

Requiem

Codi Vallery-Mills

A husband steps out of his pickup and surveys the sea of sun-bleached plastic flowers and American flags. He grabs his own offering from the dusty passenger seat, a small bundle of fragrant yellow roses – her favorite – and walks to his wife’s grave.

He sinks to his knees and presses the cool stone with his hands. He tells her he loves her, the kids are well and work is good. He is staying fed, but he knows she will notice the new holes punched into his belt. “I don’t have an appetite like I used to,” he whispers to her.

A petal falls as he places the flowers into their vase. Elegant and petite, they look out of place amongst the neighboring large store-bought memorials.

He bends to breathe in the roses’ fragrance and pictures her nose buried in them also. He stays a while longer waiting for the deer to arrive. They always do.

As the afternoon cools and sunlight dulls, the deer begin to slip out of the pines and onto the well-manicured cemetery lawn. He pictures her there – sitting just above him on her headstone – coaxing the deer one by one to offer them a fresh rose petal. She was always one to nourish another soul.

He gets up slowly so as not to disturb the deer, and steps back toward his pickup to wait and watch. The sun sets, the deer take a nibble of the yellow buds, and then move on in search of other morsels.

The old Ford’s door squeaks as he opens it. The deer look up but make no move to flee. He slides onto the pickup seat, pushes in the clutch, turns the ignition, and shifts his truck into gear, leaving her spirit there to tend to a garden of false blossoms.