



ROSES

by Zoe' Williams

ROSES ARE EXPENSIVE. Especially white ones.

I have never liked roses. The smell was always too overpowering. As I walk out of the garden shop, my nose still wrinkles at the fragrance. I wrap my hands tight around the plastic enveloping them. Maybe I squeeze too tight, because I can feel the thorns pressing against my skin, wanting to cut into my flesh and dye their stark petals red. I keep my hold, though. I do not want anyone to see how violently my hands are shaking.

The roses sit next to me in the passenger seat. I lean them against the window so they do not fall over. The plastic catches the bright sunlight and flashes in my eyes. That is not good. I need to drive. I put them in the back, lying down. I should probably treat them better, but they are going to die anyway. It does not really matter. Nothing matters anymore.

I never go less than eight over the speed limit the entire drive. I have always loved driving fast, but now I do it because I am nervous. I clench both hands on the steering wheel until they are white with strain. As a result, I oversteer.

The parking lot is made of gravel. I hate driving on gravel. The noise alone is enough to drive me crazy. I have always been one for silence, but now, everything is too loud. The bees in the cropped grass. The slam of my car door. The crinkle of those stupid roses. The blares of the highway behind me. The crunch of the gravel underneath my shoes. The leaves of the trees rustling in the light wind.

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The plain is abandoned. I am alone. That is one good thing. People make things... difficult.

There is only one person I truly love. I am meeting him now.

Our meetings are the only thing I look forward to all week. I will bring him flowers as we sit on the plain under the beating sun and talk about the past week. He is a great listener. The one thing I have against him is the roses. He loves them, and I hate them. However, I tolerate them because I love him, and love is more valuable than petty opinions.

I struggle through the grass to avoid the crunchy gravel. The dirty smell of gasoline and cars drifts through the air, polluting the gentle smell of the meadow. I grip the roses in one hand, and clench the other. I must keep a tight control of my emotions. If I lose control, I cannot tell him I am leaving.

I find him, sitting by himself on a little hill. He faces the highway, thoughts elsewhere.

Despite my mood, a small smile crawls onto my face. "Morning, Hal."

He says nothing.

I sit down and give him the roses. He listens while I share the past events of my days. He's a good listener. All graves are.

"I know, I know. They're like family. But what about God? What has He ever done for us? I only went to that church for a few weeks before..." I sigh. "I can't go there anymore. Not now. They look at me, and they don't see me. They see you. So, I came here to tell you... I'm not going back. Ever."

A moment of silence while my dead husband processes this.

"What?" I exclaim. No. I... no. I can't. I know tomorrow's Sunday. I know. Yes. I'll tell you why. I only went to that place for you. Why go to church now? It's pointless." I bury my head in my hands. "Oh, Hal."

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I prefer crying alone. No matter what anyone does, it does not change the fact that a void has been opened up inside my chest that nobody can fill. People only mess it up. Alone, I can cry and move on, but people with their stares and their whispers and their false sympathy slow down the process.

Hal never did that. He would always let me cry.

I lean sideways against the cold, hard grave, seeking a glimpse of the warmth that he had. All I find is stone. An empty, soulless stone that devours the heat of my flesh like a wind that snuffs out a match.

I straighten, my tears gone. Hal is not a stone. He is a person. "You know, maybe I will try going tomorrow. It couldn't hurt."