

WHOOPSIE-DAISY

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The bell rings above my head as I walk through the wooden teal doorway. Early morning sun peeks through the window shutters, creating intricate patterns of light on the white tile floor. I gently tug on one of the blind strings and the shop is bathed in sunlight. The blossoming flowers bask in its radiance and their colours brighten. My keys still in hand, I unlock the till and check the cash register.

I take my navy blue apron out of a compartment and put it on, lazily tying it at the waist.

Slipping into the storeroom, I take out my inventory book and note down amounts of materials, like soil, fertiliser, seeds and twine. The room is quite snug, but neat and tidy. I don't really like leaving the shop in a mess. I grab an emerald green watering can and fill it up at the small tap in the far corner of the room.

I make my way back into the shop, heaving the watering can up and pouring into the different areas of flowers, turning the soil a darker shade of brown. On the brick wall in front of me, the clocks hands signal that it's half past eight. I briskly set down the watering can under one of the wooden worktops and go to the front door, flipping the small white sign around, ensuring that the word 'OPEN' displays on the other side. I don't usually come in and open the shop this early, but the business is booming at this time of year. I don't want to miss out on customers.

I begin to pass time by fixing up some flower arrangements for orders, using contrasting and complimentary colours and placing in cards with messages.

A ringing sound comes from the door behind me and I quickly turn to see a familiar face, my friend

Gary, grinning widely. "Hey Aaron!" he greets as he strolls over. I wonder why he's in such a good mood.

"Sorry, I know it's kind of late notice". He starts, rubbing the back of his neck. "But my cousin's getting married today, and my Ma put me in charge of flowers". He laughs, "I only remembered to get them this morning, but don't tell her that".

Classic Gary. He'd forget his head if it wasn't screwed on right.

"So could you – I don't know – whip something up for me?" he asks pleadingly.

"Sure," I shrug. "Any certain flowers or colours or anything?" Gary doesn't really have any proper interest in flowers, so he probably only knows a few that I've mentioned before. He might have an idea for some colours though. He has an artistic eye, he picks up on things and analyses without even realising.

He scans the shop, picking out colours and shapes. "I'd just say white and some bright colours, maybe some roses...". He looks at me again. "Is that good?"

"Yeah, that's great!" I nod as I jot it down in my note pad. "For collection?"

"Yep, my Ma will be here in about an hour I'd say," he replies. "Uh.. she might be a bit all over the place, but she's pretty busy today with helping to get everything set up. Just a forewarning." He laughs and glances at his phone. "Sorry, I have to head off now."

"I'll be prepared!" I laugh. "No problem, I'll see you later. Enjoy the wedding!"

He nods at me as he walks out the door. "Thanks!"

I work away for the next hour. A customer gets their order and begins to leave.

A woman with short, frizzy red hair walks in, with shopping bags practically engulfing her. Gary's mother. I think her name was Cathy. "Hi there dear". Her loud, nasally voice echoes through my ears. "Do you have the flowers my Gary ordered last week?" Well, kind of. I have the flowers, but they were ordered an hour ago.

I keep Gary's secret. "Yes, right over here", I respond, gesturing my head to the arrangement of white and soft blue hyacinths with yellow roses and small blossoms, adorned with thin, leafy plants.

Her plastic and paper bags shuffle and crinkle as she arches her head to look. She squints her eyes and then smiles. I let out a quick sigh of relief. "Perfect! Can I write one of those little cards?" A pile of blank cards lay on the worktop, beside a blue pen.

"Of course!" I reply and try to tidy and pick up the cards that have already been written on.

She writes on the card in a big swoop, 'ENJOY YOUR SPECIAL DAY! -THE BYRNE FAMILY' is scrawled on it. Her phone begins to ring as she scrambles to get it out of her coat pocket. She huffs impatiently. "Sorry dear, I have to take this, my family aren't good party planners." I laugh and she answers her phone, I can hear muffled panicking from the other end.

A crying woman in a full black outfit walks in. Her eyes are red and puffy.

There must be a funeral on.

