged L.J. to the doctor and he told me to feed L.J. lots of bran and dark leafy greens and that he might outgrow this stage soon, but maybe there was something that had happened in his life that he felt he couldn't control and because of this he was controlling

the one thing he could, and that was his bowel movements. I knew it had to do with missing his daddy, who had gone God knows where with just a note on the kitchen table saying, “Bye. Sorry.”

After L.J. had his pooping problem for a while, I called Wes and asked if he had any ideas. “I’ll move in with you, sis, straighten that boy out,” Wes said, and I tried to argue, but he was so certain he could fix L.J. and it’d been a while since L.J. had any sort of man around that I didn’t question right then whether Wes would be the best role model. At that point, Wes had been living about half an hour away, in some crowded, dirty house out in Marshfield, not too far from us, but I almost never saw him.

Wes was twenty-three and since graduating high school he’d only worked on and off delivering pizzas. He could have done something with himself—he was the smart one in the family, the one who could’ve gotten a college scholarship if he’d tried. But even though he sometimes talked about applying for college, it’d been six years since high school and he still hadn’t done anything about it. I knew that he was just glad he could live with me rent free, but I told him that he’d better get a job within a few weeks or else he was gone. “I’ll babysit L.J. for free,” he said. “I’ll do a good job, I promise.”

I’d never heard him sound so serious, and if he could watch L.J., I wouldn’t have to pay for daycare for the summer. “You clean?” I asked. He’d had some trouble for a while, both with selling and using, and I told him I didn’t want any of that around my kid.

“For over a year now,” he said. “I swear on the Bible.”

I knew the Bible didn’t mean a thing to him, but still, I said okay, he could come and watch L.J. but I made sure that he knew that if there was any trouble, he was out.

A few months ago, L.J. and Wes came home with some seeds and dirt and shovels, and Wes said that they were going to plant a

garden right there in the tiny backyard. Tomatoes and squash and cucumbers and eggplants and peppers, both sweet and hot. They were going to dig up all the little rocks in the ground and cover it with dark, rich soil and water it every day until a garden sprang up.

“You don’t know anything about gardening,” I told Wes and he said, “That’s what you think.”

“The ground here’s full of rocks,” I said. “You won’t hardly be able to dig.”

“We’ll take care of it,” Wes said.

“*You* want to garden?” I asked L.J. and he shrugged, all cool like he didn’t care, but then he couldn’t hide his excitement anymore and said, “Yeah. I wanna be a gardener.”

Did it bother me that L.J. was always all excited by Wes’s ideas? Yeah, yeah it did. For God’s sake, I was his mother, the one who went through twelve hours of labor, all those hours when the nurses kept trying to call Lionel Senior but couldn’t reach him. Of course they couldn’t because he was in some bar, drinking cheap beer and, I’m sure, putting enough quarters into a jukebox so he could listen to that old Johnny Cash song “Ring of Fire” a hundred times. I was the one who raised L.J. pretty much on my own while his daddy was off getting drunk and hanging out with his good-for-nothing friends at the strip clubs down Sunshine and then Wes stepped in like a fairy godmother or something and L.J. looked up at him like he was just the best thing ever.

And so I’d go to work at Dillon’s and come home bone tired from being on my feet all day at the register with produce codes still running through my head—4608, garlic; 4011, bananas; 4129, Fuji apples—and the two of them would be hunched over in the backyard, L.J.’s knees all covered in dirt, his skinny little fingers digging around in the ground pulling out rocks, and I’d feel a pinch of jealousy about how it wasn’t me with L.J. working in that garden.

“Look, Ma,” L.J. said one day when something small and

green sprouted. “It’s growing.”

“I was talking to Linda from the bakery at work,” I told them. “She plants a garden every year, and she says you’re supposed to start seeds indoors. The weather’s too iffy to start outside. You don’t bring them out ’til they’re stronger. And she says that for people like you, people who’ve never grown anything ever before, you should just go to Home Depot and pick up a plant that’s already been started.”

