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A Subtle Change in the Flowers

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A Subtle Change in the Flowers

Insanity snuck up on him like the sun surprising a sleeping island. As far as he knew, nothing had changed. He was buying lillies for his wife, Lily, when he realized he couldn't—there was something menacing in their whiteness. It was like they were hiding something terrible inside, something fundamentally destructive but attractive, like the sirens. He heard one, indignantly screaming in the distance, enraged by one more injustice. It had interrupted his thoughts, but not his actions evidenced by the lillies on the floor, flattened and torn around his feet. The clerk was looking at him strangely. He apologized and made some vague excuse about a bee, paid for the originals and sheepishly asked for some more.

While he was waiting he noticed the array of beautiful arrangements and thought about how each one was intended for a different person. He was thinking about naming them when the cashier returned with the new bouquet. Once she brought them, though, the same fears roared through him. He found himself sprinting out of the shop and down the street leaving her with a bewildered expression partially covered by her long, blonde hair. He ran until he came to an older woman trying to sell sickly looking flowers to the stream of people out of which he had just flowed. Between gasps for breath he asked her if she was doing much business. She said she hadn't been but that was the way it had been for years and, somehow, she always managed to get by. He studied her, decaying with her flowers, by the road and felt sorry she was going to die that way. He thought he should do something, so he scouted around and, being careful to avoid the lillies, decided on some limp looking tulips.

He paid her and walked away feeling he had done something right. He looked down, examined his purchase and realized how much he hated Tulip. She was a woman, a few years older than he was, who worked in his office. She was only the next pay-scale up but acted as if the difference were five. She had this transparent, twisted smile like melted glass which she was always flashing at him. She squinted too.

It was like she was a crocodile that had just devoured his mother, mocking him with her long, thin eyes and smug grin. She was taller than he was and had a voice like a pig's seconds before slaughter. He really hated tulips. He was glaring at the pathetic things and pictured them withering in the flames of his hatred. As the last embers died in his mind he realized he was still in the flower shop paying for the roses he was going to take to his wife. She was like a flower herself: delicate, soft like the silken petals and fragrant. He knew she loved roses. He wondered how long he had been standing there and what he had been doing. The clerk acted as if nothing was wrong and continued to ring up the flowers. She said it would be fifty four dollars and smiled to him quite innocently. He paid her and walked from the shop wondering what just had happened. On the way to the car, he thought it could have been a flashback from an acid trip. That would have been strange, however, as he hadn't had one in over five years. Maybe, it had just been a disturbing daydream. He knew dreaming occurred very rapidly, maybe he had, somehow, briefly dozed off. He didn't know and decided it was either the latter or he was going crazy.

He continued walking toward his car when he realized he hadn't driven, his wife had wanted the car and, even though he needed it for work, he had given it to her and caught a bus. He had never been able to say no. She had this way of pressing herself into him which prohibited the word. She would gently grind into his groin slowly working up him up till he thought he would explode and then stop. He usually held out past that point but as she continued to stroke him his resolve would erode with every wave of pleasure. As she stood there close he could smell her too—humid, warm, wet like some exotic tropical plant. Between his rising excitement and the feel and smell of her body it was only a matter of how long he would try to hold out. Sometimes, if he proved especially resistant she would start brushing her lips against his neck and would kiss him lightly on and around his quivering lips. She always got what she wanted though.

He realized that his reverie excited him nearly as much as she did and flushed as he noticed the curious gaze of the girl sitting inches away from his erection. She looked to be about sixteen and startled

him as she looked up and smiled. He quickly turned away and hoped, when they had a daughter, that she wasn't like that.

On the walk to his house he felt strangely nervous as if he were still dating and was bringing her her first bouquet. On a whim, he decided to go with the feeling and, instead of walking in, stood outside and rang the bell. He waited, rocking from his heels to his toes, thinking of the night to come and rang the bell again but she didn't answer. He guessed she was napping upstairs, she had been feeling tired lately. Walking in, he was sure to be quiet as he removed his shoes and hung his coat up, careful not to rattle the hangers. He crept upstairs and gently pushed open the bedroom door, wincing as it squeaked. She was lying in the bed, motionless under the covers, and he walked over to her rotting corpse as the rose thorns pushed through his skin and soaked her yellowed wedding dress with blood.

"Hi Rose", he said.

"I brought you flowers". He grinned broadly. "You know, I had the strangest day today..."

The clerk stared hard at him and slowly left the register. He stood in the flower shop, addressing his comments to nothing in particular. She hurried off to find a phone as he smiled and nodded at the various arrangements placed throughout the store.

Zach Smith