

*The Arrangement*

*By*

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There is a florist nearby, and above it is a small apartment. I live there. Two days ago was my birthday. I didn't get flowers.

Each Thursday morning the flowers are delivered, all the new stems smell like soccer on a frosty morning and dew on grass. They are wrapped up. Put in buckets. I push them out the door onto the pavement, prostitutes scantily clad, bright colors in cheap packages with open lips winking at men. When I come home they are tired. So am I.

I walk 12 minutes from the florist shop to the bus stop that goes direct to the city. I get off the bus. The centre is quiet today, because today is a winter day. The rain clouds are all gone, making it look like the puddles have oozed up from between the cracks and a plumber should be called. The wind scrapes through the carousel where my friends' sisters' boyfriend used to work. He liked to work there because he didn't have to do much except yell at the brats who stood up on the horses and tried to switch when they were facing the opposite direction to my friends' sisters' boyfriend. He had to jump on and tell them to sit down. When he wasn't doing that he could watch the teenagers trying to be kitschy and the little kids who would kick their heels and slap the reins and tell the horse to go faster like they could actually win the race. Parents sat on chipped blue benches and smiled at intervals. I see you. I see you. I see you. Today the wind scraped at someone else. He was talking to a girl in ankle boots.

Being warm inside my jacket feels sickly compared to the icy air on my face. The muddy ground slaps my shoes. Subway smells good when I pass, making me glad I didn't eat the second piece of Baklava last night so I can get a cookie with lunch and not feel guilty. I was going to be good today but going to work makes me feel entitled to eat crap. Creating equilibrium. I go into the store. I won't tell you its name. It sells clothes for men. I am not a man.

Fluorescent lights blink. Blink. Awake, unlike me, until I turn on the stereo and Justin Timberlake starts bringing SexyBack. I think the marketing ploy is to encourage a rock star aura. Any man can be a player with the right shirt. Hardly anyone comes into this store, like the other stores on this row. Since the new extensions and the newer labels this part of the mall is forgotten unless someone takes a shortcut from Stocks to the food court. All the retail whores talk. The girl in the opposite shop watches my store when I go to the bathroom. The guys from the bag place next door come in to gossip about last night. We get the news about the people buying the other menswear store and whether or not 'that chick from the café' is actually going to quit. Everyone compares daily budgets and the daily take what are you on 1.4 sucked in 2.2 can you get me a juice. Danny comes in for lunch cover and I take my break.

When I get back, Mitchell is there. He says hi I say hi its our thing. Do you want to go to the movies he says it looked good in the preview and you like that actor guy. I say sure and we make a date. This doesn't make him lucky. I like movies. I will see anything with anyone. But we go to the movies a lot. You don't have to talk in movies, so conversation is limited to the ride there and the ride home. We never get dinner.

After the movie we talk about the plot. After the plot we talk about the acting. After the acting we talk about our classes. Then I am home and he drives away. I take the flowers in. They look tired. So do I. I tell my brother I am dating Mitchell. He is surprised.

A few months ago a friend from work said that if I never got any relationship experience I would screw up the real thing when I found it because my standards were too high and I wouldn't know what to do with someone I actually liked. I never thought of that. It seemed quite logical. I decided to say yes more. To people I don't like because according to my friend I don't know I don't like them until I'm in a situation where it is definitely required to form an opinion. My brother says are you even supposed to like them that much anyway. What is chemistry. He seems never to have felt it but I blame that on his choice of girlfriends and besides all the movies can't be wrong. I always wanted something more than just a source of sex and drama and something to talk about with my girlfriends. But I decide to say yes more. I say yes to Mitchell.

Our routine is comfortable now. He doesn't buy me flowers. I say yes to movies. We have easy conversations and sometimes he stays over. In the morning I wrap myself in bright colors and step onto the pavement to go to work. The carousel goes round. I see you. I see you. I see you. I see you.

Today a woman comes into the menswear store. She is dating a guy and they have reached the point where she buys him clothes. I learn this: after 4 months you can

start to change him. She says she likes a man who wears long sleeved shirts under zipper jackets and dark jeans with a light belt and nice shoes but not too pointy. She picks some shirts but says he will have to come in. To try on the jeans. She leaves with her heels clicking like her mind and her bag in the crook of her elbow. I put the shoes aside.

She returns with a man. He wears T-shirts and dark jeans with a dark belt and tennis shoes. They go into the change room together, to see if she can bring SexyBack. I sing to Justin. They buy the shoes. I make my budget. I talk to the bag shop guys about their girlfriends.

I almost forget I am going to the movies. Neither of us dress up anymore.

At work I make guys look like boyfriends. I notice there's a look. It looks like a guy isn't wearing what he would wear but what his girlfriend thinks he would wear if he was The One. Sometimes the guys look at me. Until the girlfriend comes in to change the shoes and then they look at her and she looks at me and tells me to find a different size and size sounds like guy.

When I ask Mitchell to take me shopping he is gratified by the change of pace. I sometimes wonder why he doesn't ask for more. He seems happy. He brings Baklava on Wednesday nights. I bring him to David Jones and I buy clothes for me. On the way out I see a male model in a nice jacket in a poster in a store. Mitchell tries it on. The jacket. I lead him like a lamb. Buy the jacket. It looks great on you. It's worth the money. I like it.

My friends' sisters' boyfriend is at the carousel when we walk past. He is watching the teenagers acting like they are not acting having fun. Mitchell and I talk about a book being turned into a movie on the way home. I am on time to bring the flowers in. There are gaps for the lucky ones who got taken home to be perched like Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman* on the piano. The rest look wilted and exposed. Mitchell stays the night and drives me to the bus. He wears the jacket. I wear a smile. We both look at reflections to see if it fits. At work the lights blink incredulously when I use my employee discount for the first time. The belt goes with the jacket and he wears both to the movies. We talk about the plot. I talk about new shoes. He wears them to the movies and I get him a shirt. He feels guilty. He buys me flowers.

One day Mitchell walks with me after work. The jacket is on his arm because today is a spring day but the pavement slaps his new shoes. I see you. I see you. I smile at intervals.

There is a florist shop nearby. I don't live above it. Mitchell and I live in the city. My friends' sisters' boyfriend was fired from the carousel. He yelled at one of the brats who yelled at his mum who yelled at the owner who yelled at my friends' sisters' boyfriend and now the parents buy tickets from the other guy who talks to ankle boots. I told my brother I was moving in with Mitchell and he was surprised. I thought you didn't have any chemistry. What is chemistry. After four months you can change him. He buys me flowers that sit in bright wrapping on the piano. I don't have to push them onto the pavement anymore. They are tired. So am I.

*The End*