



The Blossoms of Unrequited

Love

Vanisha Js
Retold Fairy Tales

Rose eagerly waited as her Father packed his belongings to leave for work. As the village Head Chief and Head Huntsman, he was a stern man who showed little emotion. Though he cared immensely for Rose, his overprotective nature had caused a rift in their relationship. She longed to be free, despite being only eight years old. Rose stood up from her chair, her Granny placing her hands on her shoulders. “Now you’re not to go anywhere unsupervised. No talking to strangers and no wondering off into the woods. Do you understand?” her Father said firmly. Rose nodded. “Look after her,” he said to his Mother-in-law. “Off you go now, she’ll be fine with me.” Rose loved her Granny. She let her have all the freedom a child could have at her age. She was also the only one who talked about her Mother, a loving soul whom had sadly passed away in childbirth. Her Father rarely spoke of her, but Rose could feel her warm presence close by. They waited for a few minutes after he left. An innocent but cheeky smile took over Rose as she looked up to her Granny. “Can I go now? Can I, can I, can I?” she pleaded. Chuckling, her Granny ruffled her hair. “All right then, but you be back within the hour and don’t forget to bring me back a rose. “I will do Granny. I love you,” she said, hugging her. Rose whisked out her backpack and dashed out the front door.

Only her Grandma had understood her love for the wilderness, something that she shared with her Mother. As she ran towards the lush green trees which opened a path that seemed made just for her, her eyes brimmed with delight and wonder of what her next exploration would bring. Running through the forest, she soaked up

the environment of rustling trees gently swaying in the breeze and felt the heat of the sun that filtered through the branches. She took a deep breath of air and exhaled, feeling the energy all around. Skipping, twirling and humming along, Rose took rest at a nearby bench. She closed her eyes for a moment when something out of the blue jumped out in front of her. "Wroarhh!" shouted a young wolf wearing a green bandana, yellow T-shirt and red shoes. Rose blinked unfazed at the cub. "Wroarhhh!" he shouted again, sounding more like a child playing make-believe than anything scary. "Wroahh!" Rose mimicked back at him. The cub stared blankly at her rather confused. "What are you doing?" he asked her. "What are you doing?" she questioned back. "You're supposed to be afraid of me." "Why would I be afraid of you?" "Because I'm a big bad wolf." "A wolf? You don't look like a big bad wolf to me. You look more like a kitten," she replied innocently. "I am most certainly not a kitten! I am a big bad wolf!" "No you're not, you're a kitten." "I am not a kitten, stop calling me that!" he said, tears brimming in his eyes. "Okay, I'm sorry I'm sorry," Rose said, sensing his hurt at being called a kitten. An awkward silence filled the air. "Want to play a game of tag with me?" she asked. The wolf cub remained quiet for a moment. "Tag, you're it!" she said, running away for him to catch her. The little wolf chased after her, the two smiling and laughing as Rose outran the cub, escaping his touch every time.

The two sat at the bench to catch their breath. "That was fun!" the wolf said, forgetting their earlier disagreement. "It sure was. Say what's your name?" Rose asked. "Wolf number 365," he said monotonously. "Wolf number 365? That's not a name." "Yes, it is. All wolves are called by numbers." Rose was curious. She had heard stories from her Granny of wolves being mistreated and made to live in the wolf enclosure. But she just couldn't believe that they weren't allowed to have a name. "I don't mind really. It's part of becoming a big bad wolf. And us wolves have only one goal. You can't call yourself a big bad wolf until you eat a human." "Eat a human? Yuck. You don't seem like a bad wolf to me. Don't you want to be good?" Rose questioned. The cub didn't respond. "Well...can I give you a name? I can't call you by a number, so I'll...um...hmm. How about Toby? I quite like that name." "Hmm, Toby. Yeah okay, Toby! Yeah that suits me! Thank you." "You can call me Rose. Well, I'd better get going now, Granny might be worried." As Rose got up to leave, Toby noticed something on her arm. "Hey! Shoo!" he shouted, swiping his paw at the bumblebee that was about to sting her. Rose let out a short, high pitched scream as the bumblebee flew away, revealing claw marks with blood that started to drip. Her cardigan was torn at the sleeve. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to, it was, I was trying to help!" Toby pleaded. Rose started to shed a few falling tears. He took off his bandana and tied it around her arm. "Wait here. I'll be right back, please wait," he said, hurrying off into the woods. Not long after, he returned with a box containing

