

2021 MCC Creative Writing Contest First
Honorable Mention - Fiction Category
“Black Dahlia” by Connor Royce

Black Dahlias, her favorite flower.

Normally I would wake up at seven to the sound of my alarm blaring at me to get around for work, but today I woke up early, earlier than my alarm is set. This is nothing new, this has happened every year for the past nine years. I wake up five minutes before my alarm, wide awake and ready for the day. It only happens on this day, this specific date, this damn day when it all happened and everything changed. The morning runs like clockwork. I get up and make my bed with the Black Dahlia sheets and pillow-cases, and get ready with a burning hot shower that makes me feel numb. The physical pain I feel while burning is nothing compared to the emotional damage that I suffered many years before, although it seemed just like yesterday waking up and seeing her blissful face as she slept, but that’s only a memory.

As I walk out the door I look at my clock to see if the time will be different from last year, but there’s no change, it’s seven- fifteen as I begin walking down the five flights of stairs, with thirteen steps on each floor. The elevator works, but I walk anyway as there is no reason to rush through the day. If I had work I would take the elevator, but I haven’t had to work on October twelfth since the day I found the one I love and we began our relationship, which also happens to have been her birthday. Work never scheduled me, even after it happened, they don’t even call if they need me, no one does.

Walking out the door of my apartment building and feeling the crisp autumn air fill my lungs, I breathe out and am suddenly in the same place years ago walking out the same door with a smile on my face and her hand in my own. She's wearing her slightly worn down jean shorts that fall a little below the mid of her thigh, but that's not far enough to cover the birthmark she has that looks like her favorite flower. Her gray sweater is new, a birthday present she received when she woke up that morning with a kiss on the cheek. She wore the same necklace I'd given her years before when I first celebrated her birthday, it was simply two interlocking rings with the engraving "I have found my other half in you." The words were true to my heart, I had found my other half in her, but my other half was ripped out of my life leaving me only a partial of my true self.

Thunder booms and lightning cracks across the sky dragging me out of my memory.

I don't remember starting to walk, but from the buildings that surround me I've walked almost two miles. I've lived here so long that I know just how far I have walked by looking at the stores and buildings that encompass the area. I know every building in the area, and everyone that works there, from Bricker's Barbershop where David replaced his father Neil as head barber two years ago to Sally's Thrifts across the street. I know everyone, and everyone knows me.

As I continue walking I glance around and notice that I'm the only one on this side of the street. The sidewalks aren't empty by any means, but every person in the area is staying on the other side, even moving over there to avoid me almost as if I have the plague. I'm surrounded

by people, yet I can't help but feel more alone than ever. I know it's not because I look intimidating or terrifying. I am well aware that they stay away from me because of the date.

Even from across the street I can see the pain in some of my closest friend's eyes as they go on with their days whether it be heading to work or even just going for a walk.

Ding

I grab the door with one hand and open it.

"After you," I say with a smile.

"Thank you" she says with a smile that could melt your heart, and it did every time.

Seeing that smile I knew I loved her, she always got this smile when we entered Cancun, her favorite restaurant. It was only a little Mexican place with dim brown walls, burgundy colored booths with black upholstery all around the walls. Halfway up the wall there was a green line separating the cream lower half from the top brown half of the wall.

"Table for two?" Enrique asked with a thick accent that added sounds to every letter

"You know it Enrique," I said as he led us to our booth in the corner of the restaurant. We don't even get menus, they already know what we're gonna order as soon as we walk in. It's only five minutes before we're brought our food. Two cheese enchiladas with two orders of rice instead of beans, and for me two burritos with beans, and rice on the side.

I admire her long brown hair as she eats. She eats so slowly compared to me. I've already eaten my rice and a burrito as she has barely finished half her enchilada, she only ever eats one.

She always takes the other one home. I wait for her to finish eating before we get our boxes to go. We get our boxes paid and walk out.

