

## The Yellow Daffodils

It was the butterflies of her yellow dress that caught his attention. Dozens of them fluttered upward from the foot hem of the dress, the procession ending with a pastel pink and white butterfly at her left shoulder. It was a pretty dress, one that suited the old woman's slightly plump figure well. She wore a light brown wool jacket over it, and on her feet she bore two narrow flat dress shoes that had been scuffed at the toes. Her hair flowed loosely around her shoulders, giving hints of a light brown color that age had turned to a fine gray. The old woman's apparel was neat, yet it was clear that she was not rich. It seemed that this woman had been quite the pretty girl in her youth, with her bright eyes and defined facial features. Her glasses sat upon her slightly protruded nose, one that reflected elements of European ancestry, and her cheeks were rosy, perhaps because of the cold. She was on her way to church that Sunday morning, passing time on the long bus ride by reading her *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Aware that she was being watched, the woman glanced up. Seeing the boy's observant gaze across the aisle she offered him a gentle smile. Instead of returning the smile, the boy abruptly averted his eyes to his shoes, his face turning pink from being caught staring. His mop of dirt brown hair and the disheveled bangs which barely shrouded his gray eyes reminded her of her own little grandson. He was sitting in a crouched position with his elbows resting on his knees and his fist tightly covering his thumbs. His gray sweatshirt that was a size too big had "Canada" written in claret letters beneath a red maple leaf. The fade of his blue jeans indicated that they had gone through numerous washes, and there was a patch on his right pant leg. She imagined him wearing them romping around on the playground at school or playing with his

dog. Perhaps his clothes were inappropriate for the season, but in San Francisco they were fitting since the city was generally quite windy and cool. The mercury stayed below 70 degrees most days, and this morning it marked the temperature at a chilly 49.

The boy was small, no taller than the chairs in the bus they rode. The old woman guessed he was about seven or eight years old. Next to him rested a bouquet of several yellow daffodils. After a few minutes the boy looked up to see if she was still watching him, and when he saw that she was, he bashfully turned his attention again to the gum stuck on the grimy bus floor. Quietly chuckling to herself, the old woman got up, picked up the boy's daffodils, and slowly sat beside him.

“So mister, what's your name?”

The boy looked at her and shyly whispered, “Charlie.” He started swinging his legs one by one underneath his chair, nervous that he had caught somebody's interest. She could tell he was a quiet boy that did not talk to others often as he again hung his head down.

“Well, it's nice to meet you, Charlie. My name is Frannie...So, who are the pretty flowers for?” The boy looked up slowly, obviously debating whether he should say. She saw that he had reassumed his previous shyness, and decided to keep quiet. Perhaps they were for a girl he liked. She guessed he was old enough to have been past the stage of regarding girls as gross, stupid, and dull. So, yes, the flowers must be for a girl. She smiled at the thought of young puppy love.

Silence filled the air between the two for a few minutes until Frannie whispered, “Bus smells funny, don't you think?”

The boy glanced at her twinkling brown eyes behind her spectacles and giggled. “Smells like...a big swimming pool. Maybe a bunch of chlorine-drenched swimmers rode this morning,”

she continued. Frannie nodded to his shirt. “So Canada, eh? A beautiful place...especially Niagara Falls. Have you ever been there?”

The boy, becoming more comfortable with the woman, shook his head, and then timidly offered, “It’s my mommy’s.”

The old woman winked and said, “Well, that’s nice, too.”

The boy watched her curiously as she fumbled around in her beige leather purse, finally whipping out a tube of dark mauve lipstick. As Frannie carefully applied the color to her lips, looking in the small mirror in the lipstick case, she waved at the flowers and asked Charlie, “So... are they for a girl?”

The boy nodded his head thoughtfully.

“I see.”

The boy glanced up at her, waiting to see what she would say next.

“Do you like her?”

Another nod.

“So what’s the name of this lucky lady?”

Charlie hesitated. He slowly said, “Marcie.” By now he was rubbing his hands, trying to rid the cold that bit at them. Frannie remembered the first time her own little grandson had told her of a girl he liked. He had acted much in the same way, shy and pink in the face.

“So, Charlie, is this girl very nice?”

A vigorous nod.

“What about pretty?”

“She’s...the prettiest,” he said in a proud voice and smiled, nearly forgetting his shyness.

Such a bold statement impressed Frannie. Noting he now sat on his hands in another attempt at

keeping them warm, Frannie pulled out a pair of blue and white striped mittens that were in her bag. Her own little Joey had left them at her house the night before when his parents came to pick him up.