several items. He cleaned her wound gently and bandaged her arm. Rose watched on curiously. She had never seen a wolf treat an injury before. "Where did you learn that?" she asked. "Wolf School. They teach us in case a huntsman ever hurts us, you know for protection." "Not all huntsmen are bad you know," Rose said quietly under her breath. Toby took her cardigan and began to stitch the rip in the sleeve. "Where did you learn how to sew?" "Wolf School. They teach us so we can make disguises to trick people and eat them," he said innocently, not seeming to realise what the words actually meant. "Here, finished," he said, holding up the newly sewn cardigan with a symbol of a rose to cover up the stitching. It was the most beautiful embroidery she had ever laid her eyes on. "I'm sorry if I hurt you. It really was an accident. I was trying to scare the bee away because once it bit me and I didn't want it to hurt you." Rose pondered over what to say. "Are you sure you're a big bad wolf?" she questioned. Toby stared blankly without answering. Stomach rumbling broke the silence and an embarrassed Toby tried to brush it off. Rose burst out in laughter. "Want to come back to mine? My Granny makes the most awesome apple pie! It's even tastier than a human," she joked.

The two children entered her small home to breathe in the aroma of sweet apple pie, steaming from the oven. Rose found a note on the kitchen table. "Had to pop out to the shops. Made your favourite pie! Granny." Rose cut the pastry neatly into four slices, sharing two with Toby who wolfed it down. "Yummy!" he mumbled; mouth full of pie with crumbs plastered around his face. "You've got crumbs all over you!" she giggled and went to get a napkin to wipe his mouth. As she wiped away, the front door burst open. "Forgotten the most important tool and...Rose you here?" he called, entering the kitchen. "What in blazes?!" Toby looked up in fright as the huntsman grabbed the nearest kitchen knife and brandished it at him. "Get out of here!" he shouted, causing Toby's fur to spike up in fear. He made a dash for it as a chase ensued around the kitchen. Rose's pleas for him to stop were ignored. Toby scurried out the back door as she watched on helplessly. "Father stop he's just a child, like me!" "He's a wolf, and wolves are not to be trusted!" Rose was stunned, he was an innocent wolf, but still, her Father would never listen. She wished he understood that she wasn't afraid, and that the wolf cub was her friend, not a threat. "Now where's your Grandma?" "She went to the shops." "I see. Well, I need to head back to work. I'll send someone over the minute I get there. And if I see that wolf again, there'll be trouble I tell you, a whole lot of trouble!" he grumbled, leaving frustrated. Rose sighed back into her chair, resting on her arms, staring at the window, longing to be back outside. Suddenly a face poked through the screen. "Toby!" Rose exclaimed and ran up to him. "Toby are you okay?" "Sure I am. Wolves are never afraid of anything," he said, puffing out his chest to try and hide what had just happened. "Really now?" Rose said

sarcastically. Sensing her disbelief, Toby closed his eyes, crossed his arms and pouted his mouth, making her giggle. "Want to meet same place tomorrow?" she asked. "What about your Father?" "I'll talk to my Granny, she'll sort everything out." "Okay then. I'll meet you tomorrow. Bye then," Toby said, waving enthusiastically at her. "Bye Toby." The cub smiled at the sound of his new name and left into the woods. She watched him run along, wondering what challenges may come his way if that was her Father's reaction to a small kitten.

