

The two men reached the street corner where Frank would cross for his train home. Frank had finished his tirade against Jan and said, "I think it would do you some good to celebrate that being rid of her. Why don't you come out with me and Regina tonight? We're seeing a show as it happens and I'm sure she'd be happy if you joined us."

"A show?"

"Some comedy. It's supposed to be pretty funny."

Nathan knew it wouldn't be right, not on the day of his divorce. "A nice offer, Frank, but I'll have to pass."

"Suit yourself."

After the two friends parted, Nathan went a few blocks to the subway. He took an uptown train that had very few people though it was rush hour. The lights underground flashed through the windows more, he thought, than if the car was full. He disembarked at a station north of Gramercy and making street level took an avenue that he usually did not walk. He followed it south toward his neighborhood. On the streets he trekked after work from the magazine, he walked in long streams of people, the street lit by the low, clear sunlight in the winter. This avenue was different. Shadows fell over the buildings, the sun having fallen, and made them a quiet grey and purple. Several people were passing though not as many as he was used to see. He went by them with easy, slow steps. I needed to walk elsewhere than I usually do, he thought. I cannot take the same tired way. He walked going toward the part of Gramercy where he lived.

Darkness had come when Nathan turned the corner and arrived by the flower shop. Grouped flowers filled its window—roses, daisies, and tulips sorted and bunched in big bouquets, wrapped in clear cellophane. Light from the inside of the shop hung over them; the faint pink of the roses, the yellow of the tulips, and white in the daisies came soft and rich through the glass. The flowers were all fresh and crisp, cut just that day. He saw by a sign on the door that the shop was still open. I will go in and buy myself flowers, he decided. He felt a small twitch of embarrassment. I can guess already what anyone else would say, he thought, that it is not right for a person to buy himself flowers. Jan would insist that flowers never interested me and ask how I could get any. I won't care about that though. I could stand flowers on a day like today. The ones in this window are too beautiful to pass up.

Nathan entered the shop. The place was small and tight but had many shelves full with arrangements. The light seemed bright after coming from outside, and the scents of all the flowers came to him together. Behind the counter was a young woman, the shop clerk. She was thin, freckled, and had long, brown hair that shot loose about her head. No one else was there. Nathan went and inspected the flowers for sale in the aisles before the counter. His head moved from stands of roses to tulips to lilies.

“Looking for anything?” the clerk asked from the counter.

Nathan half-turned. “Just something for myself.”

The woman eyed him carefully. “Anything in particular?”

“I don't know. I'll have to look around for it.”

About the Author

As if losing interest, the woman walked down the counter and sorted through some crumpled flowers by a garbage pail.

Nathan went up the aisle and moved into a corner crowded with arrangements. Most of these were large, dense bunches of one flower mixed with one other for variety. There was one made of red and white roses that had a few lupines stuck among them. He went past these and discovered a smaller arrangement in a wicker basket. In its center was a large, red sunflower head with a wide face and creased petals. Ringing it were short, skinny orange tulips, thick yellow roses, and purple hyacinths. I'll have this basket for the many colors and the sunflower, Nathan decided. And when I'm home, I'll put it on the kitchen table where I eat breakfast. How different the table will seem for it! I won't worry even if Jan would have disliked it. He lifted the arrangement and walked with it down the aisle.

The clerk stopped sorting her garbage and raised her head. "Is that the one you'll have?" Her voice was half-doubtful.

Nathan set the arrangement confidently before her by the register. "Yes, this is my choice." He reached for his wallet, ready to pay.

## About The Author

Norbert Kovacs lives and writes in Hartford, Connecticut. His stories have appeared or soon will appear in Westview, Foliate Oak, Squawk Back, Wilderness House Literary Review, and No Extra Words.