

A romantic scene featuring the silhouettes of a man and a woman in profile, facing each other and about to kiss. The background is a soft, warm glow from a setting or rising sun, creating a golden and red color palette. The overall mood is intimate and tender.

MILLIE GALLEY

AND
BENI
ROSE

A SHORT STORY

ROSE AND BENI

***a short story developed from Romeo and Juliet
and Bonnie and Clyde***

*“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would
smell as sweet.”*

Romeo and Juliet (Act II, Scene 2)

*“When we started out, I thought we were really going somewhere. But this
is it. We’re just going.”*

Bonnie and Clyde (Broadway, 2012 Original Production)

*“Dyin’ ain’t so bad/Not if you both go together/Only when one’s left
behind does it get sad/But a short and lovin’ life/That ain’t so bad.”*

Bonnie and Clyde (Broadway, 2012 Original Production)

millie galley

Rose Winslet trailed her finger along the rickety second-story balcony. She'd seen the view a hundred times. The big circular garden with immaculate hedges bordering the intense Kelly-green grass and flowers – flowers of all shades of purple imaginable, fading out to a crepe pink that was pale enough to have been stolen from a newborn's cheeks. Rose would venture out to the garden almost every day, and each day it was the very same. The rustling miniature leaves, confined to their boxy shapes, created a wall of symphony, the crimson vines sprouting up to chime in. Rose often kicked off her shoes and embraced the emerald grass. The grass was astonishingly soft and unlike any grass Rose had ever felt. It left no seeds clinging to her clothes, no sticky feeling between her toes. Being in the garden felt like being on an island detached from the rest of the world, or a lone spinning top on a wooden table, the large cherry weeping willow in the middle being the spoke that a small child's fingers would reach out and twist to make the rest of the world out of view, whirling into an incomprehensible blur. It was as beautiful a place above it as in it.

Rose just thought it all would've been a much nicer view without the towering charcoal buildings surrounding it, or the cars that circled the small patch of nature day and night. Rose wondered about the people in those cars. Where were they going? What kind of lives did they lead? Often, she made up stories about them in her mind. The men who drove the silver sedans had toiled in the army for twenty some years, voyaging home from living a dangerous and edgy life across the ocean. The bronze minivan drivers held four children at a time in the backseat, all clamoring over books and toys and devices, meanwhile in the front, frazzled single mothers tried to make phone calls regarding the billing of their apartments and the pet supplies for their cats and dogs and hamsters. The small red sportscars

all contained puffed up jocks and their plastic dates, cruising out to the movies or the beach. But Rose's favorites were the black SUVs with the tinted windows. The power vehicles that tried their best to blend in, but never did. No one could really tell who would be driving one of these cars at any given moment. The owner could be a spy completing a terrifying mission from abroad, or a shady business dealer who simply wanted to be left alone to his career of scamming people. Or it could be the president himself sitting in the backseat of one of those beige-leathered five-seaters, simply waiting for his secret service agents to let him out of his car and shake hands on a deal that could make or break his country!

It was one of these black SUVs that caught Rose's utmost attention on that particularly sunny day. As she was surveilling her garden from above, immersed in a soon-to-be mother sparrow clutching a twig, the four Michelin tires rolled onto the jet-black asphalt right in front of Rose's apartment building. It wasn't the car itself that piqued her interest. It was the person inside. The boy, to be more specific. It wasn't his looks, although those were certainly intriguing. It wasn't his lean body or warm brown eyes. What really caught Rose was how the boy wasn't doing anything in his car. He wasn't on the phone with anyone, or looking at it at all for that matter. He wasn't writing anything down or taking a picture. He wasn't even holding a book or a calendar. He was simply getting out of his car, leaving all his possessions behind, his head up. Rose was amazed when, instead of walking towards any of the buildings, as every other person in the neighborhood did, he turned around and walked towards the garden. *Her* garden. Rose leaned forwards against the railing, the rusty metal disintegrating under her fingers and rubbing off against her oversized T-shirt.

She studied him intently as he kicked off his shoes and put them down by the opening of the hedges – *her* hedges – and sat in the grass beneath the tree. Rose waited for him to pull out his phone, or a book, or anything, but he didn't. He merely sat there and watched the bees and butterflies chase each other in the late summer air. Rose bit down on her strawberry-colored lip and wished it was *her* over there instead of this strange boy. His messy cinnamon hair and sharp jaw didn't do anything but make her *madder* at him. Who did he think he was, sitting down in *her* garden under *her* tree and putting his shoes in *her* spot? Just because he was outlandishly handsome? Her hi-low brows furrowed as she squinted at him, as if summoning his attention to look at her and face his foe.