The next day, Rose waited at the bench when she saw her friend, running breathlessly towards her, holding something red. Running didn't seem to be his speciality. "Toby! What's that you're carrying?" Toby composed and straightened himself up. "It's for you. To say sorry for yesterday." Rose took the gift and unfolded it to reveal a gorgeous, high quality made red riding coat. She was in awe as she studied the intricacies and fine detailed patterns that outlined the coat and hood. "I made it. I was going to use it as a disguise, but I thought you might like it," he said, hiding the fact that he had spent the whole night making it for her. "Do you like it?" he asked. "Oh, I love it!" She quickly put it on, though it was far too large and covered her up from head to toe. "Maybe it'll fit when I'm older," she said as the two of them broke off into laughter. A wolf cry in the distance sounded. "What was that?" Rose asked. "Wolf call. I have to get back to school. Do you want to come join?" "Join? Is it safe? Not that I'm afraid or anything," she said, folding her arms. "I think you'll be safe in my class. None of us are big bad wolves, yet. "Toby, do you really want to be a bad wolf?" she questioned again. He remained silent, eventually taking her hand. "Come, let's go."

As they entered the classroom, Rose watched as other cubs took their places. The first line of desks each held a workstation with a sewing machine. At the end were shelves stacked with threads, needles and fabrics in a variety of colours. The middle desks each had a skeleton of a wolf body and a diagram. At the end were large cabinets with all kinds of herbs, medicines and medical equipment. The last line had blueprints that she couldn't quite make out. A couple of the children looked her way, one, a wolf in a bright, pink tutu. "Ahem," a voice said behind them. "Father," Toby called. "Father?" Rose said confused. "And just who do we have here?" "She's my friend." "You mean, she is Rose, the daughter of the Head Chief and Head Huntsman, here, at Wolf School. 365 what were you thinking?" Rose pulled down her hood. "How do you know who I am?" "Everyone knows who you are my dear. Who wouldn't? Though how you managed to come this far undetected is beyond mystery to me. Come now, we shall escort you back to the village." "Aww, can't she stay? No one will know if you don't say anything," Toby pleaded. The other wolves watched on curiously. "Most certainly not. It's bad

enough her being this far out in the wolf enclosure but inside a wolf classroom, why it's unheard of!" He spoke of concern than any anger. He took her hand and the three walked out of the class, the girl in pink whispering goodbye to her with a wave.

As they arrived at the border to her village, the three paused. "I want to have a word you both. This may sound unfair, but I don't think the two of you should meet again. "Why?" Rose asked. "I'm sorry my dear, you are far too young to understand. But us wolves are confined to this enclosure, we're not supposed to enter the town, are we 365?" he said to a frowning Toby. "I wish it could be different," he said, kneeling down to her. "Who knows, maybe one day it will be. But until then, it's best you stay in the village, and say goodbye to 365. "Toby. His name is Toby" Rose said. The teacher seemed taken aback. "Right. Toby." "I'm sorry we can't play together anymore. But don't worry, when I'm bigger and stronger I'll come back for you, I promise," Rose told her friend who struggled to hide his tears. "I had fun playing with you," she said and hugged him as his paws carefully moved to rest on her back. "Can I um, can I give you a name? I mean I know you have one, but maybe you'd like another? From me?" "Sure, why not?" "Hmm, well you're kind of little, and red suits you and I made that coat. How about Little Red Riding Hood?" Rose thought for a second then burst out into laughter. "That's a funny name. I think I prefer Rose though. Thank you." "Oh, okay. Well...bye then," Toby said in a whisper. Rose smiled, holding back her tears and ran into the distance. Her mind was racing. She wondered why her Father hated wolves, why they had to live secluded away. She wondered why they were given a number instead of a name and why they aspired to be bad? She wanted things to change. But who would listen to an eight-year-old girl? She made a silent promise, that one day things would change and in one way or another, she would have a part in it. All she needed was time, patience and perseverance.