She picks out one of the pre-made arrangements along with a card. She quickly pays and leaves, keeping her head hanging low.

Cathy shoves her phone back into her pocket and her attention turns to me again. She digs her free hand into her pocket, finding her purse and haphazardly taking out some euro notes and shoving it into my hand. "I have to leg it now, but thanks so much!" she says and strolls out with the flowers before I can protest. The money she gave me would pay for the flower arrangement and more. Very generous.

More customers come and go, most picking out arrangements and silk ribbons to go with them. Others pick up their orders and talk about relatives they haven't seen in years.

Time passes in a blur.

My phone vibrates and begins to ring in my pocket. It's Gary. "Hello?" He didn't say he'd call me, did he..?

"Uh.. Hi. I'm just ringing about the flowers." Gary states loudly, over the sound of echoing chatter.

"Ah yes, your mum came by half an hour ago and got them", I respond. I thought he'd know that his mum got the flowers, but it has probably been a very busy day for them.

"Yeah, I know". Oh. "It's just the card, it says 'Sorry for your loss – from M...'. My mind goes in every direction. How did they get the wrong card? Did I do that?

"I'm so sorry! It came with that? I never mess up cards!" I ramble, my mind still scattered.

"No, no, it's fine! My cousin and her fiancé got a good kick out of it! They thought it was from his ex-wife." he interrupts. "I just wanted to let you know about it, just in case".

Realisation hits me like a truck.

The cards got mixed up.

And I know exactly where the other card is.

Pure terror strikes my heart and creeps to my head.

The funeral.

The woman that came in earlier, the one that looked so distraught. I don't remember seeing her write a card.

"I have to go!" I blurt and move my index finger to the 'hang up' button.

“Ok, wait-” I disconnect, interrupting him before he can continue. I have to switch the card before anyone notices, if they haven’t already. There’s only one place the funeral could possibly be (*I hope*). The church, the biggest building in the whole town. A grand antiquity with ash coloured bricks of stone and sharp arches and peaks. It’s very hard to miss.

I shrug on my coat and secure the cash register, then I write a note on one of the bothersome cards, saying “Sorry for your loss -M.”. I *try* to use my neatest handwriting. I carefully fold the card in half and put it in my pocket. I flip the open sign around and rush out onto the street after locking the door. The church isn’t too far away. I turn a sharp corner and almost trip, bashing my shoulder against a wall. I hurry past a bustling shop coloured in ruby red and a fishmongers with colours of the sea and sky.

I’d like to think I’m agile. I’ve been on my GAA team for years (football, if you’re wondering), and I’m co-captain with Gary. It’s basically how we became friends. I still make time for matches on Saturdays and training on Tuesdays.

A sharp peak comes into view

The church is surrounded by people, donning black hats, jackets, trousers and shirts. All sorts of styles with one colour in common. The front door is ajar, and I decide to sneak in.

Elegant lights hang from the ceiling, rows and rows of wooden pews fill the massive space. The beige coloured walls compliment the shining lights and candles. Beside the altar, a table is full of flowers with some resting on the ground. Mostly white ones with other splashes of colour, much like the ones I gave the grieving woman. *Perfect*. I roll my eyes make my way up the centre of the aisle, my footsteps echoing up towards the peaks of the ceiling. My eyes scour through the large assortment of flowers. A frail yet firm finger taps my shoulder. “What do you think you’re doing here?” A stern voice demands.

I jump suddenly in surprise.

It’s an elderly man with a face like a wrinkled shirt. His bushy eyebrows furrow and his eyes narrow. It feels like my brain is a shattered vase, the glass shards floating around aimlessly inside my skull. It’s fight or flight and my body chose to freeze.

The chatter outside seems to be getting louder and my eyes dart towards the large door.

““Enjoy your special day’!?” someone cries behind me. “Sick and cruel, that’s what that is!” My heart stops and I turn around. It’s an elderly woman, her hair is the colour of a gravestone.

“Frankie, look at this!” She seems to be addressing the old man that has been standing beside me.

“Who’s the Byrne family?”

Oh no.