Well, it just so happened that the furious look she gave him really did summon his attention, because at that moment he looked up sharply and his eyes flew directly to hers. Rose's widened in response, and she quickly darted inside and ducked behind a wall. Breathless, she peeked out the doorframe and saw him begin to smile and peer closely towards her balcony, as if searching for the tall towhead blond. Rose's lips deepened into a scowl, scoffing at his apparent friendliness. She knew it was no more than a cover. A cover to hide who he really was.

Beni Palomo was about the most open person one could ever meet. He loved talking to people, no matter who they were. He sometimes worried he scared people off by how conversational he was. In this specific case, he had been on his way back from visiting his grandmother. The kind lady was old and had arthritis and couldn't make it to her car, instead

staying and watching out her small window for visitors. As he was passing by the apartment complex's "town square" (which was mostly made up of a few quaint cafes, restaurants, and boutiques), he had noticed a small garden, about the size of one's living room (assuming one had a decent-sized living room) with periwinkle and pompadour-colored flowers that matched his favorite color, serving as a roundabout centerpiece. He had immediately pulled to a stop to one side of it and ran in, kicking off his shoes as he went. As he sat down beneath the tree in the middle, he was reminded, curiously, of a child's spinning top – and of the ocean. No sooner had he begun to think of the ocean was he reminded of his mother. His beautiful mother, the one who had helped him through the hardest moments in his life, who had loved the ocean with everything she had. Sometimes, Beni even suspected that she had loved the ocean more than she'd loved him. But Beni had never been one to point it out. Not after what happened to her.

Because one day, his mother got sick. Really sick. Studies were run, concluding that the beach Beni and his mom had been swimming in for years was still contaminated from a colossal oil spill. It was a wonder that Beni had never felt any effects from it, but his mother, the one who had loved the ocean so much, did. Beni's father took Mrs. Palomo to the ER as soon as he realized something was terribly wrong, denying any approach that involved medication. The doctors were baffled by this request, and tried everything they could to help the poor woman in any way, but eventually they had come to Mr. Palomo with empty hands and the sorry news that it was impossible to heal his wife without use of traditional medication. One of the head doctors, a Dr. Robert Channing Winslet, felt bad for the frail being lying on her deathbed. She somehow reminded him

of his wife, who was alive and well, but had the same peaceful air, the same presence in those bleak white hospital rooms. He made sure Mr. Palomo wasn't in the area, and then he slipped her some meds that he knew would make her well again.

What Dr. Winslet *didn't* know was that he had given Mrs. Palomo the wrong liquids, and he watched from the window in the hall as the color drained from her body and Mr. Palomo sobbed at his dead wife's side, her limp cold hand clutched tightly in his. The good-hearted doctor couldn't help but come forward and admit to his misstep. The heart-broken widower, in his anger, had sued the man who had taken his wife's life, and a precarious and vicious lawsuit had followed. Eventually, Mr. Palomo had settled for a large payment that, to this day, not a single person other than the people involved with the transaction know the exact sum of due to sworn secrecy, but that Dr. Winslet never forgave him of. His anger covered over the entire Hispanic family, including the offbeat little boy in the corner with no mother.

Suddenly, Beni's eyes were drawn up out of his thoughts, as if by hypnosis, to the balcony right in front of the entrance to the garden. A teen girl, probably a little over five and a half feet, with eyes that sparkled like sapphires and lips that defied the most vibrant flower's claim, was staring directly at him, slightly leaning over the railing that came up to her waist. Beni started to wave, but the girl's eyes widened, and she raced inside. Beni laughed. His smile lingered as he tried to see where the girl had gone. He could just catch the crown of her caramel coated head popping out from behind the door frame, and he grinned, knowing she didn't think she could see him. There were introverts, and then there were *introverts*.

As it just so happened, Rose was known among her friends as by far the most extroverted person they had ever met. Of course, her human friends didn't like her anymore, so the only people she talked to were the ones who existed in Rose's world of islands and spinning tops. Rose hadn't always had those kinds of friends. It was her family's bad reputation that turned people away. Those who didn't know who they really were thought the Winslets made the perfect family – two wonderfully kind parents, a beautiful daughter, all four sweet, toothless grandparents still alive. But those who chose to grow close to the Winslets retreated when they found out that they were *Winslets*.

