

## supermarket flowers

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# supermarket flowers

by [heardmelodies](#)

## Summary

Even through the haze of grief right after Connor died, there were moments that stuck through. Moments of clarity, of happiness, of extreme sorrow. Moments when she could see everything through her old viewpoint, even when she could barely stand without feeling like she was falling.

Even years later, Zoe remembered the endless arrival of cut flowers.

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(or: grief and cut flowers make a bitter mixture)

## Notes

I love Zoe and I'm Sad

I know I haven't posted in a month or two and uh...oops? so have this. I swear some longer stuff is coming (hopefully) soon. I'm back to school in less than a month so hopefully I'll get a bunch up before then.

title from supermarket flowers by Ed Sheeran because it gets me in my feelings and I'm basic

Even through the haze of grief right after Connor died, there were moments that stuck through. Moments of clarity, of happiness, of extreme sorrow. Moments when she could see everything through her old viewpoint, even when she could barely stand without feeling like she was falling.

Even years later, Zoe remembered the endless arrival of cut flowers.

After news got around, it seemed like the doorbell was ringing at all hours with another flower delivery, or lasagna, or flower delivery, or unannounced company, or flower delivery, or sympathy card, or *flower delivery*—

It came to the point where the doorbell ringing echoed around her brain just as much as Connor's voice did, although with the former it really was ringing half of the time. It was certainly more than she heard either of her parents speak in that time, and more than she felt like speaking herself. The pleasantries between delivery people were the only words she spoke with another human, really, in those days.

(It wasn't like she could muster much more energy to engage her parents or see her friends, not when her head felt like it was stuffed with cotton and there was a voice-no, a ringing-no, a voice-or was it a ringing?-constantly at work.)

Pretty soon, she was choking under the sheer number; vases of flowers lined every flat surface in the house common areas, peppered with cards and notes. Some actually brightened her spirits whereas others just sunk her right back down. Cynthia adored them, often wandering into the kitchen to view them while she took a break from staring into space on the couch and crying. Larry couldn't get far away enough from them, retreating even further into his proverbial shell, and Zoe was starting to understand why as she found herself face-to-face with another flower at every turn.

She didn't need tons of flowers to remind her of what had happened. She appreciated the gesture, sure, but her family didn't need another flower arrangement delivered to their door when they barely began to puncture the broken bubble taking all of the air in their home. The flowers made it real yet detached, like something out of a movie. She knew no one sending the flowers really understood what that grief felt like. And she didn't hold it against them. They couldn't possibly know that, for her, it was as though her life had just been completely demolished in the space of one final breath.

The flowers wouldn't fill Connor's seat at the table. The flowers couldn't erase all of the times he'd screamed at Zoe 'til he'd gone hoarse. The flowers wouldn't fill some brother-sized hole in their family. The flowers couldn't erase Connor's dead body from their minds.

The flowers couldn't hurt her like Connor did.

(And there were so many it was possible they were going to start taking over Connor's seat, but in the poetic flow of the moment Zoe chose to overlook that fact.)

She also just didn't have the heart to remind her parents she was allergic to pollen.

She was at the kitchen table—with *all* of the flowers, and a slab of lasagna even though she hasn't been hungry in a week—when she googled something she knew she'd regret.

As she pulled her phone out of her back pocket, she could've sworn she saw Connor looking at her from across the table, but when she looked up all she saw was a judgemental poppy staring at her.

She stared back for a moment before swiping Google up and keying in the letters of her search.

*showing results for Connor Murphy obituary*

She never actually read it before then. Either Larry or Cynthia had written it some point between the hospital and the wake, but Zoe hadn't brought herself to be able to care enough to read it. She was too caught up in how screwed up it was, that at sixteen she had to worry about shit like what the obituary for her brother would be or what to wear to the funeral.

But there was nothing else to do, since some foreign part of her felt guilty when she hid away in her room instead of suffering it out with her parents. All of the contact made something just under her skin itch, and the pollen was starting to make her feel a little loopy, as well as the fact that the shock was starting to wear off and the reality of Connor being gone had sunk in. She'd pushed it away, still expecting Connor to come flying into her room in the dead of night and threaten to kill her just as their new normal had become. The frozen reality of it still thawed slowly and steadily, trickling its way through cracks into her memory.

Pushing away her fears, she clicked on the first link, screen smooth against her calloused thumb.

