

Bouquet By Numbers

by
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Based on
Bouquet By Numbers,
A short story
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FADE IN:

EXT. HUNTSVILLE CEMETERY - EARLY MORNING

It's one of those perfect spring days with a crystal blue sky, cool and dry. The last "Blue Norther" of winter has passed leaving the ground wet, and the red clay caked.

Wildflowers are in full bloom painting the landscape vibrant colors.

A car drives down the narrow strip of caliche.

A CAPTAIN from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice - Institutional Division, approaches the vehicle as it comes to a stop. The captain is dressed in a clean, sharp suit which fits his lean frame.

The captain glances at his watch and purses his lips in disapproval.

The car door opens and a disheveled man wearing what was likely once an expensive suit, but which is now unkempt and stained, steps out, straightening his tie and running a hand through his hair to smooth it.

The captain reaches the man and extends a hand.

CAPTAIN

Any trouble finding the place?

The lawyer shakes the captain's hand, but his eyes are scanning the area, as though he captain holds no interest for him.

LAWYER

A little. I lived about a half a mile away my senior year of college, but the town's changed since then. Quite a bit, actually. Landmarks have moved. Disappeared. I used to pass by this place all the time.

(voice softens)

We used to call it Peckerwood Hill. It looked smaller from the highway, though.

CAPTAIN

(disapproving)

Not a very respectful name for a cemetery.

LAWYER

No. But back then I guess we figured if you were a convict being buried in a pauper's cemetery...

His eyes, which have been roving, settle on the Captain's face. The Captain's look is calm, but not entirely friendly.

Lawyer looks uncomfortable. His gaze moves down to the Captain's clothes.

LAWYER

That's a hell of a nice suit. I feel a little under dressed.

CAPTAIN

(mildly sarcastic)
You were expecting overalls?

LAWYER

Uh, no.

CAPTAIN

We tried to wait for you, but the funeral detail had other things to do. If you'd like to pay your respects, your client's plot is over there.

LAWYER

Former client. It isn't a lifelong commitment.

There's an awkward moment of silence. The lawyer looks towards the grave, we see a man standing next to it.

LAWYER

Is that one of his relatives?

CAPTAIN

No. His family seemed... disinterested in attending. That's the husband of the victim.

LAWYER

What?! Why the hell didn't you warn me!?

CAPTAIN

(annoyed)
If you had known, would it really have mattered?

With that the Captain heads away from the Lawyer, towards a nearby parked car.

The lawyer's gaze follows the Captain for a moment, then moves to the lawyer's vehicle for a moment. He turns and looks back towards the grave.

The camera stays on the Lawyer's face as he runs through a gamut of emotions.

The Lawyer takes a deep breath, steels himself and moves towards the grave.

He comes to a stop a respectful distance from the husband.

The husband is dressed in a blue blazer and button down shirt with work boots. Though his outfit is less expensive than the lawyer's, it has been better cared for.

He is a stocky man who is obviously used to hard work, and has achieved success through the liberal application thereof. He has a sharp eye and his face is set in a solid, but unreadable expression.

Camera focuses on the lawyer and husband.

The lawyer glances nervously at the husband, but keeps his mouth shut.

HUSBAND

(looking around)

She loved wildflowers, you know. I suppose most people do, but for her it wasn't just their beauty. It was their uncertainty. Some years they set the world on fire. Others you're lucky to find a patch or two.

LAWYER

(hesitates)

The wet winter should have given us a beautiful spring.

(clears his throat)

So this is awkward.

HUSBAND

(mild sarcasm)

Just a bit.

LAWYER

Why are you here? Did you come to spit on his grave?

HUSBAND

(comes to a stop)
 Would you hold it against me if I
 did?

The lawyer doesn't have an answer

HUSBAND

You know, I still remember your
 argument against giving him the
 death penalty.
 (in a 'courtroom voice')
 Suspend the work of death. Let him
 die in prison, at God's hand and in
 His time.

LAWYER

(blinks)
 Aye, God! You still remember that?

HUSBAND

(starts walking again)
 I hated you for that. For a very
 long time. I would lay down at
 night and I could hear you
 defending him.

LAWYER

(walking beside him again)
 So did you come to spit on me?
 You'll have to get in line for
 that, you know.

HUSBAND

You're so sure I'm here out of
 scorn... Why did you come?

The lawyer is quiet for a long moment, contemplating the
 question.

LAWYER

Because a dying man asked, I
 suppose. Because I know what it's
 like to wrestle with your own
 demons. Because I owed it to him
 to see this through to the end.
 Because my life has spiraled out of
 control.

HUSBAND

(nods)
 I heard you were going through some
 tough times.

Lawyer gives the man a curious look

HUSBAND

(shrugs)

I kept up.

LAWYER

Some falls from grace are more public than others, I suppose. An occupational hazard for celebrities, politicians, and trial lawyers. So, if you're not here to spit on him, why did you come?

HUSBAND

(hesitates)

He wrote me a letter. Sent it to me care of the DA. I didn't even want to open it. Eventually, though, I did. At her grave site. On one of the anniversaries of her death. The next day I called the prison and asked to be notified when he died.

LAWYER

(looks straight at husband
in surprise)

Must've been a hell of a letter.

HUSBAND

(still staring at the
casket)

It was. Truth be told, though, there was more to it than that.

(pauses)

I let myself take the easy route for so long. Focused on him.

(looks at lawyer)

On you.

(looks back at the
flowers)

It took me a long time to realize that what was really eating me up was were the promises I'd failed to live up to myself. The fact that I'd never made it

(Heavy emphasis)

Right With Her.

(he swallows and shakes
his head)

I buried that letter at her grave site.

The two men stand side by side for a long quiet moment

The lawyer looks at a nearby tombstone. It has only a number on it.

HUSBAND

Why isn't there a name on this one?

LAWYER

Lots of the old stones don't have names. Just inmate numbers. Guess somebody figured anyone getting buried up here wasn't gonna have many visitors.

(hesitates, looking around)

Something seems off. I can't put my finger on it, but I feel like something is missing.

HUSBAND

(glancing up at lawyer)

You noticed that, too, huh? It's bouquets. The grounds are well maintained but this is the first cemetery I've ever been to without a single flower.

The camera focuses on the Lawyer, who appears perturbed by this news.

CUT TO:

INT. FLORAL SHOP - LATER

The lawyer looks over a number of different floral sprays, picking one that looks exotic and expensive.

He approaches the front counter where an older woman smiles at him.

WOMAN

Can I wrap those for you?

LAWYER

Sure.

(glances around the shop)

I didn't expect this place to still be open. I used to buy flowers for fraternity and sorority events in here.

WOMAN

Oh? And what are you buying them
for today?

The lawyer smiles politely, but keeps his mouth shut as he accepts the flowers and his change and heads out the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. HUNTSVILLE CEMETERY - LATER

The lawyer parks his car on the caliche and climbs the hill to the new gravestone.

As he comes around the grave, however, he sees that there is already a bouquet in place. This one is made from wildflowers. He picks it up and looks it over. We see that though it is made from wildflowers, the arrangement and pruning is very expert and precise.

The lawyer looks between his bouquet and the wildflowers.

He sets the wildflowers back down on the new grave, and walks a few feet down the row, stopping at a gravestone which has only a number on it.

Standing beside the headstone for a moment, he bows his head as though in prayer, then carefully places the arrangement, turns, and leaves.

Fade to black.