A beautiful name, Winslet. It's funny how fast a beautiful name can become so tarnished and ugly in the mouths of others, just because of its meaning.

A survey taken by foreigners who didn't speak English revealed that *diarrhea* was thought to be the most beautiful word in the entire language. Little did they know that its meaning isn't one of beauty at all, but something that's avoided by natives of the language. Even though it has such a beautiful sound, it's become a word that no mouth wants to swallow, neither literally nor physically. The word itself doesn't necessarily have to mean a bad thing, but it's simply the branding the people who speak it give it.

The same rotten experience went for the Winslet family. As beautiful of a name as it was, and as well-known and trusted the family had been, it had taken only one slip on their behalf before their reputation came tumbling down. One small choice, made by one Dr. Winslet, that could have

been avoided altogether – that’s all it really took for Rose’s friends to desert her. The Winslets were thought of by most as nasty people, people with sneaky motives and untrustworthy schemes in mind for those who befriended them. So, while in truth, Dr. Winslet had merely been moving to help Mrs. Palomo, rumors swirled like oil in brine water, whispering that the woman would have *lived* without the deadly chemicals the doctor had forced into her veins. And while Dr. Winslet was in fact one of the nicest middle-aged men, the only outwardly known facts about him were from the Wikipedia page of lies that his former friends had typed of him with hearts of stone and eyes of fire.

The ball of flames was starting to descend quickly through the sky, lighting Rose’s caramel hair on fire. She stayed in that uncomfortable position for a while, her head poking slightly out of the door to the balcony. The boy spotted her and started to wave at her, and she quickly pulled back her head and pushed herself against the wall, her heart pounding. He had seen her. How could she be such an idiot? He had seen her. Suddenly, she heard a *cling*. Her brows furrowed, and she peeked back around the corner. The boy stood by the entrance to the building, looking up at her. Rose stepped out to her balcony. His hand was held up in a throwing position. He noticed her and waved his arms wildly, beckoning her to come down. She shook her head. To her horror, he shouted up to her.

“Hey! What’s your name?”

Rose pursed her lips. She didn’t want to talk to this way too friendly stranger – no matter how good he looked. The boy crossed his arms and pouted. Rose giggled, and he beamed. Finally, a reaction.

“Come down!”

Tentatively, Rose took a step forward towards the balcony rail. The boy raised his eyebrows at her.

“I’m fine right here,” Rose said. The boy barely heard her.

“Yeah, but you would be finer down here,” he shouted. Then his hand flew up to his mouth and covered it in mock disapproval. Rose laughed.

“How do I know you’re not a serial killer?” she asked.

“How do you know I’m not?” he replied confidently. Rose grinned.

“Okay, give me a second.”

Rose rushed inside and pulled her gray Brooks sneakers on – her favorite ones, the ones she always wore for good luck. Her mother had given them to her a year ago as a gift when she’d departed on her long business trip that she still hadn’t come back from. She didn’t know why she thought she needed luck in this moment, with this mysterious boy, with the garden she walked out to every day and the parking lot she crossed every few hours, but she put on those sneakers anyways. As she opened her door, she breathed in so deeply it seemed like the bottom of her stomach was uprooting from her torso. Exhaling felt like letting go. Good. She shook her hair into a high ponytail and closed the door behind her.

All too soon, she was downstairs and outside, where the boy was waiting for her, his smile still plastered on his face. Suddenly Rose felt like this whole ordeal was dumb. What kind of person in their right mind would walk out of the safety of their home to meet with a guy they’d never met, and, for all she knew, was set to murder her and sell her organs on the black market. But... he’d also been sitting in her *garden*, without his phone or a book or any distractions to distract him from the beauty around him. But

then again, he'd also been sitting in *her* garden. Without asking *anyone*. Without asking *her*. Was that really an excuse to believe he was a good person? Rose hadn't gotten enough time to think it through. She should go back up inside her apartment and lock the door and shut the window and listen to excessively loud music until the boy went away and everything went back to normal. But it was too late. He was crossing the pavement to her, he was already right next to her, and his soft brown hair was brushing against his forehead, and Rose's heart beat so much faster when she realized he was only a few feet away from her.

