

YELLOW TULIPS

HAL AMES

James drove up to the main gate of the cemetery. He had tears in his eyes as he remembered how he had taken care of his mother before she died of advanced cancer. It was just a year ago that she had been buried here. His plan was to visit her grave at least once a year.

The since she had died, his life had been difficult. He only went to work and then to his home every day. He was having a hard time accepting that his mother was gone.

He parked his car outside of the main building and then sat quietly watching the raindrops fall gently onto the glass of his windshield.

He got out of his car slowly, and opened the umbrella he had brought with him.

A sign over the door said, 'Greenbrier Cemetery' and under it, a smaller sign said, 'Florist'.

As the door opened to the flower shop, a bell sounded notifying the clerk inside that someone was coming. While James closed his umbrella, shaking the water outside of the door, a voice from behind the counter greeted him.

"Welcome to Greenbrier Flower Shop. Is there something I can get for you?" she asked.

James looked up and saw a pretty young lady standing behind a glass display case with many flowers inside. He smiled back at her.

"I need twelve yellow tulips. Do you have any?" James inquired.

"Let me check. There was a man in here a little while ago and he bought twelve," the pretty sales clerk answered.

She went over to the large refrigerated case along the wall and opened the door. A breeze of cool air rushed past her.

“I have ten left. Can I add another kind of flower for you?” she asked.

“Do you have any red ones? If you do, you can add them to make it a dozen. My mom always liked an even dozen,” James requested.

The sales clerk took out the tulips and placed them on her table.

“Would you like anything else added? I have a special on these small white flowers. It’s just a dollar more,” the young woman offered.

“Sure, that would be nice,” James responded.

Looking at her nametag, he saw that her name was Cindy.

“So Cindy, how long have you been working here?” James made conversation with her.

“Let me see. I think I have been here about seven months. Before that I was in college,” she answered as she placed the small white flowers gently among the tulips.

“Do you like your work?” James continued.

“Yeah, but working in a cemetery isn’t as happy of a place as a regular florist. I hope someday to own my own shop. Then I can provide flowers for weddings, parties, and other more exciting events,” Cindy finished putting green paper around the flowers.

“You’re visiting your mom?” she asked.

“Yeah. She died last spring. I plan to visit her every year,” James replied, as he took the flowers from her and looked them over.

“These are really fresh, thank you. How much do I owe you?” he asked while taking his wallet out of his hip pocket.

“Twenty four dollars,” she replied.

“Twenty four dollars!?” James responded surprised at the price.

“I’m just kidding. That will be twelve dollars and fifty cents,” she smiled at James.

“That’s a lot better. You had me going there for a moment,” James said relieved while counting out the money for her.

He looked into her face and suddenly remembered, “Aren’t you Cindy Franklin?”

“Yes, how do you know me?” she asked.

“We were in Mr. Jackson’s art class together. You were a model once. I recall I had to paint you,” James responded.

“I remember that. It was really embarrassing,” Cindy answered. “So, how did your painting turn out?” she asked smiling and wondering what he would say.

“I think I got a pretty bad grade for that one. I’ve never been very good at art. I only took the class because I needed another credit to graduate and it seemed like an easy class, but boy, was I wrong!” James laughed.

Cindy laughed as well.

For James, it was nice to have someone to laugh with. The last year had been not been easy for James.

“What have you been doing since you left high school?” Cindy asked.

“I went to State University and studied engineering, but when my mom got sick I had to help care for her. I’m now back in school and I’ll graduate at the end of the term,” James told her about his life.

“It was nice to see you. I hope you come by again,” Cindy said smiling at James.

“I’ll do that. I need to get these flowers to my mom’s grave before they close the gates. See ya,” James responded, while opening his umbrella preparing himself for the rain.

When he left the flower shop, the rain had stopped. It was still dark from the clouds, but at least it had cleared up a bit.

James decided to walk to the gravesite. The road circled around the hundreds of tombstones that dotted the hillsides. He walked slowly reading the names on some of the stones and the dates when they lived. Some of them were from a long time ago. He had no idea that this place was so old.

His mom’s grave was on a hill very close to a large old oak tree that shaded the grass under its branches most of the day. When he passed the tree, he noticed someone kneeling at his mother’s grave. He had never seen this person before.

The man was soaked from the rain. He was bent over the grave, and in front of him

were a dozen yellow tulips, which were set gently on top of the base of the gravestone.

James paused for a moment trying to figure out who this person might be. Then he walked toward the man and stood behind him.

“May I ask who you are and what you are doing at my mother’s grave?” James said strongly to the stranger.

The man was so surprised that he fell forward. He then turned over to look at the person who had startled him.

“I’m sorry, who did you say you were?” the man questioned.

