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Lilacs

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LILACS

Robert had left home at six a.m. Friday morning. He would be gone the whole day finishing extra paperwork at the office. In the evening, he would come home to spend the next four days in celebration of his six-month wedding anniversary. Elise's bags were already packed, the help dismissed for the weekend, and her work boots waiting by the door. She laced them tightly; her hands aching for the sensation of the cool soil that had been so long denied her. It was six months to the day since she'd been in the garden.

Elise removed the wedding band from her finger and placed it on the counter then scribbled a quick note for Robert, explaining where she had gone. Elise retreated to the floral sanctuary behind the manor. She inhaled the heavy perfume of the lilac trees, which edged the grounds in a ring of reaching purple.

Kneeling among a tussle of zinnias, Robert's reprimand echoed in her mind. "As your husband, I forbid you to continue with such work! Really, Elise-think of your body," Robert had coaxed. "You'll hurt your back and your knees and develop such a terrible tan from your ring. Besides, Andrew will do a fine job on his own."

His words had thistle-stung her heart, but, as it had been for the last 182 days, Elise's only response was to nod and smile amid a stream of "Yes dears," and "Whatever you say, dears."

Now she dug her white hands into the midnight soil, relishing the sweat that trickled along her temple and soaked the rim of her bra as she worked. The heat had never bothered her, in fact, very few things did. Growing up, her mother would always say, "Elise is just like her plants, she shouldn't be inside too much. She needs the sun and rain and dirt to grow just right."

Elise and her mother's hearts were bound in the same cage of society, tethered but beating relentlessly for the things they loved most. As long as her mother had been alive, Elise had been allowed to play and work as she pleased.

It wasn't long after her mother passed that Robert began to call. Elise opened her mind to the painful memories that assaulted her and poured the last six months of frustration and resentment into the ground, finding solace in the way the earth was pliant beneath her hands, wieldy in ways nothing else in her life was.

"Mrs. Hernbroth." Elise startled at the interruption.

Andrew the gardener stood before her, lean and towheaded, his tanned skin a testament to his long hours under the sun. "Oh, Andrew. It's alright, everyone is gone for the weekend." Elise assured him, as she wiped her dirty hands on her pants.

The tension disappeared from Andrew's shoulders and he smiled down at the woman before him with reckless familiarity. The warmth between them over-shone the July heat. Elise led him back to the house, where her bags were packed to go. That night Robert would come home to an empty house, and all that would be waiting for him was an empty bed, a diamond ring, and a note explaining that his wife had run away with the gardener.

OLIVIA VOECTLE



Neverland. Mary Sikorski, Digital Art