"Hey," he said softly, as if speaking to a frightened creature. Perhaps he was. Rose met the description. "My name's Beni. What's yours?"

"What were you doing in my garden?" Rose replied rudely. But Beni didn't flinch or draw back. Nothing about him changed except for his eyes, which crinkled as an even bigger smile grew on his face. Rose hadn't even thought it was possible.

"I didn't know that was your garden," he chuckled, and Rose blushed with embarrassment. Of course, it wasn't *her* garden. It wasn't like she actually owned it. Who was she to call it *her* garden? Of course, the boy – Beni – didn't know this. Still, it was silly to call it *her* garden.

"Well... I mean... it's not *mine*, but-"

"But sometimes it can feel like it's yours," he finished for her. Rose's eyes widened. Beni nodded, as if they were agreeing on a serious matter they both knew very well. Suddenly, Rose's doubts about him flew out the window like a gust of wind blowing out papers from a desk. Rose could try as hard as she liked to scramble and put rocks and weights down on the

pages, but several of them escaped anyways. And somehow, it made her feel so much lighter.

“Do you want to go check up on your garden? I know I was probably interrupting one of your visits,” Beni said. Rose nodded, and together they walked towards the rustling hedges that were whispering in the wind, as if gossiping amongst each other the things they had seen and heard, and placing bets on the two young people crossing the street to them.

When Beni and Rose got to the entrance of the garden, Beni stopped, and Rose realized he was waiting for her to take off her shoes. She was reluctant to take them off, since they *were* her lucky shoes, but it didn't matter. She didn't need luck. Or at least, that's what she desperately told herself as she slid them off. Beni held out his uncommonly large hands for her to place the shoes in, and her lips curled slightly up at his chivalry. Who knew that a guy who could be so loud and outgoing could also be so gentle and caring? She studied his hands more closely as he took her shoes. They were calloused at the tips, as if he often played guitar. He rested her shoes snug against his bigger ones on the grass, and then turned to her, stiffened his posture, thrust up his chin and chest, and held out his arm for her. She giggled and took it, and together they waltzed into the garden. As he escorted her to the spot beneath the tree that she had been, just moments ago, watching him sit, Rose couldn't help but beam at her good fortune, which made her turn her face away from him so he wouldn't see how much she... she really liked him.

He let go of her arm and gestured for her to sit, and then sat next to her and laced his long fingers behind his head, leaning back against the tree like nothing had changed.

“So, I have two questions for you. How do two questions sound?” he asked her, who nodded. He nodded back, then continued. “My first question is, what is your name?”

Rose bit her lip, ashamed of the ugly words that had spilled out of her mouth earlier when she had failed to answer his question the first time. But nevertheless, she complied to his question. “Rose.”

“Rose?” he asked. She nodded, and he grinned. “You have a pretty name, Rose.” She blushed. “Okay, well, my second question is, have you ever heard of the knock-off gluten-free version of Ruffles chips?”

Rose twisted in her position to look at him in surprise and question. Beni laughed at the look on her face, and Rose laughed along nervously, not completely sure what they were laughing about. But one thing became stunningly clear to her in that moment.

There was nothing like his laugh to her anymore. His laugh was something she would strive to hear again and again as long as she was alive. It made her feel so light and carefree and it was a sound she wished would never stop. Hearing the laugh made her want to smile during every second of the rest of her life, and it unsettled a fluttery stir deep inside her. The way he smiled at her – not like the slightly fake smiles he’d been giving her earlier, but a smile that made creases appear on his face that some might consider stole from his handsomeness, but what Rose felt like was the only reason the world continued to spin each day. His eyes lit up like Christmas trees in the dark, and it almost brought tears to Rose’s eyes as she realized that she was sitting next to this wonder of a person.

He raised his eyebrows at her and dipped his chin down, making his eyes level with hers, and she realized he had asked her a question. She searched her memory for what he possibly could have said, and it was a few seconds before she replied, “No, I haven’t. Are they good?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I just stumbled upon them at a tractor supply a while before, but I didn’t try them. That’s something maybe we should try together sometime,” he said casually, and Rose realized he had just said he wanted to do something with her in the future. Like... a date? No, no, someone uptight like her could never be wanted by someone as loose and carefree as him.