“I asked you who *you* were, and what you are doing at my mother’s grave. And while you’re at it, why did you bring her yellow tulips?” James was serious.

The man got onto his knees and then stood up, brushing the mud off his pants.

“You gave me quite a fright young man. Did you say this is your mother?” the man asked.

“Yes, and what are you doing here?” James demanded.

“My name is Will Randall. I knew your mother many years ago. I only found out recently that she had died. I came to give my respects,” Will explained.

“You knew my mother?” James was surprised. “She never mentioned you.”

“I’m not surprised. Things didn’t go so well the last time I saw her; we never spoke again,” Will told James.

“Let’s go over there,” he said as he pointed to a cement bench close to the tree. “Let me tell you a story. You might enjoy it,” the man said as he walked toward the bench.

James set his flowers on his mother’s grave and blew a kiss to her.

He said to her, “I’ll be right back. I’ve got a lot to tell you.”

James followed the man to the bench. He was very curious about what Will had to say to him.

Will began to tell the story, “Well, so, it was like this.

“It was 1971 and I was going to attend State University. I had come from

California to attend the school in order to study to be a teacher. My mother drove me to the school on the first day of registration. She had many friends in the city so she had joined me on my trip.

“As we approached the school, a car pulled in front of us. As it did, I noticed a girl sitting in the back seat singing to a song on the radio.

“I noticed her and watched her as the car went past. She never saw me.

“I said to my mother, ‘Mom, go faster. I saw a pretty girl in that car,’ I begged my mother.

“She just ignored my request and drove the same speed, but when we got to the entrance of the school, the car with the girl in it turned into the parking lot of the university. When her car stopped, the girl got out.

“She had on a green skirt and a yellow blouse. She had shoulder length brown hair and a smile that seemed to go from ear to ear. I wasn’t able to take my eyes off her.

“I turned to my mother and said, ‘I’m gonna get to know that girl.’

“My mother just laughed.

“We passed the girl’s car, and then we parked our car in the next lot in front of the building where I was going to live while at the university.

“It took about an hour to get all of my things out of the car and up to my room. I met my new roommates and the student advisor. Once all of that was done, it was time for dinner.

“All of the parents were invited to join the new students for dinner. The dining hall was just a short walk from my dormitory.

“My mom and I got into line and chose the food we wanted. The first meal was free which made my mom very happy.

“When we sat down, to my surprise, the girl in the yellow blouse was sitting across from me. I could not take my eyes off her. She was a little shy, but she seemed to like the attention.

“I tried to talk to her, but the wrong words kept coming out. I felt foolish and my

roommate kept teasing me.

My mom just laughed.

The girl's parents looked concerned.

“After dinner, I went to the mailboxes to get my papers for the orientation the next day. While I was looking through the materials, the girl that I was watching went to her box and did the same thing. It took some doing, but I got up the courage to talk to her.

“I turned and walked over to her.

“I started by introducing myself, ‘Hi, my name is Will. I’m new here, what about you?’

“As she put out her hand to shake mine, she said, ‘Hi, I’m Brenda. I noticed you looking at me during dinner. Do you always do that?’

“I responded, ‘Actually, I saw you in your car when you passed by us on the road leading to the campus. Then I noticed you in the parking lot. To tell you the truth, I was really surprised to see you sitting across from me at dinner. I think it’s karma or something,’

“I laughed.

“She then said to me, ‘In your dreams, pal,’ while laughing at me. ‘We’ll see. We’ll see what karma *really* is.’ and then, she walked off.”

James spoke up. “Doesn’t sound like you were getting anywhere fast with her. Did you give up?”

Will laughed and answered, “Nope, I kept trying and trying.

“After she walked away, I leaned up against the wall and folded my arms.

“I thought to myself, ‘How am I going to impress Brenda?’

“I kept thinking of ways in my mind.

“Two days later we had a meeting of all the first year students in the main auditorium. I saw Brenda and sat behind her. All during the presentation I asked her questions like: ‘Where are you from? Do you like to go to the movies? Have you ever been to the circus? How many brothers do you have?’

“She just tried to ignore me, but I wasn’t going to give up.

“The next day, we passed each other on the way to class. I said, ‘Hi Brenda,’ but she just ignored me again. Still I wasn’t going to give up. I could see the smile on her face, so I knew I was beginning to get to her.

“For the entire first semester I followed her almost everywhere she went. I was her shadow. Twice she asked her friends to talk to me and ask me to stop. It didn’t work.

“During Christmas break I went home to California to see my family. I was gone for four weeks.

“When I returned to the school I couldn’t find Brenda. No one knew where she was. One of her friends told me she had transferred to another university. I didn’t know what to think.”