Ten years later

Diving under a barrage of shooting arrows, scaling over and down a wooden barrier and crawling under a net to make a dash for the finishing line, Rose sprinted with total flair and control. Although she was only eighteen, she had grown to be the fastest, wittiest and strongest girl in her village, often boasting that she could outrun a wolf any day. Her statement had some truth to it. She was the only girl in a team of Apprentice Hunters though Rose had a different motive for joining. She loved the forest and could never use her skills to hunt any animal. But the training would give her what she needed. It gave her a burning desire for change. "Nice one Rose!" the assault course leader called out as the remaining boys caught up, one by one gasping for

breath. Rose had barely broke a sweat. She had trained every day since leaving her friend Toby. Her strength exceeded that of her Father's, who was now heading towards retirement. He was still the same strict man he had always been. Rose quickly gathered her belongings, threw on her riding coat which now fit her perfectly and made a beeline for the exit. "See you later guys!" she called waving goodbye. "That girl sure is strong." "I heard she was raised by wolves." "Well I heard she inherited her strength by a magic stone!" Rumours. Rumours had circulated her throughout her life. She found some amusing, and some not. But there were far more important things to think about. The time had come to pay her friend a visit. She didn't know why she felt now was the right time. She just listened to the warmth she felt of her Mother guiding her.

Running past her house, Rose entered the depth of the woods, passing by the same bench that now was worn down. As she ran, a transparent version of her younger self flashed in place as she headed towards the wolf enclosure. She cut her way through unkempt vines and branches that caused a few rips and tears to her coat as she reached the tall gates of a building. She unlocked the padlock with her hunting tools and snuck inside. The building seemed empty, or so she thought. As she slowly made her way inside, she entered a wide corridor, crouching down to remain out of sight. She peered into a classroom and to her amazement found it full of wolf cubs, sewing, experimenting, designing, just like the room she had seen as a child. As she looked through more classrooms, she found each one full of wolves, all silently engrossed in their studies. It seemed very much a normal school. As she reached the end, she arrived at the entrance of a large hall. A sports class was taking place with older wolves. She scanned the hall when her eye caught a familiar looking wolf in a green bandana. She entered in and quickly hid behind the bags full of sporting equipment. Through a gap she continued to watch but lost her focus. "Maybe there's a spare ball under here," a voice said, tugging at her hood. "Hey, be careful!" she said, jumping out to come face to face with the wolf in green bandana. "What the, what are you...hey, wait a minute. Rose? Is that you?" "Toby?" "Haha, no way! Rose! I see you grew into the coat." "I did...thank you." A couple of the other wolves rushed over, whilst the remainder casually moved in closer to hear what was going on. "Hey I remember you. You snuck into our class wearing that red riding coat!" said a wolf in a pink sports skirt. "We never got to meet properly, I'm Amani." "I um..thought wolves didn't have names?" Rose said. "We don't, wolves are born as a number...thank you," Amani said, hugging her. "For giving my Toby a name. He gave us all one too and it kept us sane." My Toby Rose thought, her heart dropping slightly. "This looks like...a normal school?" "It mostly is, up until we leave. Then everything goes downhill from there. But what did you expect to find? Big bad wolves tearing each other apart? No wait, wait, let me guess,

you thought you'd find us in disguises getting ready to eat people!" Amani said animatedly. "No." "Good. Because everyone knows that stuff's just from storybooks. How could anyone not notice a wolf in a nightie with our big furry ears, wet nose and dagger like teeth?" Amani said, baring hers for emphasis. "Though I do know of someone here who would believe anything he read from a storybook, isn't that right Toby?" Toby laughed abruptly to cover his embarrassment. "Anyway, Rose, what are you doing here?" Toby asked. "I...came to find you." The other wolves nudged him with their elbow in his side, teasing him. "Stop it!" he whispered loudly. "Yeah," Amani said, pulling their ears. "Stop it."

