

BLACK FLOWER

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Dear old friend,
I can almost picture how surprised you are. You probably checked your mailbox to see if any bills or packages have come in, only to find a slim yellow envelope (if the post office hasn't already lost it, or if you still live at the same address). You must have thought to yourself, "Who writes letters these days?" until you saw my name and went, "of course." What can I say? You know how sentimental I am. You liked that I was maudlin enough for both of us.

Sorry for trying to read your mind. You used to complain that I knew you too well. I'm not sure anymore, after years of being completely out of touch.

You must wonder why I'm writing to you after so long, when there's nothing between us anymore. I'm surprised, too. There have been long stretches of time when you didn't cross my mind at all. But something happened recently, and you've been on my mind ever since. It's strange, I thought I had overcome those early days.

You were always a very good listener. It's one of the things I loved about you the most. At home, after a long day, I remember how you'd lean your cheek on your hand as you listened to me going over every mundane detail, as though I was narrating an enthralling story. I wish I could tell you this in person, but I know you wouldn't appreciate me calling you, and I'm not sure I'd be confident enough to act like the silent years in between never happened. So, a letter it is.

I was walking home from work when I

passed by a flower shop. Up until that day, I never took any particular interest in it. There weren't many opportunities in my life that would involve buying flowers. But something caught my eye, so I stopped to have a look. Among the colourful roses, lilies, and carnations, there was a small vase full of dark flowers. I looked closer to discern their shade. I've seen black roses before, but in fact, they're a very dark crimson. These flowers didn't have a blue, violet, or red tinge, no matter how hard I looked.

"This can't be right," I thought. "Flowers can't be black!"

"Do you like it?"

I looked up to see a plump, smiling man in a Hawaiian shirt, who was obviously the florist.

"Are these flowers really black?" I asked him.

"Yes, ma'am."

I didn't believe him. I touched the petals to see if they felt coarse like artificial flowers, but they were silky, smooth like any other flower. I brought my nose close to smell them: nothing.

"It's still daylight, so you can't smell it now," the florist explained.

"What do you mean?" I frowned.

"These flowers only release their fragrance after the sun goes down, which diminishes when the sun rises. But then again, not everyone can smell its scent. You can take one home and see if the flower has chosen you."

I smiled at what was definitely a bluff.

"What's it called?"

"These flowers are very rare," the florist

claimed. "So rare that it doesn't have a botanical name yet."

"Either this flower is really rare, or this florist is a genius conman, selling me black cloth somehow shaped into flowers," I thought. Yet, I bought one flower just to experiment. A little while after sundown, I sniffed the lonely black flower sitting in a vase on the windowsill of my bedroom. My nostrils picked up a slight smell. I don't know how to describe it, because I can't compare it with another scent, or simply cast it off as floral, but it smelled like melancholy. Like loneliness. Like you.

As the evening wore on, the scent grew more intense, filling my tiny bedroom. The black flower's essence wafted in to my kitchen, mingling with the smell of the dinner I was cooking. I'm not saying the smell was unpleasant. In fact, it was the opposite. But I knew I wouldn't want to wear it as a perfume, to have something on me that would only induce sadness as I was trying to go about my day in the world outside. I cried myself to sleep that night, which I hadn't done in ages, engulfed by the mysterious scent that was seeping through my every pore. My dreams were full of you.

The next day, the scent was gone. I considered throwing the flower out, but before that I went back to the florist.

"What's in that flower?" I asked, with more anger in my voice than I intended.

"I see," the man smiled. "So it has chosen you, too."

"I hope you seriously didn't sell me a type of poppy or something."

"No, no," the man chuckled. "This isn't

a drug which will get you arrested. But this flower," he picked one up, "doesn't please the ones it chooses. It only chooses those who have had their heart broken. Looks like you have a broken heart, miss.

"But don't worry, you'll get used to it. A friend of mine gave me this flower, which made me constantly think of my wife. I became a mess, just like I had been right after she died. I wanted this flower to go extinct, but over time, it grew on me. I have a whole bed of these black beauties in my back garden at home. You see, I was afraid that my wife was receding from my memory. I was starting to forget the details of her face. I'm an old man, after all. But these flowers helped me recall things about her that I completely forgot. The memories of my time with her became clearer and sharper. Now, I smell these flowers and dream of her every night. Thanks to them, I feel a little less lonely."

I asked myself later if I wanted to bring you back through this flower the same way the florist did. "Maybe sometimes. Not too often," I thought foolishly. But every few weeks since then, I found myself going back to the shop to buy a new bouquet. The vase on that windowsill is always full. When the flowers wither, I replace them with fresh ones.

Now you know why you've been on my mind so much. You'll find a packet of seeds in the envelope. The florist says the black flowers are easy to grow, even in low sunlight. I hope you can smell them, too.

With love,
Your old friend