To be honest, Beni was literally freaking out inside at the moment. He didn’t know if he was taking things too far or not taking things far enough – although it was probably the former. She was just so beautiful, and so adorable with her oversized navy sweatshirt tucked around her like a thick blanket. He wasn’t sure what he needed to say, because he needed to say something, and all he wanted to do was hear her voice, so gentle and light, like dandelion seeds floating on a summer breeze. Her voice was the sweetest thing he’d ever heard, and every second she stayed silent was a second more he was heartbroken without it. He wasn’t even sure if she really liked him back at all, or if her silence wasn’t normal and she only saved it for people she firmly disliked. But then again, she *had* come down from the seclusion of her apartment to be with her.

Beni wasn’t used to this feeling – not knowing what to do with people, not knowing what to say. Back at his house, he was the only one talking, the only one filling the gaps and spaces in between. And he was good at it. He

knew jokes, he memorized songs, he asked questions so it wasn't just one long monologue. So why couldn't he do that now? What was so different? Had this experience, this *girl*... had this all really rendered him speechless?

Rose became very aware of the silence growing awkwardly long, too long for even her liking. She glanced at Beni. He was clearly deep in thought, and she didn't want to disturb him, but she also really wanted to hear him laugh again, so she tried starting up a conversation.

“So do you live around here?”

Beni started. “No, actually, I'm a good thirty minutes away. I was just out here visiting my grandmother. She's got arthritis, and we're just letting her live out the rest of her life without any gross medicine.”

Rose nodded. “That must be tough. I get how you feel. My parents are all into vaccines and medicine and that kind of stuff, and my dad's actually a doctor, but it just seems so... wrong, you know?”

“Like it's not natural.”

“I mean, it's not,” Rose laughed. Beni nodded, and he suddenly grew quiet. Rose pursed her lips. That wasn't the reaction she'd wanted.

“My mom died from medicine,” he whispered in a gravelly voice, and Rose realized he was intensely fighting off tears. She put her hand gently on his broad shoulder, and he looked up at her in surprise. He shook his head and laughed bitterly. “A stupid doctor gave her the wrong stupid meds, and my dad had to watch her die.”

Rose's eyes blurred with tears and the things he'd struggled through hit her. It wasn't sympathy that made them start to slip down her cheeks. It was the sight of him crying. Seeing him with such sadness in his heart, the opposite of what he'd been before, broke her. It suddenly became real. A weight settled in her heart, and she wanted to do all she could to make him stop crying and be happy again. She wanted to hug him till his eyes dried, to cradle his head and whisper lullabies that would make him feel as if there wasn't a problem in the world. Instead, she was just sitting there next to him, with her hand on his shoulder. Helpless, not knowing what to do. Why couldn't she just fix everything for him? But soon he was wiping at his eyes and sitting up straighter, and Rose withdrew her hand. *That was stupid. Why did she take back her hand? She could've just left it on his shoulder. She wanted to leave it on his shoulder.* It was too late, though, and he was talking again. He didn't really seem to ever run out of things to say.

"He did all he could to tell the doctor to back off, to stay away, to not touch my mom, but that guy just wouldn't listen. And now my mom is *dead* because of him."

Rose was hit with a sudden pang of realization. "When did she... when did this happen?"

"Twelve years ago. Why?"

Rose's face drained of its color, and her mouth went bone-dry. Beni looked up at her in confusion, and then he understood.

"What did you say your dad does for a living?"

She shook her head. She couldn't tell him. She couldn't. He'd hate her. He'd flee her broken life and never return.

"Rose... what's your last name?"

Rose shut her eyes tightly and whispered, "Winslet."

When she opened her eyes again, Beni's head was in his hands. Rose fought the urge to do the same, and instead stood to leave. As she went to put her shoes on, Beni's voice, shaky with tears, sailed out across the clearing.

"Don't go."

Rose turned in surprise. She hesitated, but crossed the grass to sit back down next to him.

"I'm so sorry, Beni," she said. He shook his head and raised it to look at her.

"Don't be. It's not like it's anything you did."

"But it's still *my dad*. Because of *my dad*, *your mom* isn't alive anymore. And I'm so truly, deeply sorry for it." Beni started to laugh. Rose was confused. "What?"

"I'm sorry, it's not like- it's not like this is funny or anything. But your apology just sounds so sincere, and I didn't expect that." He continued to chuckle, and Rose smiled. Maybe she just needed to stop trying.

"So... what do we do now?"