"I want to ask you something. All of you. If you could leave from here, would you?", Rose asked. "Of course we would! But it's not possible," Amani replied. "Why not? Listen I promised Toby I would come back. I've been training as a hunter." The wolves gasped. "Wait, wait, it's for a reason. The hunters run the enclosure, but with my persuasion I want to end this and let you into the village." "Well that's a nice fairy tale, but it ain't gonna happen!" Amani scowled. "Why not?" "Because the person who did this is no longer here and her rules are made to last forever!" "Who? Who did this?" "Quiet Amani! It would destroy her!" Toby hushed at her. "What would destroy me? What?" "She's forbidden to know," Toby growled. Amani took Toby's paw and Rose felt a tinge of jealousy. "She has a right to know. Tell her, or I will," she said, strictly. Toby took a deep breath. "Rose, your Grandmother." "What about her?" "She's the one who banished us here." "What? What did you say? My Granny? I don't understand." "The day we said goodbye, my Father told me the truth. She's the one responsible. I don't blame you for it though, it's not your fault." "But my Granny loves wolves, she told me so many wonderful stories and she let me wonder off into the woods whenever I wanted. It doesn't make any sense!" Rose couldn't believe what she was hearing. She was left with more questions than answers. "Rose wait!" Toby called, watching Rose run away from him.

Tears were streaming down her face. She had just suffered the ultimate betrayal. Her own Granny was the one responsible for the whole situation, the Granny she loved the most. But something just didn't seem right to her. Her Granny had passed away a few years earlier and the relationship with her Father was still distant. She didn't know who to turn to. As she ran out of the school without looking, she bumped into a tall, furry wolf knocking her back. "What are you..I say is that Rose?" "Toby? I mean, Toby's Father?" "Rose what are you doing back here? I thought I told you..." "Tell me something. Is it true? Is it my Granny who did this to you? Was she the one who made the enclosure?" The teacher paused, then took out an envelope inside his suit with her name

on it. "I think you should read this. Your Grandmother gave this to me. I think it might help with some answers. I trust you'll see your way out by yourself this time...you look just like your Mother my dear," he said, warmly and walked away.

Rose knelt down, forgetting her whereabouts and opened the letter.

'To my sweet Rose,

If you're reading this letter, then you will have surely found out the truth. Yes my dear, it is I who sent the wolves away. It was I who took away their livelihood. But it was not without good reason. You see, when I was your age, I once fell in love with a wolf. Oh he was the true love of my life, my soul mate. But he left me for a wolf. Do you know how heartbroken I was? Still I had to move on, though I never really got over that betrayal. The wolves lived in harmony in village at that time. Then when I had your Mother, I watched as she grew to love the nature just as I had, and just as you did too. But when I found out that she too had fallen in love with a wolf, I strictly forbade the two from being together. Toby was his name. You may not be aware, but I was also Head Chief at that time. Then, when you were born, your Mother fell ill and it was Toby who was the leading nurse who delivered you. But he couldn't save her, and she went away from me. The wolf happened to be your Father's best friend and he was angry that his love had gone away from him, by the very wolf who also loved her. He persuaded me to banish the wolves, and in my hurt and grief over everything, I agreed. I made some very harsh rules like making them be born as a number instead of a name, taking their identity away. Their extraordinary talents were confined to only their enclosure, taking away their purpose. After all, if you don't have a purpose what else is there to have in life? You may be wondering why I painted the wolves in a good light to you, when all along I did such appalling things to them. It was because I still loved my wolf friend deeply. It was my way of making up for what I did. It was a big mistake I made, and I didn't have the courage to put things right. But you do Rose. You always have a choice in life. I have watched you grown into a marvellous young woman. The next step is up to you.

All my love Granny.'

Rose took a few moments to take everything in. She thought of Toby and Amani and the more she thought about it, the more she felt pain. But then she remembered the fun memories they had together. You always have a choice in life. Remembering that tonight, the village counsel would be holding a meeting with the Head

Chiefs of the neighbouring towns, it could be her chance to change things, if she wanted to. Feeling an overwhelming sense of responsibility, she stood up and looked back at the school.