“Oh, Darlene,” Wes said, “stop being such a know-it-all.” Then he turned to L.J. and said, “Your momma’s always been this way, kiddo. ‘Do this, Wes. Do that, Wes.’ Just because she’s two years older than me, she thinks she can be my second momma. She about drove me insane when we were kids.” Then he laughed hard and I could see his yellow-stained teeth and wanted to tell him that Dillon’s had some of those Crest whitening strips on sale, but God forbid I ever told Wes what to do.

“Once Linda grew a seven pound tomato,” I said, and Wes raised his eyebrows at L.J., just like he was sure I was fibbing.

“She got a magical tomato weighing scale?” Wes said, barely able to keep himself from cracking up.

L.J. looked to Wes and then to me and started laughing, even though I could tell that he had no idea what was even funny.

“No,” I said, “she just weighs herself first on the bathroom scale holding the tomato, then gets off, puts the tomato into the sink, weighs herself again, and subtracts the second number from the first.”

Wes rolled his eyes and said, “That only works for weighing shit,” and I was at first mad at him for cussing in front of my son and then I felt stupid for lying about Linda’s tomato, which really only weighed two pounds. But it was purple. I saw it, Linda brought in pictures of it, and it was the strangest tomato I’d ever seen. “Tasted normal though,” Linda had said. “Didn’t taste purple.”

“You gonna eat the vegetables you’re growing?” I asked L.J., and he nodded, his sandy hair flopping in front of his eyes. God, he looked just like his daddy then, wiping the sweat from his brow and scratching away at some itch on his cheek with his dirty fingers. “You never eat your vegetables,” I said.

“Uncle Wes says vegetables in supermarkets ain’t nowhere as good as home grown.” *Ain’t this, ain’t that.* The boy still sounded just like his daddy.

“Oh, yeah?” I said. “How’d you know that, Uncle Wes?”

“It’s true. My friend Ted lived on a commune for a year in Oregon and they grew all their food and now he says he can’t stand to eat produce from the supermarket. All he eats now are peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Nothing fresh.”

“Really?” L.J. said, his eyes open wide, like this was the best idea in the world.

“This Ted, he one of your business associates from your job at Domino’s?” I said.

“I got friends all over,” Wes said, shrugging, and just then I realized that L.J. got that shrug, that *I don’t care what you think* shrug, from Wes.

“Why’d someone move from Oregon to southwest Missouri? The weather’s better in Oregon, summers are cooler. Ground’s not as rocky, too, better for planting,” I said, and Wes shrugged again.

“I never said he lived here.”

L.J. dug in the ground and pulled up an earthworm.

“Put that thing down!” I said. “Don’t go touching dirty worms. And now don’t go putting your fingers in your mouth, you hear me?”

“I’ll take it,” Wes said, gently picking up the worm from L.J.’s hand. He put it back in the dirt. “Worms are good. They keep the soil overturned. You don’t want to take them out of the ground, okay, kiddo?”

There was Wes, all calm and wise, and me, screaming. This arrangement was beginning to feel less and less good. I went inside, fixing to make dinner from plain old supermarket vegetables, which I was sure would be left, untouched, on their plates.

One night a few weeks later, Wes didn't come home. In the morning, as I was trying to figure out what to do with L.J.—bring him to work with me and make him walk up and down the aisles of the supermarket and hope that my boss, Mr. Clark, didn't figure out that the same kid was hanging out there all day long, or take him to Mrs. Fowler, the old lady who lived up the street and babysat kids in her smoky house while she sat on her couch and watched soap operas and had the kids bring her glass after glass of cranberry juice to flush away her urinary tract infections—Wes walked in the door, all disheveled, with a black eye.

“I thought you were gone, took off,” I said.

“I wouldn't do that to you. To L.J.”

“Where were you?”

“At a party.”

“Did it get busted?”

“Yeah.” Wes shrugged. That damn shrug again.

“You go to jail?”

“They took me in, but they let me go. No charges.”

“I told you I didn't want any of that around my son. What is it this time? Meth?”

Wes laughed. I noticed the pimples that had cropped up on his cheeks. He looked skinnier, too.

“Stop looking at my skin,” he said. “It's from sweating out in the garden.”

“Why should I believe you?”

“You just should. You've been watching too many of those public service announcements on TV. They're making you

paranoid. Not everyone in these parts is a meth addict.”

