

Daisies

Matt shivered as he started his walk down his usual route. It was always the same: he'd walk downtown and stroll through one of the neighborhoods and take a shortcut to a backroad that led to his destination. It was early spring, so the weather was still a bit chilly, but the trees were all wonderful shades of green, and flowers were blooming all over the place. It was a sight to behold.

He looked down as he walked, trying to avoid eye contact as he passed all the shops. It was a busy Saturday morning, around eleven, so there were couples swinging their hands as they walked, groups of friends laughing and buying ice cream, and mothers taking their children out for the day. There was a generally happy atmosphere, and it made Matt walk with a small smile on his face.

"It's spring! Many lovely flowers in season! We have carnations! We have tulips! We have lilies!" Matt raised his head to the projecting yet gentle voice of the small-town florist. He had set up a nice little booth as a celebration of the beginning of springtime, and his smiling wife, not unlike all the other shop owners, had opened the doors so everyone could see into the shop. Matt's smile grew slightly. He'd always loved flowers. He accidentally made eye contact with the owner, who grinned at him widely.

"Good morning! Lovely day! Is there anyone special in your life, good sir?" Matt's eyes widened and he looked down.

"Erm, um... n-not really, thank you sir." The florist's expression remained pleasant as ever.

"Anyone you would like to be? I'm sure they'd appreciate some beautiful fresh roses--"

"I'm good for today, thank you though." Matt

smiled politely at the man. He nodded, and the kind grin never left his face.

"Maybe another time. Have a nice day!"

Maybe I should have, Matt thought to himself as he reached the end of the boulevard, turning to cut through the neighborhood. *Maybe if they'd had daisies...*

As Matt reached the old road behind the nice little neighborhood, he passed a house that caught his eye. It was pastel yellow, with little white windowpanes and flowerbeds. It was the flowerbeds that caught his attention; although they were nowhere near as diverse as the flower shop he'd passed earlier, it was almost more beautiful, in a wild and free-spirited sort of way. The flowers, albeit well-kempt and trimmed, grew all over the place. The begonias mixed with the tulips, and the buttercups were complimenting the violets. There weren't only flowerbeds, either; there were pots hanging from the porch with the kinds of flowers that drooped like a willow tree, and there were small flower beds on each and every windowsill. It was a beautiful mess, which was something Matt could appreciate.

He was about to pass when he noticed something that rendered him unable to move.

Daisies. Pure, plain, white daisies.

They were on the left side of the sidewalk leading to the door and were concentrated in a certain area before branching out and mixing with their gerbera counterparts. He considered for a moment. *It will only be a few,* he thought. *They won't miss them.*

Cautiously, Matt edged toward the daisies, careful not to step on any of the wildflowers that grew in patches in front of the flowerbeds. His feet planted firmly on the bright green grass, Matt leaned forward and plucked the daisies. First one, then four, then six. He decided that was enough, then slowly stepped back from the still plentiful bunch of flowers, then smiled proudly down at his small bouquet. This would do.

Content with his freely acquired daisy bouquet, he set off between the next two houses and onto the road behind them and continued on his way.

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Patrick had a small skip in his step as he approached his front door, humming quietly as he walked inside and began gathering his supplies. As April was ending, May was beginning, and bringing many different types of flowers with it. He'd just bought, ironically, a packet of mayflower seeds, and was already excited to plant them. He didn't have much to do that day, anyway; his friend had cancelled their plans.

After gathering his supplies, Patrick set off to the garden, still mindlessly humming some acoustic tune he'd heard earlier in the day. His face scrunched up in thought as he debated where to plant them, before finally deciding that they could blend in with the wildflowers that had grown in front of his daisies. As he knelt to dig, he noticed something.

"My daisies!" He gasped, leaning forward to inspect them. Some of them were perfectly snipped at the base. Patrick tried to count how many were gone but couldn't keep track; at *least* fifteen of them had been cut, if you were counting the ones that had begun to regrow.

Patrick leaned back and frowned. Who had done this? It couldn't have been anyone that wanted to just pick a few, as they had clearly been snipped, not picked. After thinking about it for a minute, Patrick decided to let it go. It didn't really seem to affect the overall look of the flowers, and it was somewhat better for them to be snipped rather than wilted.

