

Jack and the beanshock.

GAPS OPENED in the morning clouds, and sun rays poured down on Detroit's Eastern Market. With the confidence of robins in summer, Neil and Jack shopped the open-air plaza for farm-fresh fruits and vegetables.

Jack eyed a table of peaches. The vendor eyed Jack. "I don't like peaches," Neil said. "They're fuzzy."

"How can you not like peaches?" Jack asked. "Never had peach cobbler?"

"Never had it."

"Peach pie? Peaches and cream?"

"I would gag on the smell," said Neil. "My dad made me eat the skin. We were at war over it."

"Times have changed," said the fruit vendor. "Give peach a chance."

Jack and Neil ambled to the next booth. A woman in bib overalls and a *CWA* baseball cap was piling greens two feet high.

"CWA," Jack nodded approvingly. "Corn Workers of America."

"Communication Workers of America," the grower corrected.

Neil regarded the variety of leaves with reverence. "What is all this?"

Jack picked up a long, dark bundle. "Lettuce, Neil."

"Let us what?"

"Lettuce Neil!" Jack put the green bundle back. "Never mind."

Next door a man and a woman, he with the complexion of a cauliflower and she with her arms crossed, oversaw a dozen containers of unusual shapes and colors.

Neil gestured at a basket of exotic-looking glossy green-yellow things and raised his eyebrows questioningly. "What are those?" Peaked ridges ran their full lengths.

"Starfruit," said the man. "You cut them crossways like this" - he used his index finger as an imaginary knife - "and the slices look like stars."

Neil gingerly picked up a dark green something with small, stiff, tightly packed, pointed thick leaves. It was the size of a grenade. He examined it as if it might explode.

"That's an artichoke," stated the woman. Neil pricked his finger on a leaf point and dropped it back in its box. "Be careful," said the woman.

"Too late," Neil said. "It already pricked me."

"I don't mean your finger, I mean the artichoke," the woman said. "You bruise it, you buy it."

Behind the artichokes was a container of produce, palm-sized and oval-shaped, with dark green skin covered with tiny bumps - or pits, depending on your world view. "Avocados?" Jack asked.

"Avocados," said the vendor. "You can make guacamole."

"I knew it," Jack said.

"No thanks," said Neil. "Can we get something normal?"

They moved on to the adjacent booth. A vendor of legumes and cucumbers was reading *The Milagro Beanfield War*. The vendor sat with all the patience and empathy of the vegetables themselves.

“Those are some heathy beans,” Jack admired. “I’ve never seen green beans that big. It’s like they’re on steroids.”

“Maybe they’re magical,” said Neil. “You plant them, they grow, and we climb the stalk to a castle in the clouds.”

“We’ll take a pound,” said Jack.

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At home that night, it was Jack’s turn to fix dinner. So big were the green beans that he only boiled half of them to have with their hotdogs.

They seated themselves at the dining room table and into their mouths popped the first beans, still steaming. “Are you sure you cooked these long enough?” Neil asked.

“Absolutely sure. Twenty minutes, more than enough.”

They chewed with difficulty. The beans stayed mostly intact, hard and thick.

“Swallow yet?” asked Jack. There was a thickness in his voice, fuzzy from talking with his mouth full.

“I’ll try” Neil swallowed, and gagged worse than he ever had on peaches. The bark-like substance in his mouth reversed directions, and out rocketed a shredded

mass of masticated green. He retrieved it with his fork, and, through the dining room window, the setting sun drenched him with realization.

Jack spit out his own green wad and ripped it into two halves. Surprise - the product of ignorance - etched his face like cracks in a windshield.

“They’re lima beans, Jack. We’re supposed to open the pods, not eat them.”

“It’s LIE-ma, Neil. Not LEE-ma.”

“Are you absolutely sure?”

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