“What about the black eye?”

“Some guy punched me.”

“Why?”

“I didn’t agree with his political views,” he said, his voice all sarcastic. “Look, can we stop with the questioning? I want to take L.J. and get some stakes for the garden. The plants are getting big.”

He was changing the subject, but I was nearly late for work, and I didn’t have time to argue with him. Was I being paranoid? Maybe, but I thought the signs that he had gone back to his old ways were all there.

I saw him reach into the bowl on the hallway table where we left all the keys. He picked up the keys to the old Grand Prix, Lionel Senior’s car that, for some reason or other, he didn’t take with him when he left. “You’re not driving today with my baby in the car,” I said.

“I told you, I’m fine. Everything’s fine. Look,” he said. He touched his nose with one hand and put the other arm straight out in the air and stood on one leg like he was a lawn flamingo. “Excellent motor skills.” He wobbled a little.

I shot him the dirtiest glare I could muster and took the keys out of his hand. “You can walk to get supplies,” I said. “And look both ways before crossing the streets.” Then I left, shoving the keys to the Grand Prix deep into my purse.

When I got back that afternoon, both Wes and L.J. were wearing brand new overalls, which were covered in dirt but were still stiff with newness. Neither of them was wearing a shirt, and they each held a hoe and were working the soil. Above each of the older plants, the ones they’d started weeks ago, three wooden stakes were tied together in the shape of a teepee so the stems could have something to lean on as they grew taller. All in all, the whole thing

looked pretty professional, like they really knew something about what they were doing.

“How’d you know how to do that?” I asked.

“Got some books out of the library,” Wes said. He was still turning over the soil and reaching down every few seconds to pull out a rock and then toss it into a growing pile of rocks on the grass.

“Ma, we’re gonna plant some herbs,” L.J. said. “Some parsley and some . . .” He paused, looking up at the sky, which meant he was thinking hard.

“Cilantro. And basil,” Wes said. “And this time around we listened to your friend Linda and got the seedlings.” He pointed to a few black plastic containers, which each contained a small plant.

“Where’d you get the money for all this stuff? And for the overalls?” I gave Wes money every week to buy some snacks at the convenience store or lunches at McDonald’s or Wok and Roll and sometimes a little extra money for gardening supplies, but I made sure not to give him too much. I was scared of how he’d spend it.

“I got money saved up. Some wise investments,” Wes said without looking up at me.

“You put all your pizza delivery money into real estate out in Branson, that it?”

“Yeah, exactly,” Wes said, getting up and wiping his dirty hands on the butt of his overalls. “I’m a regular Donald Trump.”

“When the basil grows, we’re going to pick the leaves and put it on pizza,” L.J. said. “Uncle Wes says it’s so good.”

I looked at L.J. His shoulders were red. By nighttime they’d be sore. “Did you put sunscreen on him?”

“I forgot,” Wes said. He patted smooth the soil around the base of a small plant.

“Look at his skin. Look how pale he is,” I said. That was something L.J. got from Lionel Senior, that creamy white skin that turned pink and blistered under the summer sun. “Why isn’t he at least wearing a shirt?”

“I didn’t want to,” L.J. said. “Uncle Wes ain’t wearing one.”

“Why are you two wearing overalls anyway?” I said.

L.J. looked at me like I’d asked the stupidest question in all the world. “It’s what real farmers wear,” he said.

“You come with me,” I told L.J. “We’re gonna put some aloe on your shoulders before they start hurting.”

“No,” L.J. said, “I ain’t done gardening. We got to stick all the herbs into the soil here. Today.”

“Let’s go,” I said, grabbing L.J. by the arm and pulling him toward the house.

“I want to stay out here with Uncle Wes,” he whined, digging his feet into the ground, making himself heavier than he really was.

“Fine, we can do it the hard way,” I said, leaning down, grabbing him around the waist, and lifting him up.

“No! No!” he said, kicking his legs.

“If your father was here, he’d beat your behind for acting this way,” I told him.

“But he ain’t here,” L.J. said. “You made him go away.”

Right then my anger turned into something else, something cold and miserable I felt all through me. Even Wes could see that things had suddenly changed. “You go on,” he said calmly. “I’ll finish up out here. You listen to your momma now.”

