

## July 14: ♪ 6. Angeleyes ♪

Peter stood at the bus stop in a daze. Confusion reigned. Rose's behavior confounded him to no end. Did she want to? Didn't she? All his suppressed feelings came up his throat and entered his brain.

The fading July sun shining in his face reminded him of Southern California. *L.A. Rose. L.A.* The last winter, coldest one in over 30 years, exposed the brutal reality of continental climate in landlocked Berlin. In Los Angeles, the nearby ocean moderates the weather.

Plus, the city had a uniqueness. Superstar couple Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman buying tickets in the little movie theatre in Westwood where Peter worked in his youth. Only in L.A. Maybe, he should go back for now. He could always return in 40 years, when global warming bestows California's climate onto Germany.

Only a few exams to get his real estate license back. The housing market had improved. In the good old days, before the financial crisis, people in that business walked on paths paved with gold. With prices doubling and tripling every hour, as it seemed, even a flunky made money. The current tough market required someone like him. *I am good at real estate. I am very good at real estate.*

But, could he handle the memories. And Rose. Why Rose Sinéad O'Rourc? Three billion women on this planet. Why does the one that he adored, worshipped, have to walk into his sale? His emotions twisted and tore him apart. Just the thought of her made his pants feel tight. Years of dreams, of unfulfilled longing, of fantasy play stood before him in the flesh. Ready for him to touch and taste. Yet he felt such overwhelming, unbridled fear. Fear of the unknown. Of failure. Of rejection. And an angst beyond anything that he

would destroy, once again, an already drowning soul desperately grasping for a life ring.

He should not think below the belt. Bad idea. If he had any sense, he would put a mile between them. A league. A universe. But his brain had decided to strike. Brainless, he boarded the bus.

"*Nee.*" The nasal voice of the bus driver with his Berlin metrolect asking for payment brought him back to reality. "*Mittm könn' Sie wirklij nich zahl'n*—No. You really can't pay with that." Peter stared at the crisp, green hundred-euro bill in his hand. He mumbled an apology and showed his monthly pass.

One look from Rose turned his brain to mush. Those "Angeleyes" got to him. Always have, and always will. The ABBA song played in his head: one look and he was hypnotized.

Peter teared up. Those big eyes. Eyes so deep he could lose himself in them. Swim in them forever. Rose had them. So did Natasha.

*Oh, Natasha.* His great love at first sight. The two met at a party and made an immediate connection. He recognized his "Soulmate." The song by *Natasha* Bedingfield instantly popped into his head. Someone who knows how to love you without being told. Fate had to have arranged this chance encounter.

The childish flirting went on for an hour between them. Her beautiful brown eyes sparkled whenever they met his. A graceful smile greeted his gaze. Whenever someone obstructed the longing view, Peter and Natasha would shift their bodies to regain their precious vista.

Natasha and he talked and flirted for the rest of the party and continued afterward outside, eyes glued to each other, faces barely apart. The two young love birds kept talking and talking until three in the morning. The parking garage had

closed by then, separating her from her car, her lifeline home. He had to rescue the imperiled princess. Story of her life.

The problems started with Natasha drowning her pain in alcohol. *Alcohol, alcohol, alcohol. I could write a Greek tragedy about alcohol. And star in it!*

Deep inside Natasha cowered a fragile, vulnerable, lonely, fearful little girl. Udo Jürgens' "Gib mir deine Angst" played in his head. He had translated the lyrics for her as "Give me your fear." Even made the text rhyme. The contrast of fear and hope, night and day. Hope for a hopeless soul.

Peter noticed a dark figure with long hair sitting in the back in the dim light of the fading day. The ghost of Natasha. He spoke to her in a soft voice.

"Did you come back?"

"What do you think?"

"She looks so much like you. Same eyes, same smile, same figure. Rose behaves just like you. And she drinks...like you."

The shadow shrugged her shoulders. "It is what it is."

"Why did you leave me? I protected you. Gave you shelter."

"You total let down. I looked everywhere for love. What did I, like, get instead? Bozos lusting after my body. Just like you. Nobody cared about me."

"But I listened when you cried your heart out. Your best buddy. Like in *When Harry Met Sally*. We could talk about anything. The most intimate details. Just like them. I understood you."

"Yeah, and what did Harry say? A man as friend of a woman he finds attractive? So no go. Sex totally gets in the way. Just fess up. You thought of only one thing. I trusted ya. I needed love. You wanted sex."

*Sex, sex, sex. I am good at sex. I am very good at sex.*

"I just wanted a taste, to make sure. Give you a taste. One weekend with Michelle, we did thirteen positions of the Kama

Sutra! I could have sent you to seventh heaven, but you never gave me a chance."

"You still don't get it, dude. You never told me 'I love you.' Like you told Rose. Your love could have saved me from alcohol. Saved my life. Instead, on that fateful night on La Brea Boulevard, alcohol destroyed us both."

"Forgive me. I love you."

"So too late."

Peter reached out for her, but the shadow vanished. *Why did I drive that night? Why? Dark. Rain. Four o'clock.* Because he needed to talk to Natasha. See her one more time. Tell her the words that could have made everything right, after hurting her so much. He had to face her to preserve their love.

Fate intervened.

To punish him.

Mercilessly.

His dreams perished at San Vicente Boulevard, miles from his salvation.

The movement of the bus shook him out of his thoughts. Peter noted a flash in the opposite lane. He saw a figure standing in the darkness, dressed in regal attire with glittering gold trim. One hand rested on the handle of his long sword. Its shiny metal pommel reflected a bright, white ray of light. The other hand held a skull. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.

