

Overboard

by Jennifer Tatroe

Six dozen roses and the delivery man has gone back out for more.
Seven dozen. Eight dozen. How much did he spend?

They don't all fit in her office. She doesn't even have an office. She's a receptionist, for God's sake. She sits at the front desk. She can't see out from behind all the roses. She feels like Sleeping Beauty behind a thorny wall. She thinks she could stay there for a hundred years, until the only memories of her were the whispered stories of old crones. She won't. She parts the Red Sea and looks through. What was he thinking?

Gary, her boss, emerges from his glass-walled office, sneezing.
"What the hell is this?"

"I didn't expect this," she says. "Don't worry, I'll deal with it."

It's only half a lie. She has bruises on her upper arms where Tripp grabbed her last night, a scrape on her hip where she hit the rail of the staircase. She spent the night at Susan's house and she knew twelve hours was enough time for him to lapse into melancholy and order penance. Forgive me, florist, for I have sinned. She just hadn't expected this many.

Gary pulls a crisply ironed handkerchief from his breast pocket and blows his nose. "Put them in your car. You can't keep them here."

Six months ago, Gary hired a goateed designer to "defoliate" the office, trucking out all the ficus trees and spanish moss to make room for curved sheets of fiberglass and, as he called it, "negative space." Now, her voice echoes off the concrete floors. She sits at a clear desk with a bluetooth earpiece and a keyboard projected onto the glass in front of her. She doesn't even have any pens.

She picks up the first vase, along with her keys and her own, hopelessly-dated cell phone.

Susan answers on the first ring. "Did he send roses?"

"Ninety-six."

"I suppose a hundred would have been going overboard."

"I'm leaving him," she says. At the moment, she means it.

On the third trip, Gary takes pity on her and helps her carry the last vases out. He holds them at arm's length, but his eyes still water.

"There were a lot this time," he says.

"Ninety-six."

He nods. "Do you need anything? Can I help?"

She looks toward her car, to where water has leaked onto the passenger seat and the flowers are already starting to wilt in the August sun. "Let's defoliate," she says.

Together, they fling ninety-six roses into the dumpster. They fly, she thinks, like hearts skewered on the tips of darts. And, poised against the wide blue sky, they are beautiful.

