

BUTTERED ROLL

by Robert Corra

I swear, Sophie is such a bitch. She wouldn't survive 5 seconds back home. The way she talks so slow and has nothing good to say about anybody.

I'll never forget the day Sophie showed up with braces. You'd think she'd be all embarrassed by it. Keep her stupid head low. But she pranced around with her lips open and her big dumb teeth showing like it was a fucking gold medal. By lunchtime, all the other girls were jealous and wanted braces too. You can't make this shit up.

I guess I should stop saying "back home" though. This *is* my home now. And whether I like it or not, Sophie makes the rules down here. That's what Rosa keeps telling me, at least.

Rosa's the only friend I made so far. She lives not too far from me. She's a bit small for her age, and she's got the world's corniest laugh. "Yuck, yuck, yuck!" It sounds like those fake laugh-tracks from old TV shows. The kind they play on loop in nursing homes. She's a good kid though.

Rosa's been hanging around with Sophie's crew lately, trying her best to act cool and fit in. She swears that most of them are alright, and she even vouched for me. But Sophie came up with the brilliant idea of an initiation. Like they're a sorority, or something. According to her, I had to swipe something from the local convenience store. A pack of AA batteries to be specific, absolutely *not* AAA. Like I said, what a bitch.

Now, I knew I could pull it off pretty easily. The thing is, my Nonno used to own a small bodega, with sleepy cat and everything. I spent a lot of time there when I was a little kid. My

mom would drop me off when she was “busy.” He would always make me a buttered roll when I was sad or angry.

He was a real pillar of the community, my Nonno. He was calm and would greet everyone with a warm, lazy smile. It looked like his eyes were half closed all the time, but believe me, he saw everything. Everybody loved him.

Thinking of him made me feel bad for a bit. Like I was breaking some bodega code of honor. But seriously, who puts the batteries out in the open like that? They were asking for it, really.

When it was time, Rosa came into the store with me. She was the awkward decoy, while I headed to the spot. I couldn’t stop thinking of my Nonno though. I kept picturing myself as that dumb, little kid, with my head barely sticking up from behind the counter.

It messed me up for a bit, but then something caught my eye. I grabbed it and shoved it in my bag without anymore hesitation. Like I said, pretty easy.

We bolted to the meet-up spot behind the store, where Sophie was hovering with her friends. Rosa looked like she was gonna puke, but she’d be alright. Before Sophie could say anything obnoxious, I walked straight up to her and slapped the goods in her hand.

A look of total confusion came over Sophie’s face. It was priceless. Finally she said, “What the hell is this?!”

“What does it look like?” I snapped back, as sarcastically as I could muster. “It’s chapstick. I figured you’d need it, ‘cause you can *kiss* my ass!”

With that being said, I just turned and walked away. I could barely hear all the nervous giggles over the loud “Yuck, yuck, yuck!” right behind me.