“These are my grandson’s, but for now you can have them to warm those hands of yours,” said Frannie as she took each of his hands and put the mittens on him. Charlie smiled and shyly whispered, “Thanks...Miss Frannie.” The old woman turned her attention again to the daffodils.

“So, is it a special occasion?”

Charlie nodded.

“For her birthday?”

He shook his head.

“An anniversary?”

Charlie hesitated once more, taking a few seconds before responding. He slowly moved his head up, rolling it around and finally replied, “Ss...sorta.”

“So how come you’re here all by yourself? Where are your parents?” The boy stopped swinging his legs and stared at his feet that hung midair. After a long pause, Charlie said, “My daddy’s got a cold. He didn’t want me to go today, but I really wanted her to have the flowers so he let me. I’m not really supposed to talk to strangers.” Remembering this thought, he became quiet and resumed staring at the shoelaces of his sneakers. The gray rubber had started coming off the toe of his left shoe, and the white was stained with dirt.

Frannie smiled at his innocence and said, “Well Charlie, your daddy’s a wise man. I don’t want you to disobey his wishes, and I’m pretty sleepy now anyways, so I’m going to excuse myself to take a nap.”

Seeing his disappointment as his face fell slightly, Frannie pulled out a green pen from her purse and a notepad with two cats pictured at the bottom. Charlie's face lit up as she said, "Maybe you can draw your daddy a picture?" Giving her a smile, he happily took the pen and paper and busied himself in drawing clouds above the cats.

Satisfied that she had at least left him entertained, the old woman grunted groggily and situated herself in a rather uncomfortable position, her head resting on the pole beside her seat.

The seventy-one year old woman felt her age as she started to give into her weariness almost immediately. Age was a burden to her. Not only did it fade her formerly golden brown hair and make her more tired, age also slowed down her walk, weakened her bones, and made her mind more forgetful. She lost things more often now, leaving her keys in the freezer or the phone in the bathroom cabinet.

Frannie could tell she was almost asleep by the way her dreams crept into her head. Her thoughts progressed from how sweet Charlie was to how he reminded her of her grandson and when they went to pick strawberries the summer before.

"Bye Miss Frannie." She woke up as somebody gave her a soft hug. Opening her eyes, she could see Charlie getting off the bus. He had left his mittens on top of her purse, which lay on her lap. It was then that she noticed that Charlie had left three daffodils behind. They were placed so that the flowers lay beside the mittens. The green pen and the notepad, where Charlie had scribbled something, were tucked beneath the daffodils. She picked the notepad up and read the uneven scrawl on the paper:

*Thank U Miss Franny,*

*I thought U like some flowurs. Its OK she won't mind. I think she woud  
like U to hav them too...they mach UR dress.*

*Love,*

*Charlie*

Frannie quickly twisted around to see Charlie walk away, but the bus had already started moving. Disappointed, she started to turn back around before something caught her eye. Instead of the expected welcoming neighborhood with friendly houses, she saw only a bleak cemetery.

She stared out the window towards the cemetery for a long time. Her reflection in the windows echoed her jumbled mind as a sundry of emotions pervaded her thoughts. The scene with Charlie was stuck on play, like a song on a broken record. What did the cemetery mean? Perhaps this girl was meeting him there. She shook her head. It was an odd place to meet. It did not make sense for a seven-year-old boy to meet his friend at a cemetery.

A thought occurred to her. Maybe something dreadful had happened to his friend. The flowers were not for a birthday, he had told her, but for an anniversary. No, Charlie had stated that it was *sorta* like an anniversary. Another awful thought struck her. The woman held her hand still. It was trembling.

“Ms. Frannie?” The bus driver had stopped the bus. He had been watching her from his mirror for the last couple of minutes. The driver was well acquainted with Frannie. They saw each other every Sunday when she rode the bus to church. As he pulled up to her stop, the driver could see that the old woman was still absorbed in her thoughts and had not realized that it was

time for her to get off. Her tears were gone, but her face was still. It was obvious that something had happened. The old woman looked up, startled at his voice.

“Are you ok?”

She only nodded.

“It’s your stop.”

The woman whispered a thank you and distractedly collected her things. Slowly she walked up the aisle to the door; clearly she was deep in thought. As she stepped off the bus onto the sidewalk the bus driver called, “By the way...”

Frannie turned around. He offered her a kind smile.

“Happy Mother’s Day.”