

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/4

Lydia Keating
Errands

I STEP OUT FROM THE CHANGING ROOM, SAGGING IN OLIVE SATIN.

"It's way too big," I say.

"Way too big," Sylvester agrees. His eyes travel up and down the dress.

"I lost weight."

"Did you?"

"Almost twenty-three pounds."

He raises his eyebrows and says, "Good for you. I've been trying to lose the same twenty for the past twenty years."

He chuckles, so I laugh too.

"Ever try Weight Watchers?" he asks. "My wife had me on it for a while, but I was starving the whole time. Total rip off."

"I think my hormones just changed," I lie. "A second puberty, I guess."

"Huh," he says, bending over to adjust the position of the wooden step stool. "Never heard of a second one." He scoots the stool in front of the mirror and motions for me to stand on it. "Here, sweetheart. I'll get my pins." He disappears into a sea of acrylic prom dresses and houndstooth suits.

I wait for him, silently scanning the space. I love Sylvester's store—its stillness, the creaking of the cherry oak floorboards, the smell of cigarettes. The door to his shop is painted red with a small sign that reads, *Sylvester the Tailor* in metallic gold that winks in the sunlight on cloudless days.

A visit to the tailor is a task that I classify in my brain as a *nonimperative errand*. Other tasks, *imperative errands*, always seem to crop up and take priority: buying a box of tampons after two and half days of free bleeding, purchasing a bottle of purple grape Pedialyte with trembling hands, getting a throbbing cavity filled because I have this habit of eating Sour Patch Kids in bed at night and sometimes in the early morning before the sun has risen, and before the rest of the world has woken up, and when time and reality are suspended in waning periwinkle.

Life is basically that: one errand after the next until you die. In Heaven, I imagine errands don't exist. In fact, that's Heaven's trademark feature—the absence of menial tasks. And Hell is simply a never-ending loop of going to the post office, and then the grocery store, the optometrist, and then to CVS, where our bodies eventually explode while we're buying a green bottle of shampoo. A piece of our abdominal flesh will dangle off the cheek of a baggy eyed cashier with cystic acne. Our viscous blood won't quite penetrate the synthetic fiber of the carpeted floor. And the prompt on the red splattered checkout screen will ask us if we want to donate \$2 or \$5 or \$10 to American Red Cross. Then, cruelly, our dismembered bodies regain tact, and the loop restarts. That's Hell, violent, merciless, unending.

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"Alright," Sylvester says, reemerging. "Let's see what we can do." He heaves towards me, shifting his weight from one leg to the other, carrying needles and chalk in his calloused, swollen hands. Sylvester is a mouth breather. Sometimes it sounds like there's a little whistle hidden in the back of his throat. He pinches some fabric at my waist from behind and then looks at me in the mirror.

"What do we think?" he asks. "If we bring this in here, then it flares nicely. Do you see that?"

"I like that."

He nods and pushes a needle into the satin. Then another on the opposite side.

"It's for my sister's wedding," I say. "I'm a bridesmaid."

"When's the big day?" he asks with pins in his mouth.

"December fourteenth."

"A winter wedding. Not many people do those."

"She loves Christmas."

"Who doesn't."

"I don't," I say. "I find it stressful. All that commotion for just one day."

Sylvester gets on his knees slowly and methodically.

"You're like my wife." He smiles. "She hates the holidays." He folds a half an inch of hem at my shins. "And we can bring this up to here?"

I look at the bottom of the dress in the mirror. My legs—prickly with week old stubble—are the only redeeming part of my body, and I make a point of showing them off. I have a disproportionately wide and flabby stomach compared to my slender limbs. A boy in high school once referred to my body type as: a marshmallow on two toothpicks.

"Maybe one more inch?" I say.

He folds in more fabric, so the hem now falls just below my knees.

"There?" he asks, looking up at me.

"Perfect."

He marks the spot with white chalk.

"My sister and I, we don't get along," I say.

"No?"

"No."

"Family's tough," he says.

When Sylvester stands up, his face is so red, it's a little bit purple. Blood vessels explode like fractals across his cheeks.