

“Red Wine and Cake”

“You need to get out more. You’re thirty-three, not dead,” Lena said, brushing crumbs from her lavender and purple crocheted poncho. Her hair was pulled back into a sloppy braid, and she munched on a cookie wrapped in plastic while sixties rock pulsed out of the record player in the sunroom behind them.

“How many times are we going to have this discussion?” Rosaline said, collapsing into the back of her chair.

“Look, I mourned for years, but I got passed my husband Paul dying,” Lena said, “you need to do the same, live your life, sister.”

“You are sixty-eight, how are we sisters?” Rosaline said. She pulled her faded green prairie skirt back over her giraffe like legs and shifted her weight to lean into Lena’s face. The thick orange curls on her head cascaded gloriously past her broad shoulders. She pursed her lips at Lena.

“You get what I’m saying so stop diverting,” Lena said, waving her cookied hand, “You are boring. Plain and simple.”

“I am not boring, I’m just happy with how things are. The bakery is doing well and I’m at peace. It took me awhile to get to this point. I don’t need to smoke or have edibles like you.”

“But you never go out anywhere,” she said, offering her a piece of the cookie.

“I don’t need to go anywhere Ms. Lena. Sitting here talking with you is more than enou,”

“Wait! This is the best part,” she said, raising her skinny fingers to the neck of an air guitar as the record player swelled in the sunroom behind them. “Relativity” by Sam the Sham was cresting its guitar solo. Lena bobbed her gray frazzled braid around her head as she played

with her cookie pic. “Yeaow! Ha-ha! You gotta enjoy life!” The music died down as the next song beats in the background. “What were you saying?”

“That I like talking to you,” Rosaline said, looking at the cookie pic, “and why are you eating that cheap cookie when I brought you a chocolate pound cake from my shop?”

“Yours tastes better, but these make me feel better,” Lena said with a hand up to her crummy grin.

Rosaline smiles, “I have to close the shop today, why don’t I stop by and check on you after work? I will bring a bottle of wine and we can dig into that cake.” She picked up a multi colored hooded poncho and shook her skirt free. Drizzles started to plunk on the overhang of the porch.

“Sure,” Lena said. She looked as Rosaline squeezed the hood over her mane of hair. “That one is getting worn out, I gotta crochet you another one.”

“This one is cozy. It will last a few more walks in the rain. See you later tonight,” she said. Lena took another bite of her cookie and raised a halfhearted peace sign at her.

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Rosaline noticed the small blue sedan as soon as she reached the end of the block. It was parked a little passed the cross street at first. She continued her strides, and neared the corner. The car crawled out into the road when she took a left at the end of the sidewalk. The sedan turned soon after her.

Rosaline quickened her pace, crossed the street, and turned right at the next four ways stop, passing the park. Swings and slides glistened in the sun. They were moist and void of children. She continued her pace and turned to look again. The sedan was stopped in the middle of the cross street, with the window cracked. After a few seconds, it sped off sloshing water onto the

sidewalk. She turned back around and continued walking. Rain reverberated from up above as she passed the park. She hummed through the lyrics of “Fairy Tale.”

“Pretty lady, the horses are back, bringing joy and happiness, but all of a sudden the horses are gone, It was only the sound of your heartbeat alone!”

The rest of Rosaline's walk was sunny and fairly short, considering her long strides. She stuck her hands in her pockets, looked up at the sky with wide eyes and breathed deep. Icy droplets of rain began to pelt her milk white skin, which had light, spotted, honey colored freckles. They dripped onto her eyelashes and she blinked them away.

Sun bounced off puddles, while she walked by houses that were lined with various lumps of deep red mulch. They surrounded beds of juniper, daisies, periwinkles, and morning glories. Water seeped into the street from the candied lawns like a sponge, making the air smell sickly sweet. A few of the neighbors sped out to their mailboxes, covering their heads with magazines or the collars of their shirts. Others just sat on their porches.

A short, stocky man with gray suspenders waved as she passed. “Hey Rosaline, always getting drenched huh?”

