

# Duty

by Liz Jameyson

Two girls, twelve years old, run down San Pedro Avenue past the market, the middle school, seven driveways, their small chests heaving. The smooth soles of their Mary Janes keep slipping on the gravel driveways.

Two men in a rust-orange van bear down.

A cop car stops at an intersection half a block from them. The girls offer brief prayers of gratitude as relief makes them slow. They raise their arms in unison, waves big enough to topple a barge. The cops smile, eyes dim, wave back, big grins. Turning right, away from the girls, the driver says, *So nice to see kids that excited.*

The first girl slips trying to resume her speed, catches her footing, and tears around the side of a house and into the alley behind. When she looks back, her best girl friend is gone. She doubles back and sees the van door closing, a Mary Jane dropping out. She makes a panicked decision to ignore her mother's warnings of stranger danger.

Bang, bang, bang on the door of the house whose yard she just tore through. A middle-aged woman, cigarette dangling from her lips, small tears in her flamingo pink camisole bulging with flesh, answers the door. The little girl shrieks her story. The woman, thank you Jesus, gets it and phones the police.

The cops come back, lights flashing. They see one girl, and the absence of one girl. Glancing at one another, they wipe any recognition from their eyes.

