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# Home Kids

Home Kids scoop cups of flour for math lessons. They describe the cat for writing assignments. They drop slugs into jars for science experiments. When it is evening, after chores but before TV, Home Kids pass the guitar down the bench in the living room, each strumming a verse of *Five Loaves and Two Fishes* for instrument practice. When it's time for bed, Home Kids go to their rooms to say their prayers. They stand in dark corners before Our Lord and Savior. *Have mercy on me, thy unworthy servant, so that lustful, sinful and wretched as I am, I may lie down in peace.* Strands of their hair fall in tens and twenties to the carpet, tickling their heels and distracting them. They prostrate and cry, begging their god for forgiveness until a trickle of blood creeps from their ears.

Home Kids go to Costco on Tuesday afternoons with their mother. One girl loops her arm through her mother's. One girl's socks sag and rest atop her sneakers like gray tulips. One boy walks ahead of the cart with his arms crossed, judging the choices of shoppers. One boy skips down the aisle, knocking bags of tortilla chips onto heads of short women. At the checkout, the cashier inquires. *Helping Mom?* One girl blinks four times and does not answer. One girl cries in her mother's side. One boy says, *Nosy one, isn't she?* One boy whips his arms front-to-back, over and over, his rotator cuff tearing from his socket.

Home Kids take field trips to the city. They grasp parts of their mother—her sleeve, her skirt, her braid—and creep up First Avenue. Men with torn clothes speak to the Home Kids. *Do you have any change?* Goose pimples form on the Home Kids' arms.

*Is he going to kill us, Mama?* One girl says.

*Just keep walking,* The mother says.

At Pike Street, they make a left and head to the market. On the curb, in front of the fish store, a trio plays sea shanties with accordions and bones. Behind them, a fishmonger at the counter yells, *Cod!* He tosses one to a man wearing a white apron near the customers.

*What are they doing?* says a Home Kid with a sneer.

*Throwing fish, I guess,* says the mother.

A customer places an order.

*Coho!* The man in the apron hollers. He grabs a fish from a bed of

crunchy ice and throws it to the fishmonger.

The boy with the sneer stands near the man in the apron.

*Can I throw a fish?* The boy asks.

*It's heavy,* the man warns.

*So,* the boy says.

*Sure, kid. Here.* The man in the apron places a fish in the Home Kid's hands. The fish is cold and its eyes are stuck in time. The boy lifts his brow as he turns the wide mouth to face him. The boy's eyes glisten as he peers into darkness.

*Something's in there,* he says.

A circle of strangers gather round the boy.

He looks closer. The fish body gets heavier in his hands, harder to hold onto. The boy bends his knees for leverage.

*Mom,* he says, but she cannot hear him because the circle of strangers has gotten wider.

The sides of the fish undulate.

*Whatcha doin' kid,* the man in the apron says.

*Nothing. I'm not doing anything,* the boy whines.

*Throw the fish,* the man says.

*Here,* the man says, *Let me help you.* The man grabs the tail with one hand, but he loses his grip as it thrashes side to side. *Grab hold of the lips!* he yells to the boy.

The boy places two fingers on the bottom lip.

*Sockeye!* the man in the apron hollers. The fish gills move. The fish fins wiggle. The fish tongue grabs the boy's fingers, his arm, his head.

*Sockeye!* The man in the apron yells again, catching the swollen fish with his arms. *Sockeye!* the fishmonger behind the counter responds, chanting as more fishmongers join, as customers join, as the singing trio joins.

The man in the apron hurls the fat, shiny thing over the heads of the people and over the counter to be wrapped in pure, white paper, like a shroud.