

Flawless

A Sew Powerful Parable by Dana Buck

The cobblestones are gleaming wet
From an early morning rain
Overhead's the rhythmic clatter
Of the elevated train

The sidewalk's lined with sandwich boards
Each striving to declare
That here you'll find a grocer
Tailor, watch or shoe repair

And just beyond the butcher shop
You see the yellow door?
It marks the small emporium
That's Rothman's Jewelry Store

Dawn is peeking through the windows
Around each half drawn shade
Casting dusty beams of sunlight on
The silver, gold and jade

Old buffed and polished oaken floors
Host displays of wood and brass
Both inviting and protective
Where small locks guard doors of glass

On beds of soft black velvet
Enthroned like kings and queens
Lie necklaces and pendants
Broaches, bracelets, pins and rings

Here countless gems have traded hands
For sweethearts, wives and mothers
Purchased by a countless stream of
Husbands, beaux and brothers

And all transactions large and small
All lay-a-ways and buys
Each sale of jewelry has transpired
Under old man Rothman's eyes

Those eyes are slowly dimming now
The same with what he hears
Yet every day he's where he's been
For forty seven years

In suit and vest, a tie to match
His footsteps rise and drop
As he descends the narrow stairs
From his room above the shop

The window shades rise one by one
As the new day is exposed
He unlocks the door and flips the sign
Replacing open for closed

Then he tucks a rose in his lapel
At exactly nine oh three
And awaits the day's first customers
While he enjoys a cup of tea

The displays around the jewelry store
Are positively jammed
With gems acquired in Singapore
Hong Kong and Amsterdam

And upon each case, a lettered sign
White with crimson trim
Informs the reader as to what
Appears for sale within

Here emeralds and diamonds
And amethysts are sold
While across the floor is topaz
Rubies, platinum and gold

But there's one case unlike the rest
In back, and to the right
When the Jeweler shines this furniture
He does so with awed delight

For the wood is deep mahogany
Carved and tooled by hand
The hinges, lock and metal clasp
Forged expertly and grand

The velvet holds no dust or lint
Perfectly squared and leveled
The translucent beauty of the glass
Is etched and deeply beveled

But what makes this case unique within
This shop so dignified?
It's the emptiness that's so distinct
For no jewelry rests inside

No sapphires, no garnets, no emeralds
No onyx, no tourmaline
No diamonds, no rubies, no opals, no turquoise
No topaz, no aquamarine

The reason for the absent gems
Is simple to define
The vacancy, caused by the single word
Printed on this case's sign

This word defines the criteria
By which gems may be here displayed
That single word is "flawless"
And no stone has yet made this grade

This case has sat empty for decades
Barren as an unused church
Placed here by old man Rothman
The symbol of his life-long search

For over all his many decades
Ten thousand gems he's scrutinized
Not one has met this standard
Under his firm and discerning eye

As to flaws, he knows their signature
How they hide within the gleam
Some subtle, barely visible
Others clear and plainly seen

These imperfections can't be altered
Erased or now abated
For they're birthed within the very core
From the time the stone's created

He's known gems that featured hundreds
And others with barely a trace
But whether one or one hundred thousand
None can enter the flawless case

And yet the jeweler, gem by gem
Continues his pursuit
He's searching for perfection
In a quest that has borne him no fruit

But today his thoughts are elsewhere
Bringing pleasure as they run
As he joyfully anticipates
The return of his only son

He's completed a journey of study
To places both far and wide
His Father, tracking his odyssey
On a map he keeps at his side

It's filled with stars and circles
With notes and commenting lines
From one end of the earth to the other
Capturing passion, commitment and time

He has traveled the world seeking knowledge
Studying gems both precious and rare
His authority now is unchallenged
His reputation beyond all compare

And his father, as proud as a peacock
Sometimes can scarcely believe
He's about to realize a dream
He has sought his whole life to achieve

For the son will step in with the father
Long ago they established this plan
When he left he was just beyond boyhood
He now returns an accomplished young man

Then suddenly pulled from his reverie
By the sound of the bell 'ore the door
His son steps in from the sidewalk
And with arms wide he crosses the floor

Now a hug and emotional welcome
Then his son hangs his jacket and hat
As Rothman refreshes the teapot
They lean on the counter and chat

For hours they talk of his travels
His studies, his many degrees
Occasionally serving a customer
Then resuming their talk over tea

So the shadows grow long as the evening
Descends on the shop like a blind
Then the son casts his eyes to the corner
And the case with the old "flawless" sign

"I see it still sits cold and empty"
As he moves close beside the display
Its beauty just as he'd remembered
Its futility firmly conveyed

He picks up the sign on the cover
And smiling he fingers the word
This unyielding, exacting requirement
And the isolation its meaning's assured

"When I opened this shop I was your age"
Said his Father behind tired eyes
"That sign represented my values"
"My commitment to not compromise"

“My desire was to deal in perfection”
“Without blemish or error or flaw”
“What I found was decidedly different”
As his voice became quiet and raw

“My work is concluding in failure”
“As that case everyday lets me know”
“In these stones there’s no sign of perfection”
“And I fear it will always be so”

As his words trailed off into silence
His son put the sign back in place
And stepped over to embrace his father
Then he spoke with a smile on his face

“It’s true that to look for perfection”
“Is a quest that is futile and drab”
“The only gems that will ever be flawless”
“Are fake and produced in a lab”

“If I’ve learned anything in my studies”
“The education you bade me to seek”
“It’s every stone carries some imperfection”
“That’s what makes them each rare and unique”

“The key is to look for the beauty”
“And forgive when a blemish is showing”
“Judge the gems with a grace filled perspective”
“And that case will be soon overflowing”

They locked eyes and then nodded together
And both knew a new thing had begun
The standard upheld by the Father
Realized through the work of the son

Then Rothman and son walked together
To that case in the back of the store
With a laugh they removed the old signage
Took a key and unlocked the glass door