

Alina Duran, Age 16

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Before the tulips wilt

The late afternoon of September 17th in chilly San Francisco, "Doesn't it look so beautiful," I said, "with the delicate flowers laying beside your face?" I asked while lying next to the grave of whom I'd once promised to give my all to. The promise that was not lived up to. My responsibility as her fiance was to respect and care for my late wife. Because during the last few months in our relationship, I had shown nothing but neglect towards her, she grew into a depression and in the last letter she wrote described as "living in a dark abyss". I have faults, I won't deny, and like many others, I have regrets. I stayed for a while with Rosemary, making sure that I left the face of her grave looking half as pretty as she used to look, looking effortlessly radiant with hazel eyes that sparkled so beautifully when the sun had shone and with long black hair that would flow in the cool breeze.

In the early morning of April 25th, a couple years ago, I had decided to stop at a flower shop before heading to my office at News&More as a journalist because I had been laid the night before and wanted to say my last thank-you's to my co-workers whom I've spent most of the last 13 years with. An occurrence I could not seem to understand as I had been quite devoted to that career.

"Hey Demain!" Said the florist who was trimming the ends of some flowers.

"Hey, it's been a while since I last stopped by " I said as I stepped into the shop and beside the fresh-cut Asters I had seen the most lovely smile caused by a bouquet of yellow tulips mixed in with the subtle array of baby's breath. Since surrounded by many flowers, a butterfly happened to rest on the crown of her head and that's when I knew I was given the chance to introduce myself. Upon getting to know her, I'd come to realize that she didn't have a single bad bone in her body. Since the day that greatly affected my life, on her birthday each year, I'd give her the best bouquet of yellow tulips I could find as each year the set I gave her would wilt too quickly. As the sun began to set after staying with Rosemary for a short while, I began packing to head back home and before heading to my car I placed another bouquet of yellow tulips resting beside her tombstone along with a note to better express what I thought I felt which was nothing more than guilt.

The next morning I went over to my sister, Vanessa's house to make some pancakes. "Hey stranger! It's been a long time since you'd last stopped by my goodness." She had said as she excitedly greeted me at the front door. Once I got situated and put down my belongings on a counter, I set out the kitchen table with some napkins, cutlery, and some sauces we would put on the pancakes.

I happened to meet Rosemary the day I had gotten fired and my best and worst decision will be having ever stepped foot in the flower shop. My best for meeting Rose and the worst for her meeting me. If only she had fallen in love with someone else to protect and cherish her for the loving person she was. I had been so heartbroken with my job I began to feel lost, Though when meeting Rose, She and I felt a spark. I had failed to acknowledge her attempt to make our relationship work in the last year we spent together.

After eating breakfast, Vanessa hurriedly rushed to work as she realized she was running late. I planned to stay a while more at the house to clean up the kitchen as we left unwashed dishes with batter and butter laying out on the counters. Leaving only some plates unwashed, I looked out the window placed above the kitchen sink where the sky had looked as beautiful as Rose had captured in her paintings she'd created almost every evening at sunset and that's when she appeared again. I heard the voice. "Are you ignoring me again?"

I heard Rosemary say in a pitiful tone.

Setting down a dish cloth, I turned around to see her sitting down with a strawberry resting in her palm though she had no intention to eat any. Her face still glowing, eyes glimmering, wearing the classic yellow wool sweater paired with a long floral skirt reaching down to her ankles matching with the gold butterfly necklace she always refuses to take off. She always wears them now. Though I knew she had passed long ago, she is still a figment to my imagination.

"I wasn't ignoring you, I just didn't realize you were here yet". "I see you're still refusing to give up your necklace".

"As long as it's not broken or chipped, I'll continue wearing it". Said in a snarky tone. I had then come to the realization, "wait, what are you doing here, you don't usually appear in the mornings".

"Had trouble sleeping," she said jokingly.

Some more time had passed now with Rose so I figured I better head home. I grabbed my belongings and locked the door on my way out. It was now the next day and I got up for morning coffee. Out of habit, I mindlessly filled boxes with items I thought to be junk and placed them in my car. When cleaning a drawer I figured to be empty, I came upon Rose's belongings which had paintings, journals, and letters.

"I see you found my art pieces". Sneaking up from behind there she was again.

"You were the most talented person I'd met." I said aloud. "If only I had appreciated that talent while you were still here." I thought. At first glance, I took notice of the missing necklace. Her "... " had notably changed into a way I couldn't seem to comprehend.

"How come you didn't wear your necklace today, I thought you loved it?" Asked with more concern rather than curiosity.

"A reason you'll soon come to understand".

With a perplexed look on my face, though kindly brushing it off, it simultaneously lingered in my mind.

More days have passed and I have grown worried about the idea of becoming employed again. Based on past regrets, rather than believing I have to be employed to be considered "successful", I would rather take the time I have now to reflect on myself and to clear my thoughts.

Today is now the 21st of September. The weather has only grown colder which seems to fit the gloomy mood. Today is the third anniversary of me and Rose's relationship and I figured it would be best to visit Rose once again. Getting out of the car, I was holding another bouquet of the yellow flowers and a small red velvet box and inside it contained the exact gold butterfly necklace she loved so dearly. While walking up to the grave, something caught my eye. The same yellow flowers I had placed days before were still there in the same spot. The same purple ribbon. The flowers are still fresh. I set out a blanket and laid there while sharing my thoughts with her. Months went by where I

spoke with Rose but concealed my true emotions. The clouds began drifting away and the sun shone once again creating a beautiful reflection along a river that was across the bridge not far from where I lay. While spending my time there, laughs and tears were shed. After about an hour had gone by I once again folded my blanket and packed more of my belongings. I had said goodbye to Rose as I began walking away and heading back to my car.

Just as I was about to open the door to the car, I spotted the most beautiful pair of wings that had reflected off the sun's rays. It was a white butterfly and it slowly started flying around the crown of my head. "What goes around comes around I suppose" said with a slight chuckle and a smile. Now with all boxes packed with my necessities, and a sense of relief with no more weight on my shoulders, I drove. I drove so far until I reached a sign saying "Welcome to Santa Cruz". I knew this would be my last time seeing Rose as if she were there. I always knew that that city was the only place I'd see her. The guilt in letting her pass in a lonely way was holding me back from leaving and after spending time grieving and working up the courage to say my farewells. "Love you 'til forever and always". I said as I drove past the lake where we planned to hold our wedding. " 'Til forever and always."