Still, Patrick thought to himself, *my flowers never wilt anyway.*

Slightly irritated and confused, but overall still in a good mood, Patrick continued to hum and plant his mayflowers.

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It had been three weeks since Patrick had found the daisies had been cut, and it was becoming increasingly annoying. He didn't mind *that* much, as whoever was doing this had the decency not to do it if they were looking sparse, and they always took care to never take more than a few. Still, it was irritating him. The worst part was that it was always the daisies; Patrick had many beautiful flowers to choose from, with every color of the rainbow, but it was always the daisies. Every single time.

Patrick didn't have much to do, and was mostly planning on having a lazy Saturday, so after getting dressed he'd made himself a cup of coffee and was contently gazing out of the window, humming a new tune and admiring his flowers. He'd attempted to make plans with family, but everyone had been busy. Everyone always seemed to be busy.

As he took a sip of his coffee, his eye caught a tall figure awkwardly approaching his house. He frowned and leaned forward, wondering if this was the daisy thief he was looking for. The tall man was wearing black *everything*: jeans, shoes, and shirt, along with a black denim jacket, and had a dark brown mop of curly hair and pale skin. Patrick watched intently as the tall boy, who looked to be in his mid-twenties, awkwardly stepped forward toward his flowerbeds and smiled, gazing down at Patrick's newly-bloomed pink roses (he found this slightly ironic due to the boy's dark attire), before finally reaching into his pocket for a small pair of sewing scissors, and leaning forward to snip the palest flowers out of the bunch: his daisies.

Patrick gasped, infuriated now that he'd caught the culprit. He watched, wildly offended, as the tall boy took careful measures not to step on his brand-new mayflowers and bit his lip in concentration, snipping away at his precious daisies. Patrick huffed as the boy carefully leaned backward as he finished, gathering the flowers into a small bouquet and smiling down at them, content, and began to turn around.

Patrick immediately ran toward his front door and stomped out on his front porch.

“Excuse me,” he called out. The Daisy Thief whipped around, red faced and guilty looking. “I was wondering who had been snipping my daisies.”

The boy looked downright horrified, alternating his gaze between the flowers in his hand and between Patrick’s stern expression, not knowing what to say.

“I—I—I’m so sorry, I—I just, I—” Patrick watched, amused, as the boy attempted to defend himself but came up short.

Patrick stared at him for a moment before sighing. There was no malice in stealing flowers, and although he wanted to pout about losing some of his favorites, he knew this boy meant no harm. But honestly, what could he possibly need to steal *flowers* for?

Maybe it’s a girl, Patrick thought. He tried his hardest not to huff. Of course, it would be a *girl*, everyone seems to have a *girl*. A *someone*.

“She must be very pretty.”

The spluttering boy shut up and looked at Patrick curiously.

“W—what?” He asked, confused.

“She’d better be pretty, anyway.” Patrick replied. “I’ll be quite upset if she isn’t pretty enough for you to be stealing my flowers. They’re for a girl, aren’t they?” Patrick watched as the Daisy Thief looked for a response, but ultimately came up short.

Any girl who is worth stealing flowers for had better be a damn model, Patrick thought bitterly. He stared at the Daisy Thief for a moment, considering him.

Patrick didn't know why he did it. Maybe it was because he wanted to know if the Daisy Thief – as he'd been calling him in his head – had a justified reason to steal his flowers. Maybe it was because it was a Saturday, and he had nothing better to do than stare out his window and daydream. Maybe it was because he was bored and alone yet again, and his Daisy Thief seemed interesting. Patrick didn't know why he did it, not really; he just knew that he wanted to, and so he did.

“Let's find out.”

The tall boy looked at Patrick with wide eyes as Patrick stepped toward him, gesturing toward the rest of the neighborhood to tell him to lead the way.

“I, um... it's not really... uh...”

“Look, I have to know if she's pretty enough to warrant flower theft. So let's find out.”