L.J. softened, his muscles loosened. He settled into my arms and I sniffed his neck, that sweet smell like warm milk and his little boy sweat and it smelled so good and I thought about how little boys become grown men and change and get rough and sour, all that sweetness gone.

“We’ll get you a shirt and some sunscreen,” I said. “And then you can come back out here and help your uncle, okay, baby?”

L.J. nodded and wrapped his arms around my neck,

clasping his hands hard together in the back, holding me close and tight like I really mattered.

That night Linda called. She told me that she'd gotten a phone call that afternoon from the cooking school in Kansas City that she'd applied to months ago for their pastry chef program. They wanted to interview her in the morning and she had to drive out there immediately. She needed someone to work her night shift at the register at the supermarket. Linda told me that she'd already tried calling four people, and Mr. Clark said that she'd be fired if she couldn't find someone to take her place. "Listen, Darlene," she said, "I need this job, you know it. If I don't get into the school or get enough financial aid, I got to have a job to come back to."

I told her I'd take her 10pm to 6am shift. Taking her shift would help her out, but extra money was always a good thing for me. When I was ready to leave, L.J. was already in bed, and Wes was stretched out on the couch, flipping through the TV channels with the remote. "I'll be back in the morning," I said. "You take good care of him. I won't be home later than six thirty." Wes nodded without looking up from the TV.

I stepped outside and then I thought that I should've said thank you, that I always forgot to thank Wes when he'd done a good job, and hadn't he been doing good with L.J. all summer? Before my heart could soften too much, I ran right into the Grand Prix, parked on the lawn by the back door. It wasn't supposed to be there, but Wes had left it so he could bring heavy bags full of soil into the backyard. He was supposed to move the car once the bags had been unloaded, but it had been hours, the soil all spread on the ground already, and there was the car, still in the same spot. "God damnit, Wes," I said, kicking a tire. In the morning I'd have to back the car into the driveway. Another thing on my to-do list.

After I finished with Linda's shift, I was tired, more tired than I'd

been in a long time, maybe since L.J. was a baby and I'd woken up three times a night to nurse him. Even back then Lionel Senior hadn't been much help, rolling over in bed, saying, "What? It's not like I can breastfeed the kid." Including Linda's shift, I'd worked over seventy hours that week, and all I wanted was to get in bed and stay there for a long, long time.

When I got back to the house, the Grand Prix was in the driveway. I got out of my car and put my hand on the hood, right over the engine. It was warm, maybe even hot, like it'd been driven pretty far and had just been brought back. Hotter than it'd be if Wes had just backed it into the driveway. I walked inside the house and there was Wes, feasting. He had the ice cream out and a big bag of potato chips open, and he was making himself a peanut butter sandwich. "The hell, Wes? You just get in? It's six thirty in the morning."

He took a big bite of his sandwich. "L.J.'s fine. I just checked on him."

"Why're you eating ice cream in the morning?" I said.

"I'm just hungry is all."

"Did you leave him alone? How long were you gone? Where'd you go? You can't leave a seven-year-old alone all night!"

"The kid sleeps like a log."

"That's not the point."

"Go check on him yourself."

"You're an idiot," I said.

Wes put down the sandwich and ate a spoonful of ice cream right out of the container. He put the spoon back in and took more.

"I need some air," I said and slammed out the back door. I thought that if I stayed, I might just scream and scream at Wes and then I'd wake up L.J. and he'd look at me the same way he did when I yelled at him for picking up the dirty worm.

Outside, the sun was just beginning to rise. It was going

to be another hot day, typical Ozarks in July. It'd hit a hundred by noon. It was already sticky and the air felt thick and heavy. I walked over to the garden and looked down at the plants that they'd been working on for a month-and-a-half now. There were no tomatoes or peppers or eggplants sprouting. Just leaves on thick stems that were growing taller by the day. And then I thought of something horrible. These weren't tomato plants. These weren't eggplants or peppers. This was some disgusting garden full of drugs that Wes was having L.J. help him with. It was terrible and awful and a scheme to make easy money. Wes wasn't clean, never would be. Whoever he was hanging out with, they were dragging him back into his old ways. This was why Wes was so good with decimals, measuring out little bits of things. All of it had to do with buying and selling drugs, counting out ounces of this or that.

