

To See the Dahlias Again (Excerpt)

Out of the many questions man has ventured to the depths of the world to solve, there are simple questions to which the answers remain elusive. I ask, for example, what is the smell of love? Is it the crisp breeze of the oncoming fall as we sit outside together, steaming mugs of cinnamon and sweetness in our hands? How about the cedar birds that adorn our home, furnished by your peonies and daffodils that waft a citrus scent that flavor our life? Or perhaps it is you, blanketed by the flowery smell of dirt and fruit, basking in the heat of the fireplace, a short pause from the garden that demanded your attention outside?

As you get up to leave once more, I do not follow. Instead, I pick up my tools and enter the study, taking a seat by the window. I let my hands shape the wood to whatever they desire, but my attention is elsewhere. It always is when you are around. You do not know that this is my favorite place within our home, and I will not tell you. Because how would I tell you that only through this windowsill can I see the image of your bustling figure tending to the rows of flowers, cultivating the beauty of nature with a happiness that no one else could compare? How would I tell you that this windowsill serves as a vantage point to view the most beautiful sight of the world: your dirt-caked face surrounded by the labors of your love, red and blue and yellow and purple flowers dancing around you as if basking in your joy? Working at the wood shop is wonderful, but the most precious moment of my day only occurs after, when I come home to see you among the colors of joy and happiness that you've reared.

But one day I came home to a garden missing your warmth. Instead I found you bent over the kitchen sink, hacking your lungs as a river of pain poured from your throat. You turned around as the chime of the door signaled my arrival, a weak smile on your lips.

"I'm fine," you said, wiping at your mouth with the back of your hand.

Pulling out a handkerchief, I walked over to meet you at the kitchen, dabbing at the sweat and grime coating your face. You continued.

“It’s not that serious—”

“When did this start?”

A moment of silence stood between us, the mask of assurance slipping as the seconds ticked away. I coaxed you into my arms, your head nestling into my shoulder.

“Last Monday.”