Beni's smile vanished as he was reminded again of the somber matter at hand. "I... I don't know. I don't... know. I don't have the answers for our questions, I don't know what to do, I just... I don't wanna lose you," he said. He'd voiced the last part with such despair that it took Rose a second to

comprehend what he'd said. She tamped her smile down again and nodded. Then she shook her head.

“You're not going to lose me. You didn't do anything,” she said. That's when she realized that to lose something... you had to have it first.

Rose put her slender fingers on his cheek and turned his head to face her. His eyes were full of doubt and sorrow, and Rose wanted to hug him and make it all go away. But she couldn't. Not yet. “Don't worry. We're going to fix this.”

“But I don't know what to do.”

“If you don't want to fix this, I will. But it won't stay like this anymore. I promise.”

Beni stayed silent. Then he spoke again.

“I'm going to Montana. I'm not coming back. I can't live like this anymore. But I can't go alone,” he whispered. Rose knew what he was trying to say. She wanted to shout yes, but...

“I'll think about it.”

Beni nodded, then nodded again, as if that settled it. Then he reached out his long arms and pulled her into an embrace. For a moment, Rose stilled in shock, but she quickly she hugged him back as if doing so could trap everything happening into a little box between them. When they pulled away, Beni placed his hand against the trunk of the tree and stood, then offered his hand to her to her, helping her up. She took it gratefully, and it wasn't lost on her that their hands continued intertwined as they walked back to the entrance. They reached their shoes, and Beni playfully went

down on one knee and slid her shoes on for her. Rose blushed again and put her hand on his shoulder to steady herself.

They walked back to his car in silence, stopping only to stare deeply into each other's eyes at his door. Suddenly, a car zoomed into the parking space behind Rose, and a man hopped out of the driver's seat and rushed towards the two. With horror, Rose realized it was her incredibly spiteful and overprotective father.

"What is a Palomo doing here?" Mr. Winslet barked, glaring at Beni.

"Sir, please, let me explain-"

"Does explanation make up for years of my life lost in court? No! Go home, boy, and don't come back."

Beni bit his lip and looked at Rose, who set her jaw and sent a goodbye with her eyes. He stepped into his car with resign, reversed out of his spot, and flew off into the darkening twilight, the headlights blinding the two he'd left behind. As soon as he was out of sight, Rose spun around to face her father.

"Why would you do that? Beni has a really good heart!"

"*Beni* has a father who cheated us out of our life! You are not to talk to him until you stop breathing. Am I understood?"

Rose opened her mouth to argue, but snapped it closed and nodded, faking her best apologetic look. She knew her father would never see the truth for what it really was. "Yes, I understand."

“Good. My word, the things people are capable of these days, sending their sons to try and compensate for their wrongdoings, well I won’t buy it. A good man like me has no right to tarnish his good name by accepting...”

Rose hung her head and walked inside, her father following her, still ranting about the Palomos.

It is said that when one cannot sleep at night, it’s because they are being thought of by another person. Lying in bed that night, two young minds couldn’t fall asleep, their thoughts occupied with each other. Everything paled and grew dull in comparison. One of them couldn’t stop himself from whispering “Rose” repeatedly to himself.

The next day, when Rose’s father drove off to work, Rose sent a prayer to the heavens to alert Beni that it was safe to return to her. For some reason, miraculously, half an hour later a familiar black SUV came speeding down the street. Rose cried out in joy, then covered her mouth, as if there was someone in the apartment to hear her. There wasn’t, but after last night’s fiasco she couldn’t help but be cautious. She slipped on her sneakers just like she had done almost twenty-four hours earlier – the same lucky shoes, of course – and ran out to meet him. Beni leapt out of his car and hugged her tightly.

“Have you got your things?” Beni asked, as if they were continuing a conversation that hadn’t been started. Rose nodded and lifted a duffel bag.

“Right here.”

“Good. Let’s go.”

“Wait. I just... is this the right thing?” Rose asked with uncertainty.

“Yeah. Of course. How else would we be able to see each other? To live with each other, to follow our destiny-”

“But what if this isn’t our destiny?” Rose asked. Beni shook his head.

“Why’d you have to go asking that question?” he asked. He knew deep inside that this wasn’t the right thing to do, but he was so taken with Rose. Wasn’t it fair to take a shot at reckless love?

“Because... my parents would be heartbroken.”