I picked up a hoe that was just laying there on the ground and went to work. I hacked at each plant, tearing them up by the roots, slamming the edges of the hoe into the thick stems until they bled liquid, kept smashing until they fell over. I kept going, hitting and hitting until I worked my way up to the wooden stakes. And then I started hitting those, too, but they were strong, that lashed-together teepee structure held steady. But I kept going, pounding and pounding and pounding, trying to destroy everything. Finally, some of the stakes began to crack.

Wes burst out the back door, taking a big bite out of a banana. "What's all the racket?" he said. And then he saw the garden. "Shit, Darlene. Shit."

I stopped trying to kill the wooden stakes and dropped the hoe.

"We worked so hard," Wes said, and he looked genuinely upset. "All that work, L.J. and me." He bent down to the ground where the damaged plants were. "You did this 'cause I went out last night?"

"You know why I did this," I said. "You know why."

Suddenly, the upset look on Wes's face changed to anger, his eyebrows pushed tight together. "Because you're exhausted? Because Lionel Senior left? Because your life sucks and you hate everyone?" He was screaming now, loud enough for the neighbors to hear.

"You know why, Wes. I don't want any of your drugs here. I don't want my son involved in any of it."

Wes laughed then, hard and mean, and flung the half-eaten banana into the dirt. He went inside.

I collapsed onto the ground, sat myself right in the soil that Wes and L.J. had hauled home in the Grand Prix. I wrapped my arms around my legs and put my head on my knees. I thought about the terrible things Wes had said about me and tried to make myself believe that none of it was true.

The back door slammed again, and Wes hurled toward me, holding a book. "Look!" he shouted, holding the book close to my face. It was a book about gardening from the library. "Look at these pictures," he said. "This is a tomato plant." He went to one of the ruined plants and picked up a branch. "Look at the leaves. Look!"

I looked.

"What do you see?"

"They're the same," I said, and I felt like an awful fool. He flipped a few pages real quick and found another picture. "Eggplant," he said and headed back toward the ruined garden.

"Okay, okay, Wes. I get it," I said. "I get it."

"Why, then?"

"I didn't know what those plants were. I didn't see any vegetables."

"It's still early in the season yet," Wes said. "And I just figured out that I was supposed to fertilize, so they're growing extra slow."

I nodded. Maybe I was wrong about things. “I just got paranoid is all. I have no idea what’s what with plants. You know I was never into drugs in high school like you were.”

“It’s not like I ever grew any of that, Darlene,” Wes said, shaking his head. “And all you ever were into was Lionel, ever since your freshman year. Ruined your life with that asshole.”

I knew he was right, but I didn’t want to tell him that, so I said, “I’m sorry for messing up your garden. I really am.”

“Be a lot harder to tell L.J. you’re sorry. And you got to tell him. I’m leaving.”

“You can’t leave. Not right now. Not before he even gets up.”

“I can’t stay here anymore,” Wes said, and he went back into the house.

I sat there on the moist ground, and my head felt heavy, and I was so, so tired. I knew Wes well enough to know that nothing I could say would stop him. Once he made up his mind, that was it. I sat there on the ground for a long time, long enough for Wes to pack up his room, to put his clothes into the one ratty suitcase he brought with him and to leave through the front door.

“Take the Grand Prix,” I yelled out. “You can have it.”

But I didn’t hear the engine start. And when I finally got up from the ground and walked around to the front of the house, Wes was gone and the Grand Prix was still right where he’d left it.

When he woke up, I told L.J. that some animal, maybe a fox, got to the plants and that Uncle Wes took a job out in Oregon with that friend of his. I don’t think L.J. believed a word of it, but he just nodded, probably bottling up resentment inside just like his daddy always did. “Look,” I said, walking with L.J. into the backyard, “the herbs are still okay, the parsley and cilantro, you can still tend to those.” He looked around the mess that used to be the garden and went right back into the house without saying a word. That

night, while L.J. slept, I cleaned everything up, put all the ruined plants and the splintered stakes into trash bags and took them to the curb for the garbage men to haul away.

