

*The Flower Shop*

"Can I help you find anything today, ma'am?"

Eva shifted her eyes quickly from the window down to the array of flowers before her and then back up, meeting the gaze of the shop associate now standing a few steps away. She glanced at the bright green nametag on his collared shirt: AVERY was printed in bold across the shiny plastic surface.

"No, but thank you Avery. I'm just trying to decide between these tulips here but I'm almost done," she replied.

Avery smiled at the use of his name before explaining that he would be over at the register if she happened to need any assistance at all. Her lips curved up to return the sentiment and she nodded her head in understanding.

As she listened to Avery walk away, Eva gently traced a few petals with her fingers. Her hand slid freely along the buds and she resumed staring at the scene outside the window across the street. It was a mother and her daughter; presumably so because of their identical auburn, wavy hair and matching dark suede jackets. The pair were snuggled close together on a small bench enjoying a round of ice-cream cones.

Eva shook her head as if trying to collect herself. She had already decided on yellow before even touching a single tulip. Yellow was Emma's favorite color and not a day had gone by that she didn't remind Eva of that very fact.

"It's everywhere, Momma. Yellow makes me happy 'cause it reminds me of sunshine."

A few fresh tears rolled slowly down her dewy cheeks as Eva finally selected the brightest yellow bouquet from the display and brought it up close to her nose. The sweet scent wafted around her and she generously took all of it in. For six years without fail, since her very first birthday, Emma had received a bouquet of yellow tulips from Eva, who always made sure they stayed beautiful and strong blossoming in their own secret backyard garden. Emma was in love with this little project, so much so that when she began at pre-school she would be in a rush to get back home and check on her “yellow tees”. Emma had had such a difficult time pronouncing “tulip” at first that she started using “tee” and then the name just ended up sticking like glue.

Eva softly chuckled remembering her cute mispronunciations of the flower’s name. She lowered the bouquet and swiftly wiped the drops still moistening her face before making her way to the check stand.

“Good choice! These ones here look especially yellow,” Avery said as he scanned the arrangement.

Eva’s eyes met his and she delivered the most genuine smile she could manage.

“I thought so, too. They’re for my daughter, it’s her birthday today.”

“Isn’t that nice. How old is she turning?”

“S-s-,” Eva whispered, almost choking on the word, but hastily regained her composure.

“Seven,” she corrected firmly.

Avery was still smiling as he collected her cash and produced the proper change. As Eva began to walk away he called after her.

“Have a good one! Give your girl a happy birthday from me!”

Eva waved back on her way out the door. She clutched the tulips close to her chest and headed for the cemetery.