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In the Flowers: A Novella in Progress

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It's funny how you remember insignificant details from traumatizing events. It's the shining dew on the dahlia blossoms or the spiderwebs tickling my arms as I hauled the wagon deeper into the field. It's the peanut butter hovering in the back of my throat. It's rare that the memory of her body resting in the mud as gently as if she were sleeping sneaks up on me. The smell of death and rot stays with you, you know. It's made up of eight hundred different chemicals. It's distinctly sweet. Your body instinctively knows what it is. Smell is deeply connected to memory.

The smell of rotting wood brings me back to the back porch of the house I lived in for the last few years of undergrad, before I moved east. It was a big house, probably a hundred years old, squeezed onto a too-small plot of land on the corner of Daw and Jefferson. There was no driveway, only a steep, narrow brick stairway leading to the front door. I was always having to park a block down the street. The front door was maroon, a choice on the landlord's part I judged heavily in tandem with the fading yellow siding, and it was set with a frosted glass window shaped like a crescent moon. My key—everyone's key, actually—was janky and didn't fit properly in the lock. It was common to hear some unlucky renter fighting with the lock while you stood in the kitchen, heating canned soup or fidgeting with the magnetic poetry kits on the refrigerator.

*we are belligerent ly drunk girl s
sand between y our toes
meditate about my as s*

I lived on the top floor, the third floor, and I towered over the rest of the neighborhood. My room—I gradually made it feel like my own over the few years I was there. I liked to bring home sad-looking plants from work that we couldn't sell and nurse them back to health, and they eventually grew out of my room and took over the house. Who was living at the house was an ever-changing affair. There were six or seven bedrooms, I think, and someone was always moving in, moving out, subletting for the quarter, letting their partner move in—such is the nature of a cheap, huge house near a college. That house reminded me of the dollhouses that fold apart to show their insides, like cracking open a ribcage to look at the organs inside.

I broke my housing contract in the spring of my freshman year, and I told Addison it was because the mold made me sick and I hated the communal showers—I don't know if she ever quite believed that. She'd been so excited to live together.

But, if there's one thing I hate in this world, it's a goddamn only child. I've never met one who's normal. Well-adjusted. Not self-absorbed. I have a theory that being an only child messes you up psychologically. Because of the nuclear family structure, only children don't learn how to share and aren't socialized as well with their peers when they're young. I've known only children with good parents and bad parents, but despite that, they think everything is always for and about them, and that's why I started getting sick of Addison, but that wasn't the straw that broke the camel's back. What I credit is Kylie.

Of course, Kylie and I weren't on bad terms at that point. I'd chosen to forgive her – mostly because that's what Addison told me I should do—so, technically, we were still friends. But, she and Addison had always been closer than I'd been with either of them. Addison was always inviting her to visit us every couple weekends, or Addison would drive upstate to Kylie's college to visit her. That winter, when I started working weekends at the plant nursery, was when I started looking at other places to live.

I got hired at Russo's in the middle of January, mostly to transplant seedlings, and I worked from just after sunrise to after it was dark outside. Candace had hired me on the spot. Working weekends and still trying to party seemed ridiculous to me, so I would stay in and sleep. Addison and Kylie would always go out and hunt for a party when Kylie visited, and they'd stumble back into the room a few hours before my alarm would go off for work and—always—turn on the overhead light, and talk and laugh while they stripped off their layers of cakey foundation. There's a reason that sleep deprivation is a method of torture—it's because it's fucking torturous.

At the time, I thought they just didn't understand how upset that made me. Now, I think they just didn't care.

So I moved out.

The dorm was more to Addison's taste anyways. She'd insisted on a navy, maroon, and white color scheme that made our room look like someone had eaten the American flag and regurgitated it. I think she liked the frantic environment of dorm life. Someone was always crying or arguing. Addison managed to worm her way into the periphery of some of the different friend groups in our building but she was never in the center—she was too attached to Kylie to let herself enter the masses like that.

Candace stared at me blankly, her dyed brown hair washing out her complexion. "What do you expect me to do about that?"

"Don't you know how to fix the damn thing?" I hissed. "We have eight people in line. We need both registers."

She rolled her eyes and barged into the store, and I abandoned the teenagers running the front to her rage. Candace wasn't really as aggressive as she sometimes seemed—only passive aggressive. Her tall, stocky frame tended to intimidate my newer coworkers, and I was convinced that the newest one, yet another college student Candace had hired on what she referred to as *pure gut instinct*, had done something to screw the register up.

I wandered into the greenhouse, the nice one, to pretend to check on things. Ruby was offloading plants into an empty spot, her freshly short haircut swirling around her chin. "Is Candace being a bitch to you too today?" she asked drily.

There were a few customers scattered about the building so I stepped closer to her and lowered my voice. "I don't know? She acted irritated when I asked her to fix the register."

Ruby chuckled. "Did Jameson manage to fuck it up again?"

I sighed. "I swear to God, he must be messing with the settings or unplugging cords or something. I just want to catch him doing something so Candace will *have* to get rid of him."

"Why would Candace want to get rid of her eye candy?"

"You are *disgusting*."

Ruby jammed one last plant onto the table. "I'm not saying I agree with her. Candace is weird about some things."

After work that day, I showered—relaxed, at first, and then frantic when I realized I had somewhere to be—and I drove to Addison’s apartment and sprawled out on her bedroom floor, carpet littered with hairs and bits of lint you could only see from up close.

“Rebekah, I’m bored.” Addison was slumped back in her desk chair, swiveling back and forth. “Tell me something interesting.”

“Why don’t we go downtown and get dinner, or something?” I asked, exasperated. “I haven’t eaten yet.”

“I don’t wanna eat.” Addison turned away from me and I watched her scraggly ponytail hang over the back of the chair. “I’m just bored.”

“Nothing interesting happens to me. I go to work and I come home. You don’t know anyone I work with.”

She let out a long sigh. “Whatever. Kylie’s going to be here soon.”

I picked at a piece of the carpet that was coming undone. “Oh.”

“I was thinking we could all get drunk and watch *Dance Moms*. Like we used to in high school.”

“Your roommates are in the living room, though.”

“They can just go back to their rooms.” Addison was wearing the same leggings she wore probably multiple times a week, dark gray camouflage.

“If Kylie’s coming, I don’t think I should stay. She’s driving an hour and a half one way. You two might as well enjoy your time together.”

“Oh my God, Rebekah,” Addison said, little emotion in her voice. “It’s not a big deal. You’re being so dramatic.”

“I don’t want to see her.”

“Literally just think about the good times we all had together.”

I thought back to when Kylie sat behind me at a dinner for the track team in high school and wouldn’t stop throwing croutons at me. “No. I’m leaving.” I shoved myself up off the carpet, brushing the debris Addison failed to vacuum from my shirt. “You two have fun.”

Addison stood from her chair to follow me to the front door. “You literally forgave her. It’s fine. There doesn’t need to be any beef.”

I gritted my teeth. “I’m. Leaving.” I pulled the front door open and stepped out into the humidity, worse than usual for a June evening. The apartment was on the third or fourth floor, and I hurried down the stairs—no sense in taking my time. As I got to my car, I watched Kylie’s red SUV pull in a few spots down, and I smashed the unlock button on my fob and practically fell into my car. I shoved the key into the ignition. The air conditioner kicked on, blowing hot air into my face, and Kylie exited her car and headed up the stairs to Addison’s.