“I love it, it keeps me calm. It's just rain, I won't melt.” she shrugged, with a slight grin. A younger man yelled at his toddler to come in out of the rain. She looked over in his direction. He walked into the rain to grab his fussy kid, and smiled at her. “You ever getting an actual jacket instead of that hood, cuz you look silly without a basket.” Her eyes smiled, and she tucked a few stray curls into the poncho.

Finally reaching the parking lot, she was welcomed by her store's sign, "Red Wine and Cake," and caught sight of a few customers exiting. She opened the door galloped into the shop, wet, but with a smile on her face.

"Hey Mark, how was opening? Did you get the large party order, from that office, taken care of?" She pulled off her poncho and shook her curls loose, wiping her feet as she walked into the kitchen."

"Yup they are picking it up around four," Mark said.

"Ok good," she said, tossing her apron on and inspecting the kitchen and ovens. Several stainless-steel baking sheets were laid out on the marbled kitchen workstation, some with fresh chocolate croissants, others with her strawberry topped shortbread cookies, or her favorite - chocolate pound cake.

After a few dozen croissants and loaves of bread came out of the oven, and into customers hands, she decided to change out the coffee. She looked over at a customer who sat in the corner next to the window. He had his computer out, but instead of typing, he gazed through the crowd of people as they walked towards the door, to the bathroom, or came in and out from the rain.

"People watching again Damian?" Rosaline said, walking up to the table and refilling his coffee for the third time. "You should try a glass of wine every now and then, instead of fueling your writing with coffee."

His thin frame and short stature made his doe eyes look larger in his skull. His ears stuck out much further than his jaw, which matched the pristine hairline etched into his skull. He flashed a smile at her revealing, large, obtrusive teeth. He leaned back in his corner chair, and took a slurp of his coffee. After a brief pause, he set his cup down. "I only drank wine when my boyfriend was here with me."

“I have never seen a glass of wine in your hands,” she said, “and they are perfect to caress a nice large glass of red.”

“They are better to hold books my dear,” he said, as he waved a large hand, and widened his grin. Rosaline could see stains of red near his gums.

“Well, I will make you a promise,” she said, “next time you bring a date in here, two glasses of red will be on the house.”

“Well that’s very sweet of you,” Damian called to Rosaline, who had already crossed the shop and started to take the coffee urns apart.

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The order for the office had been picked up, and the shop started to wind down, but the rain was a steady dull all night. She closed the shop by herself, snagged a bottle of *Woodbridge Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon*, and soon threw on her poncho, tucking her curls in. She locked the door, put the keys in her pocket, and slid the bottle into her poncho. She walked down the side of the building, and into the parking lot. A car pulled up to her, close.

“Hey, do you need a ride, Rosaline?”

Damian leaned over the passenger's seat and called out from inside the orange glow of the car.

“Oh, umm, no thanks. I like walking in the rain,” she said with a wave, “and I’m not far.”

“Ok, go straight home,” he nodded, and pulled out of the lot, and down the road.

The rain got heavier as she approached Lena's block. She pulled her hands out of her poncho, and spread her palms. The wind picked up and chilled her wet fingertips as the bottle sloshed against her belly. She could not see the moon, but there was a blue hew in the air. She heard the drone of Lena's record player before she reached the lawn. The lights inside cast a warm shadow

on the porch. The music shook the windows. Rosaline walked up and put her hand on the door. It pulsed on its hinges.

She knocked and waited a few moments. The sound of a guitar solo came through the door, so she pounded louder. Nothing. She crossed the porch, and looked through the window to the sunroom. Lena was laying on her daybed, laughing. An ashtray sat on the tiled rod iron table next to her. Wisps of smoke rose, gently, into the air. A knitting basket sat at her feet with strings of yarn strewn over the floor and bed. Rosaline smiled, and walked over to the door as she pulled out the bottle of wine and her keys. She found Lena's spare key and unlocked the front door. She was instantly greeted with the blaring of a guitar and a drum solo, making her flinch, and stick one finger in her ear.

Walking through the kitchen, she sat the bottle of wine on the counter and tried to yell over the music. "Lena I'm here! Hello? Turn the music down!" she said, noticing the pan of chocolate pound cake on the kitchen island. "Lena!" She walked into the sunroom and saw Lena sitting on her hands, laughing. She fell over, into the daybed. Rosaline rushed over, and Lena looked up at her and laughed. She was yelling something, but Rosaline couldn't make it out. The drum solo ended. Silence.