The boy stared at him for a moment with his mouth wide open before eventually deciding he had no choice and leading Patrick toward the alleyway between his neighbor's houses. Smirking, Patrick bounced along next to him, glad he'd found someone to spend the day with.

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Matt was appalled. Getting caught stealing flowers was one thing, but having to show the man *why* he'd been stealing them was an entirely different ordeal. He kept his eyes trained on the ground as he and the Flower Boy – as he'd been calling him in his head – walked in silence towards their destination. How was he supposed to tell him? What would his reaction be when he realized?

Flower Boy was nothing like what Matt had imagined. In fact, he hadn't imagined a boy at all; he wasn't entirely sure what exactly he *had* been expecting, but it definitely wasn't this. Flower Boy had dark skin and a short but round head of hair. He was tall, but probably about three or four inches shorter

than Matt (who stood at a smug six feet and three inches). He dressed in a mix of pastels and dark colors for contrast, and his jeans had dirt on the knees. Matt may not have been imagining anyone specific, but now that he was meeting Flower Boy in the flesh, he realized he'd at *least* been expecting an irritable old woman, not a prying young man with kind brown eyes.

"What's your name, Daisy Thief?" Flower Boy asked.

Matt glanced up awkwardly. Possibly the worst part of this situation was that he hadn't taken the daisies from him, so Matt had to continue to carry the stolen flowers as he walked down the long, broken road with the man from which he'd stolen them.

"Um... Mat-Matthew... Matt." He replied quietly. The man nodded.

"I'm Patrick, in case you were wondering." He said after a moment of silence.

"Right... N-nice to meet you, Patrick. I'm sorry I stole your flowers." He replied. Patrick smiled.

"S'alright. Let's just hope it was warranted." He teased. Matt didn't reply, so Patrick continued after a pause. "What's her name?"

Matt kept his eyes trained on the ground as he tried to think of a response. How did he say it? When should he say it?

"... Olivia." He answered finally.

Patrick hummed in approval. "*Is she pretty?*"

Matt clenched his teeth. "Yes."

Patrick glanced over at him, slightly confused by how short he was being.

"What's she like?" Patrick pressed.

Matt stopped walking for a moment, and Patrick frowned, looking at him in concern. He was just about to ask if he was okay when he spoke.

“Kind. Very kind. And clever.” He paused as he tried to think of how to word his next sentence. “She... she can... she listens... she... w-is...” He squeezed his eyes shut and took a deep breath, before releasing it and looking up, sending Patrick a very small smile.

“Bright. Very bright person.”

He didn’t say anything more, and Patrick didn’t ask. They walked for a few more minutes before Patrick began to grow impatient. He was about to question where this girl lived before Matt suddenly took a left and walked through a very large gate.

Curious, Patrick followed him through, and watched as he passed a tiny building with a security guard in it.

“Hello, Matt.” The guard smiled sadly at Matt, and Matt gave him a small smile in return.

“Hello, Gale.”

They continued past the building and Patrick began to look around. There weren’t many people there at all; in fact, the only ones they could see at first were a small family sitting around a gravestone.

A gravestone? Patrick thought. They were in a cemetery? Why had Matt gone to a cemetery?

Patrick frowned at Matt curiously as he led him on a path that curved through the many different gravestones and trees. Patrick’s thoughts raced as he tried to think of why they were here. Maybe it was a shortcut? Yes, that had to be it.

Patrick glanced around, trying to ignore the other idea of what they might be doing there as Matt led him off the path and toward a willow tree. He felt his stomach sink as he opened his mouth to ask, but all his suspicions were confirmed as he turned his head to find Matt kneeling at a gravestone.

Patrick watched in mild horror as Matt laid the daisies down at the grave and sat cross-legged in front of it. Patrick edged forward timidly and read the stone.

HERE LIES OLIVIA WALTERS

"ALWAYS TAKE THE TIME

TO STOP AND SMELL THE FLOWERS"

MARCH 3, 1995 - MAY 21, 2019

Matt glanced back at Patrick's feet without turning his head, biting his lip and looking back at the grave. Patrick watched helplessly. What was he supposed to do?

Matt took a deep breath and began to speak.

"Hello, Olivia."