A week after Wes left, there was a plant sale at Dillon's, all the sad, dried-out tomatoes and peppers that no one had bought at the beginning of the summer for seventy-five percent off. The plants had been left to sit outside the store for weeks, only getting a quick spray from the hose when someone remembered them or noticed that the soil was bone dry. They hadn't been cared for, but I told myself that I could do something with them. I got a cart and loaded it up with those sale plants, careful not to spill the crumbly soil on my clothes.

"You shouldn't buy those," Linda told me when I pushed the cart by the bakery section. She came around from behind the cake case and poked a finger into the dry soil beneath a cherry tomato plant. "It should be illegal to even sell this junk," she said. While she was talking to the admissions people in Kansas City the week before, she'd realized that going to culinary school would load her up with a lifetime of debt, so she'd decided to stay here instead, working the same old job. She'd been in a foul mood since she'd gotten back from her interview.

"They'll barely cost anything with seventy-five percent off plus the employee discount," I told her.

"Still, though, you should be paid for carting those plants out of here. It's too late in the season to plant anything. It's too hot for it now, they'll just die right after you get them into the soil."

"It's fine," I said and kept moving because I didn't want to hear any more from Linda. I didn't need her telling me what to do, and I didn't know if she was telling the truth or just being a pain.

I went home, put those almost-dead plants into the holes that were left when I pulled out all of Wes's plants, picked off all the dead leaves, and wished I hadn't ruined those stakes so I could

have used them to train the plants to stand up straight.

The next day, I dropped L.J. off at Mrs. Fowler's before I went to work. He had to stay with her while I worked for the rest of the summer. I knew it wasn't the best place for him, but it was cheap, and it'd have to do. After I picked him up that evening, he went to his room and changed into his overalls. Then he headed outside and knelt by the herbs, weeding and arranging the dirt around them, picking rocks out of the soil. He ignored the new plants, the ones I brought home from Dillon's, acted as if they didn't even exist. And maybe they didn't, really. They were hardly alive, had far more brown and crumpled leaves than green ones. But I didn't want to get rid of those plants, didn't want to uproot them, because it'd be like what happened with Wes's garden all over again: something was there and then the next day it wasn't, and the only clue to it all was the over-filled black garbage bags on the curb.

I looked out the kitchen window as I fixed dinner, stared at L.J.'s pale, shirtless body in those goddamn overalls and wondered if he was trying to break my heart. After I called him inside for dinner, he came into the kitchen with some basil, warm and folded over in his fist, and I took the leaves, cut them up, and sprinkled them on top of the spaghetti I'd cooked. After we sat down and L.J. had wound some spaghetti around and around his fork and took a bite, he said, "Yeah, Uncle Wes was right. Does taste good."

Now I'm woken up each morning by beeping. There is construction going on down the street, and every day, right at seven, the trucks turn on and start their racket, beeping as they back up. The construction must wake L.J., too, because a few minutes after the trucks start making noise, L.J. heads to the bathroom to shower. My bedroom and the bathroom share a wall, and I hear the scale beeping, once before L.J. uses the toilet and another time after the toilet flushes.

I always give myself a minute before getting out of bed, then I shrug on my robe and put on a pair of flip-flops. I fill a watering can in the kitchen and go to the backyard. We have a hose out back, but I don't trust it to be gentle enough with the delicate garden, so I carry the watering can into the backyard each morning then bend down close to the soil so the water doesn't pound down from too high. Linda tells me that I am being pig-headed trying to get these plants to survive, but she says that if I am going to be stubborn, I might as well give the plants the best chance I can. She tells me to water the plants early in the day, before the sun starts to sear, so I don't end up burning the roots.

As I bend to water my struggling plants each morning, I listen to the rumble of the construction vehicles down the street. All of us here are trying to coax something out of this place, and who knows what will come of our efforts. It's hard to dig into this rocky, impossible land, into turf that doesn't want to be changed, and to try to build something new. But the men in trucks down the street keep working, tearing and destroying the ground in order to build up from it. And me? What can I do but water and wait and hope that something good will grow?