*Connor Murphy, 17, passed away surrounded by family early Tuesday morning at St. Peter's hospital. Connor was a high school student at Woodcreek High and had just begun his senior year. Connor is survived by his younger sister Zoe, 16, and his parents Larry, 49, and Cynthia, 48.*

*A beloved son, brother, and friend, Connor was an avid reader and could frequently be found at the Woodcreek Public Library at nights and on weekends ever since he began his trips with his parents as a young boy. On several occasions, he discussed his love of the book *The Little Prince*, being able to read it fluently both in English and in its native French.*

*Wake services will take place at the Morris Funeral Home from 5 to 8 PM on Thursday the 8th of September. A private funeral service for family will take place the following day. At his parent's request, donations can be made to the National Suicide Prevention Center at the following link.*

That was it, save for directions to the funeral home.

Zoe read the blurbs again, searching more and more as though it could provide some insight as to who her brother actually is-*was*. But there was nothing there. It was quick, polished, forgiving of her '*beloved*' brother. She felt anger coil in her, tight around her heart. Where was the real part of his life, the parts where he spent all his free time getting high and terrorizing Zoe? Where was the part about how he loved weed more than his family? Where

was the part about how he spent the past few years trying and failing to kill himself? Where was the part about how he tried to take Zoe down with him? Where was the part where he decided destroying anything near him was preferable to getting help?

(Going to the library every night. Please. She and her parents knew plenty well he wasn't haunting the library when he wasn't home 'till 2 AM.)

His favorite book was *the Little Prince*. She didn't even know that.

Maybe Cynthia was right. Was she was too caught up in every bad part to even try to find a positive?

(*Did* he go to the library? It's not like she ever asked.)

(Not that he would have told her. Or been civil.)

Her throat constricted and her already pollen-itchy eyes began to water as she wondered why she was even crying. He didn't deserve her knowing his favorite book. He was broken beyond what Zoe could help. She'd tried to help him, she'd tried to give him her love, but all he'd done was throw her trust away time after time.

She'd tried to help.

*Because there's Zoe, she remembered, and all my hope is pinned on Zoe.*

She didn't really believe herself.

She didn't even know his favorite book. She'd learned it from his obituary, where every past tense verb hit her like a punch in the gut.

(Where she'd been mentioned as a throwaway, a *survivor*, nothing more than an add-on to her brother's life, just as she had been while he still lived and breathed. Where it treated surviving as some kind of privilege rather than a duty, a duty she now had to carry since he hadn't been willing or able to do so. Where she almost felt bad for not being the name the obituary shared, in some kind of fucked up survivors' guilt, even though it felt more like survivors' envy.)

She'd learned something as juvenile as his favorite book from his obituary, sitting at the kitchen table, surrounded by cut flowers, at age 16.

Zoe shook her head quickly, hair swishing around her face. The tiny sting against her cheeks focused her just a tiny bit, the din of tuning and his voice pausing.

She just wanted to feel normal. But there was nothing normal about her life, at that moment. Her father was home from work, hiding in the basement or his room or maybe even plain sight, just blending into the walls of the living room. Her mother had barely moved from the couch in several days, too distraught to walk past her brother's room. She was home on a Monday afternoon in September, all school work forgiven. She'd just learned her brother's

favorite book from an obituary she'd looked up online. She was sitting in a kitchen that practically doubled as a plant nursery, eyes so itchy they were ready to fall out.

She wasn't sure if she wanted to laugh or cry.

A day or two after Connor died, Cynthia had announced the family was going to grief counseling, the first session being that Monday afternoon. Zoe already had an appointment scheduled with the school counselor for when she finally returned to school. She didn't know why. She was coping just *fine*. Connor was an abusive jerk and her life was easier without him there to kick down her door.

She knew what would come next. The counselor would ask her to say out loud what he put her through, and it would all sound stupid once she said it, but she'd still get pushed too far and probably have a panic attack or something and all the while the counselor would be saying she'd been misinterpreting his behavior and she'd never given him a chance and she clearly should have given him a supportive network rather than been self-absorbed and taking it personally. She'd have to excuse herself to go to the bathroom and to work herself down from sinking to the floor and breathing until her lungs gave out, all because she didn't know how to explain just why she took what he said so personally, how much every word he spoke hurt, how much she grieved him while he still stood in front of her. She'd engineer some lie to tell Cynthia so she'd never have to go back, but only once her pulse had calmed down and the tears had dried on her cheeks.

She was just *fine* without the counseling.

At least if she could stop sneezing from all the damn pollen.

And then she was crying, even though she didn't really know why she was crying. Pressing a hand over her mouth, she tried to cover the sobs for a moment before she finally gave in and lay her head on the table in her arms.

Only when she pushed her arms out, they collided with a vase of carnations.

Before she even really knew what she was doing, that anger coiled up in her again and she batted out a hand, sending the flowers in their vase toppling to the floor with a shatter that evoked one too many nights in the Murphy household.