Patrick immediately felt that he was intruding, but he didn't really know what else to do other than stand there and stare with his mouth hanging open.

"I've been okay. Mom has been missing you visiting with me. Caroline got married and I didn't have a date to the wedding. It was a very lovely affair. I think you would have had fun. Do you remember meeting Jack? I think you liked him. I liked him. I think he's good for my sister." It was quiet again for a moment.

“It’s been a year.” He spoke finally. His voice was weak, and by the slight turn of his head, Patrick knew he was speaking to him. “Exactly one year. She always had a vase of white daisies on the dining table, they were her favorites, that’s why I...” He trailed off, and Patrick nodded before remembering he couldn’t see him.

“I understand.” Patrick’s voice cracked. Matt nodded and was quiet again. Patrick took a deep breath, trying to keep his air steady.

“H-how... If you don’t mind my asking... did she pass away...?” He asked nervously.

Matt inhaled. “Pills.” He replied bluntly.

Patrick’s jaw dropped abruptly. “Oh.”

“Yeah. Oh.” It was quiet again for a moment.

“Was she your girlfriend?” Patrick asked.

Matt shook his head. “No. Childhood friend. My... my best friend.” Matt then turned back to Patrick.

“Do you mind if I...?” He gestured toward the gravestone and Patrick nodded vigorously, folding his hands behind his back.

“Of course! D-do you... do you want me to go?” He asked timidly.

Matt turned back to her grave and looked down, twiddling his fingers in his lap.

“You don’t *have* to stay here. But... but you can. If you want.”

Patrick hesitated, but finally took it as a request, and silently sat cross-legged where he stood, which was about a foot behind Matt. He exhaled in relief and addressed the grave again.

“It’s been a year.” He repeated, this time to the headstone. To Olivia. “Since you’ve left. I still visit your parents sometimes. They invite me to family gatherings that you used to take me to, like Easter and your brother’s birthday. I was scared for a while... that I was just replacing you... because no one could replace you. But they told me that it was different enough without you there, and that they couldn’t bear to lose me too. I’ve always liked your family, of course, so I don’t mind. My grandmother baked your favorite cookies on your birthday. We saved the one that was a little burnt at the edges for you ‘cause they were your favorites. Plus, they’re gross, I don’t know why you liked them,” he laughed. “It was like an unspoken rule. They miss you a lot.” Matt took a deep breath, and when he let it out, his body shuddered. Patrick felt his eyes watering. “I miss you a lot.” Matt’s voice cracked.

Patrick slowly pushed himself closer to Matt and tentatively held out his hand, placing it on his arm. Matt froze for a moment before relaxing, and Patrick was close enough to hear him sniff and watch the tears stream down his face and land on the daisies.

“I promised I would keep going. Even if you weren’t there with me, that I’d keep going. I’ve... I’ve finally moved out of our apartment. It hurt too much. It reminded me of you. I need to move on, just like you told me to. I will, Oli, I promise.” He broke down then, sobbing silently whilst staring down at the headstone. “I promise.”

Patrick watched as Matt took a big sniff and wiped his nose, not bothering to brush away the tears that he knew weren’t going to stop. He pushed the flowers closer to the headstone and put his hand on it, taking a deep breath to calm himself down.

“I love you, Oli. And I miss you. I’ll be okay. I promise.” He sighed. “Goodbye.”

Matt stood up and looked down, avoiding looking at Patrick for too long. There was pity in his eyes, a look Matt had grown used to at this point, but it seemed different this time. Patrick stood up, too.

"I'm sorry," Patrick whispered. "I didn't know."

"It's okay," Matt replied. "You couldn't have. And I shouldn't have taken them without asking."

Patrick shook his head. "Olivia is welcome to my daisies."

Matt looked up at him then, his eyes filling with tears again. This time, though, they were a different kind of tears. Patrick smiled sadly at him.

"Do you want some coffee, Matt? It's no trouble, I promise." Matt considered him for a moment, before mimicking his sad smile, the tears overflowing silently.

"I'd like that."

Patrick squeezed Matt's arm and began to lead him home, and when Matt looked back, he smiled.

He wouldn't need to steal them anymore.