“Mine would be too... well, at least my father. But... if they just try to keep us apart from each other for the rest of our lives, what good are they to us?” Beni asked, and Rose stepped back in shock.

“What good are they to- Beni, they raised us! They made us who we are! They’re the reason we’ve met!”

“We would’ve met otherwise. It was our fate to meet. Don’t you see that?”

“Fate? There is no fate. There is no destiny. There’s no luck. And there’s no me without my family.”

“I’ll be your family!” Beni cried. “We’ll make our own! Rose, we’re *meant* to be together.”

Rose shook her head. “No. Not if this is what you’re going to do to the people who love you. *I* love you, but if this is what happens when people

who really matter don't fulfill your wildest dreams, then I don't want to take the chance that I'll fail to accomplish that too."

"I'll always stay with you, Rose," Beni said, his voice cracking. "I promise." Rose shook her head, tears in her eyes.

"No, Beni. I'm not going with you. I know so many girls who'd do this for you, but... I'm not one of them. I just can't betray my family like this," Rose persisted. Beni's jaw set, and he turned sharply away from her and jerked open his car door. The gravel shot up behind the tires like vipers trying to reach out and snap at Rose. Tears slipped down her cheeks and throat, and she stumbled back inside and shut the door.

Three weeks later, Rose was back where it had all begun – the spindly balcony. The garden was ruined for her now, and she couldn't even bear to look at it from overhead, instead studying the smoky buildings around it with an intense reverence. The parts of the structures that were reached by the sun's bright happiness glowed almost white, but the beauty of the afternoon slowly dipped into a deep darkness that Rose had once hated but now enjoyed. Maybe sometimes she needed a shade from all the simmering smiles floating on the top. Rose knew now that the sun could be alluring, but it could also burn. Dr. Winslet didn't understand what had happened to his daughter, but he knew it had something to do with Beni.

"I warned you about him," he repeatedly stated, but he didn't realize he wasn't helping his daughter in the slightest. It made her regret not leaving with Beni, but there was nothing that she could do now but

reminisce over the first few happy moments they had shared before he had realized who she really was. In a way, she had predicted this would happen, that once he knew, things would never be the same... but it wasn't up to her to decide how he thought about her, she supposed. She just didn't know how she could ever go back to the simple days she had lived before. She'd tried making up stories about the cars and flowers like she used to, but it wasn't the same. They couldn't give her the satisfaction and contentment like *he* could. But there was nothing she could do now.

She had just started to try and make another story about one of these cars when she saw a black SUV cruising down the street at breakneck speed. Rose dropped what she was doing and ran down the stairs. A different kind of man jumped out than the one she'd known before, but she didn't care. All she wanted to do was be in his arms. He scooped her up and twirled her, and she laughed with joy. He set her down.

"I'm so sorry, I never should have doubted you, and I'm ready to go with you, and- what happened to you?"

Beni looked as different as he felt. A scar tore down the side of his face, and his lips were cracked and dry, and his cheeks were splashed with blood, and he walked with a slight limp in his step.

"I robbed a few stores, and-"

"You robbed a store? You're a thief? Oh my g-"

"I needed the money! C'mon, we need to go. I'll explain later. Right now, we need to get away from here."

Rose shook her head. "First tell me what's going on."

Beni groaned in frustration, and Rose crossed her arms. “Look, Rosie, I really don’t have time for this right now, I-”

“Rosie? Explain that too. Why are you in such a rush? You look like an escaped convict with guns in his backseat!” Rose said. Beni looked down, and Rose covered her mouth. “Beni, please tell me-”

“Look, the police are after me, and I’m so close to getting out, but I didn’t want to go without you. Please, I’ll tell you everything later, just trust me, Rosie!” Beni yelled, looking around wildly. Rose saw the look in his eyes. It wasn’t like the ones before, when he was joking. This was it, and she knew it. She nodded and walked over to the passenger’s seat. Beni let out a deep breath and sat down, starting the ignition before reaching back and grabbing a pistol, handing it to Rose. She gasped at the sight of the weapon, but took it in her trembling hands and held it tightly on her lap. Beni gave her a quick kiss on the temple before picking up a gun for himself and driving with one hand on the wheel. They exited the small neighborhood in complete silence, and were a good ten minutes out when Beni started to speak again.

“I know I’ve scared you Rosie, but I just want you to know, I love y-”

The first three bullets shattered through the windshield.