Nightfall settled in the village and the counsel gathered in the town centre. Amongst the Head Chiefs were townspeople; men and women of all ages. They were discussing new measures to restore an old building. As they chattered amongst themselves, a loud, unison thumping was heard. Rose was leading a group of wolves towards the centre guarded by the Apprentice Hunters. Though they were in training, they all had a liking for Rose and respected her. It had taken the wolves some persuading that they would be safe to leave, but with Rose in charge, Toby had convinced everyone to have faith in her. Slowly, they emerged out of the darkness. The counsel jumped to their feet as Rose stood in front of her Father. "Rose, what on Earth is going on?!" her Father shouted. "Sound the wolf alarm, sound the alarm!", another counsel chief commanded. The townspeople moved back together in apprehension. Thanks to her classmates, they had the wolf alarm points covered so no one could be alerted from the other towns. One sound and they would be here in an instant.

"Everyone listen to me. You all know me as the daughter of the Head Chief and Head Huntsman. But I'm here on my own accord to ask you to free the wolves from the wolf enclosure. "Rose, enough!" her Father shouted. "Father I know everything. And I mean everything. Inwardly, Rose was shaking. Never had she come face to face with her Father and under such circumstances. But she drew her strength from her Mother, whom she felt was right next to her. "I know you were hurt, because Mother went away. What happened was a tragedy, but you can't blame the wolves for that. They have amazing talents that we need. You can't take away their purpose anymore. Once they leave their school what's left for them? I know Granny was also partly to blame, but it doesn't excuse anything. The crowd was stunned into silence. "Mother would never have wanted this to happen, and I think you know it too," she told her Father sternly. Taken aback by her words, he remained speechless. "Father, everything that has happened has been a result of hurt, misunderstandings and grief. But blame does nothing. We only end up hurting ourselves." Silence filled the centre, broken by a lady in the crowd. "Well, I see no reason for the wolf enclosure." "My family used to have them round for tea all the time when I was younger!" an elderly man shouted. A wave of comments suddenly began to outpour from the crowd. Watching the aggravated villagers, her Father raised his hand for silence. He slowly walked over to Rose, placing his hand on her shoulder and for the first time, looked into her eyes. "You are just like your Mother, Rose," he said, with a tear falling from both their eyes. "The meeting will reconvene in a month's time,

where my daughter Rose will attend, as the village's new Head Chief and Head Huntswoman. With that, he left in silence. Rose breathed out a heavy sigh of relief. "Nice one Rose," her friend fist bumped her. "You did it girl, nice going!" another said. The crowd slowly dispersed, leaving just Toby and Rose alone.

"Rose, I, I um.. thank you," Toby said. "Don't thank me. You could have chosen to resent me when you found out about my Granny, but you didn't." "Well how could I? Giving me a name made me realise I didn't really want to be a bad wolf anymore. It kind of gave me my own identity. "I'm glad... so, um, Amani seems like a lovely girl." "She is." "I see. Well, goodbye Toby. I'll see you around sometime." Toby hugged her, taking her by surprise. "You'll always be my friend Rose." Rose smiled, teary eyed. "And you mine."

Five Years Later

Life changed considerably since the wolves entered the village once more. New dispensaries were set up and medical breakthroughs were being made every day. People came from far and wide to witness the unparalleled sense of style the village was known for. New tools for hunters meant a transfer from hunting to building, and they created the most innovative buildings one had ever seen. Not far from the woods, a couple welcomed a newborn. "Have you given her a name?" Rose asked. "Not yet," Amani said. "Might I give a suggestion? Toby, do you remember that name you gave me when we were younger? The one I laughed at?" "Oh, you mean Little Red Riding Hood?" "Yes, that's the one." "I quite like it," Amani said, smiling down to the cub sleeping peacefully in her arms.

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