"I smoked a Zig-Zag with him earlier! We're playing hide and seek! Shhh, no singing!" she screamed, a little too loud.

Rosaline looked down and noticed the yarn behind Lena's back. They were wrapped around her wrists. The record player picked up again. A steady, deafening, guitar strum.

"Ooooowwwwoooo! Who's that I see walkin' in these woods? Why, it's Little Red Riding Hood."
Rosaline looked over and noticed a chair next to the iron rod table, and beyond that, the back door leading to the pool. The glass was broken.

“Hey there Little Red Riding Hood, you sure are looking good. You’re everything a big bad wolf could want.”

She turned, and saw Damian next to the record player. He had a knife in his left hand. “You are so tender,” he said, and lifted the blade to his lips. He licked it.

“Listen to meeeee.”

Rosaline reached down and grabbed the scissors out of the knitting basket.

“Little Red Riding Hood, I don’t think little big girls should, go walking in these spooky old woods alone. Oooowwwoooo!”

She leapt to her feet, and raced out of the room. He followed behind her. She ran through the kitchen as he threw the bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon. It smashed into the wall covering her in deep red liquid. She moved into the hall.

“What big eyes you have, the kind of eyes that drive wolves mad. So just to see that you don’t get chased, I think I ought, to walk, with you for a ways.”

She looked behind her. Nothing. She froze, and pressed her back against the wall. She slid around the corner. Down the hall, past the stairs, was the front door. She raised her fist, and clenched the scissors, tight. As she started to make her way down the hall, she was knocked to the ground.

“What full lips you have. They’re sure to lure someone bad. So until you get to grandma’s place-”

Damian wrestled her into the carpet. She kicked his knee from under him. He fell over. She turned, landed a kick on his chin, and stumbled to her knees. She crawled up the stairs, but felt a grip on her skirt. He sliced at her calf. She screamed.

“-I think you ought to walk with me and be safe. I’m gonna keep my sheep suit on, until I’m sure that you’ve been shown, that I can be trusted walking with you alone. Ooowoooo!”

He jumped on top of her, and she turned to face him. She took the scissors and thrust them into his gut. His mute wail slobbered on her cheek as the veins on his neck and chest popped. She broke free, and reached the top of the stairs. The drums, beat under the floor and through her toes. He followed, arm clenched around his ribs. The door burst into the master bedroom, and she staggered across the plush pink bedding to the double doors of the terrace. Damian enters behind her, as she struggles with the latch, and tackles her through the glass of the door. They flop over the threshold, and hit the wood.

“Little Red Riding Hood, I’d like to hold you if I could, but you might think I’m a big bad wolf so I won’t. Oooowwwoooo!”

Damian’s knife slid across the wood and over the side of the terrace, which was covered in vines. Several bags of soil and river rock leaned on plump mosaic flower pots. Rosaline pushed herself to her feet as Damian hobbled to the railing, fighting the gale wild. The rain silenced the air around them. Little rivers of wine coiled from her hair, and down her legs. They dripped onto the blood that ran off her feet. He yelled something into the wind just as lightning flickered in the distance. She snatched a bag of rock. Before he could lunge, she swung the bag into his stomach, and knocked him over the rail. He hit the surface of the pool, and clutched at the bag before he fell under the surface. Rosaline peered over the edge. The harsh wind scraped the top of the pool. Damian’s blood dyed the water pink.

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The balmy sun starts to fade. Rosaline hears a rumble in the sky drawing closer as she lowers flowers onto her husband’s grave.

“I think I’m going to start wearing a raincoat,” she said. “Everyone warned me I would catch a cold, and I did.” She laid a hand on the gravestone. “Who knows, maybe I’ll close the shop and move to California, or something crazy like that. I guess I never thought about it.” She stood up and walked away from the grave. She turned around before she left. “I’ll always miss you.”

Lena leaned on the hood of her Volkswagen beetle. Rosaline walked up kicking dirt as she went. “You ok Rosie?” she said.

“I’m good,” she said. “A storm is coming, let’s go, I don’t wanna get caught in the rain.”