“So, I decided to start dating other girls. They were nice, but just not the same as Brenda.

“It was not easy. Most of the time the girls would ask me why I wasn’t with Brenda. They knew that I had been chasing her.

“I told them she was gone and now I had to start over again.

“Two weeks later, Brenda returned to school.

“I ran up to her and asked, ‘Where have you been? People said you transferred to another school.’

“She tried to ignore me, but when she realized that it was not going to work this time, she turned to me and answered, ‘I went to Florida for my grandparent’s fiftieth anniversary. Who told you I wasn’t coming back?’

“I answered, ‘That would be Maggie.’

“She looked upset.

“Then she said, ‘She knew I was coming back. I wish she hadn’t started that rumor!’

“I said to her, ‘If it means anything to you, I’m glad your back.’

“She turned and walked away.

James stopped him for a moment and asked, “Didn’t you get the message that she was not interested in you?”

“Nope, I had a goal in mind and when I set my mind to do something, I don’t give up very easily.

“Now I knew I had a lot of work to do, so I decided to continue to date other girls to see if I could make her jealous. It seemed to be working, and then my whole plan fell apart.

“One of the girls I was dating realized what I was doing and told Brenda. Then the whole thing backfired. Now she really hated me.”

James interrupted, “So how did you get her, or did you?”

“Oh, I got her alright, but it took a long time.

“During the summer I took a job working with kids in a camp. Brenda had signed up to work at the same camp. When she found out I was also going to be there, she wanted to back out, but the owner wouldn’t let her.

“She kept her distance and avoided me for most of the summer. I was used to it. Whenever I got a chance to talk to her, I made the most of it.

“One night, we were sitting at the campfire singing songs, when it began to rain. I had an umbrella with me so I offered it to Brenda. She was surprised, but she took it and ran back to her cabin.

“The next day she gave me the umbrella.

“She said, ‘That was nice of you. Thank you.’

“Then she walked away.

“That evening we went on a long walk in the woods. I was at the back of the line making sure that none of the kids got lost.

“It got very dark. Somehow, we became separated from the rest of the group and went the wrong way. Brenda was with the kids in the front of our group. When she realized that, she started to scream for help.

“I ran up to her and told her it was going to be alright. Ahead of us was a house.

We asked to use their phone to call the camp to let them know where we were and that we were safe.

“The camp sent a small bus to get us. I ended up sitting next to Brenda. To my surprise, she took my hand and held it tight. I knew better than to say anything.

“When we got back to the camp, Brenda and I were taken into the office and they asked us what happened.

“I told them it was my fault. I wasn’t paying attention and the kids in my group went the wrong way.

“They told me I was going to pay them one week’s salary for my mistake.

“After the meeting, Brenda thanked me for taking the responsibility for the mess-up.

“She leaned forward and gave me a kiss on the cheek.

“She said, ‘You’re pretty nice after all.’

“From then on we did a lot of things together. She was more fun than I could have ever dreamed. I was falling in love all over again.

“When we returned to school, the other students were shocked. They all thought that we would never be together.

“We continued to date until graduation. I was making plans for us to get married, but Brenda had bigger plans. She wanted to see the world and experience many things before she settled down.

“After graduation she left for Europe and was gone for almost a year.

“During that time I met another girl at my workplace. We began to see each other, and then she fell in love with me.

“When Brenda returned from Europe, I told her the story. She was very angry at me and told me she never wanted to see me again.

“That was the last time I saw her.

“Here is some advice. If love ever comes your way, don’t mess it up. Give love a chance. If you’ve got an opportunity to find it, go after it. Don’t do what I did. I gave up

on the best thing that ever happened to me.

“It was nice to meet you James. It was nice to remember that part of my life. No one has been as important to me than her.

“I hope we meet again.”

Will stood up and walked away, whistling a song, with his hands in his pockets.

James just stood there on the hill under the tree. He thought about what Will had said. He was wasting his life sitting at home grieving for his mother. He needed to get a life.

He went to his mother’s grave.

He said to her, “I just met a man who you knew. He gave me some very good advice. I’m glad you had someone like him in your life. Now it is time for me to find my love.

“I love you mom. I’ll come and talk to you next year.

It began to rain again so James put his umbrella up. He walked slowly out of the graveyard to where his car was parked. As he passed the entrance to the flower shop, he paused. He looked inside and saw Cindy preparing to close for the day.

The bell on the door chimed as James walked in.

Cindy looked up at him with a smile.

“So, how did it go?” she asked.

“It went very well.” James replied. “May I ask you a question?”

“Sure, what is it?” Cindy responded.

James paused and then asked the question, “Would you like to get a cup of coffee with me?”