She stayed like that for a moment, letting her heart rate slow down even as her hand stayed raised. She could swear she heard a cruel, taunting laugh filling up the room, and her hand flickered with a ghost of chipped black nail polish.

*Seems more like something I would do then you. Don't worry, though, I'm impressed. Guess you do take after me, after all?*

Zoe was up in a flash, hand gripping her fork so hard her knuckles paled to white, a bit of lasagna flying off of it when she spun around.

The kitchen was empty, besides her.

She threw the fork back to the table, savoring the clink it made as she remembered that he was gone and nothing more than a voice in her head and a phantom memory.

As she eased herself back down, she tried to forget about the flowers around her and the old memories of what had happened at the table. There were some things that she didn't want to drudge up, especially while tears were still drying on her face.

Neither of her parents had even made a sound when she'd broken the vase. She thought about cleaning it up, and wondered if she was a bad person for wanting to leave it for Larry or Cynthia to take care of.

Because she *really* wanted to. They'd always left Zoe to clean up her own messes while they ran after Connor putting out all the fires he set. Now that Connor was gone, it was much of the same. They'd barely stopped to ask Zoe if she was okay, much less tried to help her get through it.

Which she didn't need. Obviously. It just would've been nice to know they remembered that they had a daughter, one who had real feeling and problems, not just a son who was (a sharp inhale drawn from nose, eyelids fluttering) six feet under ground.

Before she could fully decide what to do with the vase, a knock sounded from the front door. A frown creased her face, unused to a knock rather than the doorbell (the *damn* doorbell) ringing. She paused for a minute, a waiting game to see if either of her parents would make a move towards the door and not leave their only (another sharp inhale, paired with a bitter half-laugh and quirk of the lip she knew exactly the cause of yet really didn't want to think about) child to do all the work.

Neither made a sound, as usual. She would think she was the only one left in the house if she didn't know better.

Silently cursing whoever invented flower deliveries for the umpteenth time that week, Zoe padded her way through the kitchen and down the hall towards the door. She couldn't see anyone through the window, but she opened the door anyway. There was no one in sight, and she nearly eased the door back shut and slunk back down the hallway. At the last second, she looked down at the mat to see-

More flowers-colorful, mockingly cheery, *aggressive*.

At first she was angry, but as the sight of the flowers got processed in her sluggish, tired brain, she could tell that they were different from the ones inside of her house. They weren't cut. Instead they were potted in a plastic pot, looking a little sad even though they were so abundant. They looked like something you'd pass at the supermarket. Zoe didn't know much about flowers, but she did know these were bright. A folded-up note was stuck on top of the pot, *Zoe* scrawled on the front in unfamiliar handwriting.

These were hand delivered, and they were for her, specifically. Not her family. Not for "their loss."

For her.

With a twinge, Zoe realized she couldn't remember the last time she'd had something all for herself.

After a moment's pause, Zoe bent to pick the pot up, sticking out one hand to pluck the paper from the flowers. Without thinking she sniffed them before immediately turning to sneeze into her elbow.

If she never saw another flower after that, it would be too soon.

Damn pollen. Damn allergies. Damn doorbell.

Once she got to the kitchen table after sidestepping the broken vase, she unfolded the note.

*Dear Zoe,*

*I know that everything can be a little overwhelming, and I saw that you had a lot of flowers, so I thought that having some of your own that will (hopefully) survive a little longer than the cut ones couldn't hurt. (Too many flowers over all? This may have been a poor plan, in hindsight.) But I know I feel a lot better when taking care of a plant or two. It's calming for me at least, so maybe it can be a little calming for you, too.*

*Things might be a little chaotic, now, but I know you'll pull through, and hopefully this little plant will with you.*

*-Evan*

Zoe smiled almost imperceptibly, a tiny little quirk of the lips, but it was more than she had smiled in what felt like a long time. She glanced over at the other side of the table where Evan Hansen had sat for dinner a few nights previously before looking back at the flowers he'd given her.

They were a little sad, but she figured she could get them to perk up again with work and a little time, and probably some google searches. Maybe she'd even forget about Connor and the upcoming therapy session for a minute while she tried.

The flowers were kind of cute, really. And it was nice of Evan to drop them off, given he didn't know her at all. Hopefully she wouldn't kill them too, just like it seemed she killed everything else.

She sneezed again, her allergies taunting her and asking her if that was what she really wanted.

Stepping over the shards of glass and heading to the kitchen for some water, she decided that, well, it certainly couldn't hurt to give those supermarket flowers a second chance at life.



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