Ding

I don't know how long I've been standing looking at Cancun, but nevertheless, I resume walking with a tear in my eye and a frog in my throat. More lightning shatters across the sky like broken glass beautiful in all of its horrifying glory. I love days and nights like today, not just because I think they're beautiful and I love rain, but because they scared her, and when she was scared she'd cuddle close to me and hold me tight while I comforted her.

I'm almost where I need to be and finally I see Blooms over the crest of the hill.

"I know you don't like flowers, but can we please stop?" She asks with a pout forming in her lips and eyes. She knows I can't say no to her, especially when she looks sad.

"Let's go" I reluctantly let out.

Walking into the shop was nothing like I expected, so many flowers filled the place. On walls, on shelves, even hanging from the ceiling. Plants were everywhere, but yet the aroma was wonderful, it wasn't too strong, but it filled my lungs and refreshed my breath. The people greeted us with their names and said to walk around and enjoy their flowers. We walked around for barely thirty seconds before she rapidly turned her head and walked away. She'd seen a flower like no other in the shop that caught her eye.

"I want this one" she whispered so softly like she was going to hurt the plant. To her every other plant was dull in comparison. The lady noticed what plant we were looking at and

rang us up. They were Black Dahlia's and they weren't cheap, but I bought them anyway because she wanted them and I wouldn't say no. She gave me a single flower and told me to come back anytime. I put the flower behind her ear before we strolled out.

I walk into blooms where Ashley and her husband Geoff work and already laying on the counter is a single Black Dahlia with a note written in her handwriting '*Take it, you need it more than we do*' she'd done this every year after the first, just had it ready for me before I even got there. Glancing up at the clock I hope for a different result than normal, but to no avail, it's eight thirty-seven on the dot. Like clockwork.

Holding the flower carefully I leave and head towards my final destination for the tenth time as of today. It starts to rain, but I'm too numb to feel the chill that grows in my bones and muscles. I haven't felt anything since I saw the flower shop sign. It doesn't get easier, and I've learned that the hard way, but even though I'm completely numb I keep walking at the same pace. The rain comes down as if the sky is weeping. My body is becoming wet from the cold droplets falling from the sky, but my face was already wet, it became wet when I walked out of that store, and it was only due to get worse.

It's almost noon, but from the looks of the sky it feels like it's evening. As I walk through the gate of the final place it groans like it's screaming in agony. This place where many like myself come to visit the ones they love is gloomy, but it's meant to be. The grass looks perfect as it's cut every week to ensure that no weeds grow, the only other plants that are on the

property are weeping willows. The gravel pathways crunch beneath my feet as I head towards the biggest willow on the cliffside.

Names surround me, but they have no meaning. I'm here for one name, and only one.

'Jack, Mariah'

I found her. The reason I made this walk. The reason I've always made this walk on this date. Her tombstone. A simple marble stone in the ground with the etchings *'October 12, 1994 - October 12, 2017. Taken from us too soon, but we mustn't weep as for now she is not in pain'* I kneel on the ground and sob, and sob, and sob. I don't care how wet the ground is or how soaked I'll get I need to be here. I cry until I struggle to breathe without hurting my chest. I cry so long that my eyes are red and dry of tears although the rain still streams down my face.

"I miss you, not just today but everyday. I miss seeing your smile every day when we're together. I miss our long walks at night where at the end we'd just stay and fall asleep underneath the stars. I miss the woman I fell in love with and married because she was my other half. I love you and hopefully I'll see you again"

Tears well from my eyes as I try to stand up, but trying to stand feels like picking up fivehundred pounds. After what seems like minutes of struggling to get up I am standing tall. I grabbed half of the necklace I'd given her years ago and put it on as I do every year, except this year it weighs me down, keeping my once proud head low. Even with the rain pouring down I know that the ground in front of me is wet from my tears. Grasping the flower that even throughout the terrible weather was perfect just like I remember her. I set it down on her grave letting out a terrible wail.

“Goodbye my love” I said and walked away for the last time.