

## VEGETABLE VANDALISM

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[Assignment: Describe an experience in your life when you betrayed your better feelings or beliefs by acting under pressure of others' expectations. Carefully select those details which will allow the reader to share your experience.]

(1) A deep blue sky; a dash of puffy white clouds skimming over the little country town nestled in the grassy countryside--this was the scene on that deceptively pleasant summer day.

(2) My younger brother and I finished our vegetables and asked for permission to go outside and play. My mom carefully scrutinized our plates and granted our requests. At that instant, we bolted for the door and flung ourselves into the balmy outdoors. Squinting a little at first, I led the way across the yard to the gravel road. Stopping at the usual place, we loaded our pockets with round river rocks for slingshot ammunition. This done, we proceeded to crawl on our bellies under the rusty barbed wire fence surrounding Farmer Brook's land. Bounding for a few yards through the tall grass, we reached our big scraggly friend, the old elm tree. Up the tree we scurried like nimble squirrels to our special branches. Here we usually passed the days catching busy black ants and grasshoppers, shooting our slingshots, or acting out whatever make-believe the day created. Soon we were joined by our sulking neighbor friend, Bobby Jo.

(3) "What yah pout'n about?" I asked curiously.  
"Mommy made me eat all my tomatoes," she blurted out bitterly.  
"I hate tomatoes," said I in an attempt to make things better.

(4) Just then Bobby Jo's eyes lit up with fire. I knew the tempter had planted a devious idea in her head. With my brother and me now claiming to be ardent tomato haters, Bobby Jo put it to us.

(5) "If you really hate tomatoes," she decreed,  
"you'll help me smash my dad's tomato patch!"

(6) My better instincts sensed a spanking in the making, but such a dare coming from a girl left me no choice but to join her in the mission. My brother and I descended from our lofty perches and marched off behind Bobby Jo toward the beckoning tomato patch. Under Farmer Brook's rusty fence, across the gravel road, along the hedgerow, we stealthily approached our quarry.

(7) Now, standing at the edge of the tomato patch, I examined more carefully than usual the neat rows of large, healthy, viny tomato plants, each carefully propped up with a sturdy stake. The plump green tomatoes

hung everywhere, some heavy tomatoes resting on the freshly tilled earth. A sharp, viny smell was pleasantly stinging my nose, when suddenly my head buzzed with feelings of guilt. It was an unforgivable sin to destroy any plant in my dad's garden, but I rationalized, to appease my anxiety, that this was all Bobby Jo's idea, so, rightfully, the blame rested on her shoulders.

(8) As quickly as the stupor came, it left, and was slowly replaced by a hot, pulsating throb in my chest brought by the sweet idea of my revenge on vegetables. Into the patch we tore, destroying the larger ones first. The slimy seeds and broken tomatoes made a sharp smell that cleared the foggy cloud of guilt from my head. More euphoric now; we hurled the tomatoes at each other, our confidence growing with each tomato kill. My adrenaline pumped furiously; this had to be the perfect task. I was lost in ecstasy destroying these tormentors of the dinner table. Higher and higher my spirit climbed, the world spinning around me in an illusion of destroyed tomatoes and Bobby Jo's face. I dug my fingers into a cursed . . .

(9) "BOBBY JO NELSON!" someone screamed.

(10) Paralyzed, my heart sank fathoms as it slowly turned to stone. Looking up I saw Bobby Jo's red-faced, tight-lipped mom storming right at us. Jerking Bobby Jo into the house, she uttered dreadfully, "I'm calling your mom!" At this, my little brother tore home in a crying, blubbering mess leaving me alone with my agony. Wishing I had never lived, I wandered to the old elm tree, kicking the ground all the way, as visions of mom's switch loomed ominously in my head; I could not go home. There I played in the tree trying to forget what happened. But whenever I reached a state of tranquility, visions of the decimated patch and my mom's switch shattered the temporary peace. I dreamed, as I often did, of growing wings and flying across the sky to Grandma's house where there was an unlimited supply of candy and cookies.

(11) After I had whiled away the afternoon hours, my sister Denise came out to play. She told me that mom had a candy bar for me. At first, this new situation seemed precariously strange, but passing any chance of getting a candy bar would be ludicrous. The uncontrollable urge to have my own candy bar strangled my sense of better judgment. Forgetting my crime and my agony, I raced to the house, anxious to receive my unexpected reward. With ease I navigated the front door, motored up the stairs and came sliding to a stop in the kitchen. Suddenly an eerie feeling crept through my body; I had taken the bait. From the corner of my eye, I saw mom approaching me. She was gripping an object too large to be a candy bar.