"To be, or not to be—that is the question..." His voice thundered over the roar of the bus engine.

"To die, to sleep

No more—and by a sleep to say we end

The heartache and the thousand natural shocks..."

Hamlet disappeared as the bicycle rolled past Peter. He woke up, like he did that fateful day. Sleeping forever would have made everything easier.

Instead, he had to "suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." When he finally left the hospital,

Natasha was gone. Maybe her family took her away. Perhaps she ended it all. Not knowing worsened his feeling of guilt. It took him two years to get over Natasha. Two long, painful years.

Peter never saw her again. Until he found that picture. A young girl, with angeleyes, just like Natasha. No, not like Natasha. Natasha paled next to Rose. Everybody paled next to Rose. He immediately felt the same connection; made Rose his new soulmate, his ersatz-Natasha.

He could dream about her. Make up with her. Fantasize about her. Love her. Have sex with her. Beg her forgiveness. And never make it real. Never face the agony of not knowing. Never feel the desperation of rejection. Never plunge into the guilt of hurting her. She was not real.

*Alas, poor Yorick!* No Shakespearean tragedy without unbelievable coincidences. Fate had arranged another chance encounter. Brought Peter and Rose together. A sign from heaven?

Just in time, he spotted the sign for the subway station "U Mendelssohn-Bartholdy-Park." He jumped out and walked up the stairs. *So Berlin! A subway that runs above ground.*

Only a handful of people waited at the far end of the platform. Peter stared at the steel rails below him. *Oh, Rose, this is not happening.* This could not be happening. This must not be happening. How could this not end in tragedy? *Shakespeare always ends in tragedy! Hamlet dead. Romeo and Juliet. No exceptions.* He had already died a million deaths today. Maybe two million.

Peter wanted his RoRo so badly—a girl so fragile, so vulnerable, so lonely, so fearful, like Natasha. A girl looking for love, like Natasha, meeting a boy who wanted to die.

Tears ran down his cheeks. No one there to see. Not that he would have cared. *To love, or not to love, that is the question.*

And why "Rose," the shortened English version of "Rosemary"?

"Why not?" There she stood in a costume straight out of the *Sissi* movies: Rosemarie Magdalena Albach, known as Romy Schneider, in a shoulderless dress with big bust and wasp waist ending in an embroidered skirt that fanned out forever.

"Rose is my doppelgänger. I started in movies at 15 and zoomed to stardom by 17. What price fame for a young girl? Everybody wanting a piece of me. Literally a piece of me. No privacy, no chilling, no fun. Always someone watching, criticizing."

Romy made a half turn and looked down on the platform. Her voice had an air of resignation.

"No one to turn to but other stars with their own dramas. Like Alain Delon, my fiancé, huge star in France, just like Joe DiMaggio in America."

"And boozing makes better friends?" Peter said.

"Of course not. A buzz purges false friends from your mind. Like my husbands. Took advantage of me, my fame, my money. Who do you trust? Awful feelings...horrible loneliness, unbearable pressure, the paparazzi...naturally we self-medicate, to get a moment of joy. Besides, I'm not the only star who drowned the pain. At least, I made it to 43. Young Rosemary..."

Romy silently kicked pebbles across the platform.

Peter spread his arms and bowed his head in sorrow. "What's in a name? Yours, tragedy! For *nomen est omen*—name is omen, says it all. No worse pick to tempt fate but 'Rosemary'!"

"What about 'Marilyn'?"

"Monroe?"

"Yes. Three marriages. Dead at 36. It's in us. She who we call Rose, by any other name, would smell as drunk."

A cold spell hit his face. Peter's arms and shoulders shuddered.

"So Rose will share your fate?"

Romy faced him and shrugged her shoulders.

"You know her better."

True. Peter had known Rose forever, though he only met her hours ago. Twenty plus pages in Wikipedia. YouTube videos of her triumphs and her failures. Newspaper articles. Pictures. Beautiful ones. Pretty ones. Awful ones. Like her mug shots. Her drunk shots. He knew her forever. Now fate played its hand. What was his?

Romy spoke over his silence while continuing to kick with her feet.

"Rose is falling like Natasha. Drowning in alcohol like Natasha. Losing her friends like Natasha. She's reaching out to you like Natasha."

"What can I do?"

"Ask Hamlet. He the man."

Peter turned toward the rumble in the distance and saw a train approaching surrounded by a blood red sky. Why bother offering Rose his hand when he could see failure written there? Cold rolled down his back. Peter clenched his fists to stop his hands shaking.

Why not run away for good instead? The locomotive filled half the opening now. Two steps forward and he could join Hamlet in his endless sleep. Feel the long, cold steel. A familiar voice spoke next to him.

"Alas, poor Peter, your hour is come. Know, thou ignoble youth hast a chance to purge away thy foul crimes done. Thy chance at redemption. Seize it. Swear by my sword!"

Lord Hamlet commanded it. Peter had dishonored Natasha, but he could still save Rose.

His hand reached out for the imaginary sword. "I swear, my liege, I shall not fail once more."

*Not again.* The Beatles played in his head, "Not a Second Time."

Even if he had to drag himself back to the hotel on his hands with two broken legs, he would see Rose again. "This time 'tis different."

"Thou must move posthaste," Hamlet said.

Right. Every time a character in a movie waited, hesitated, some tragic coincidence would thwart its effort. If Romeo had only gotten the message in time. If Juliet had just woken a moment earlier. If Peter had only told Natasha in time. If he had driven to her a moment earlier.

*Time, time, time.* He had no time! Rose would fly back in two days. He had to act now, before fate intervened again. Elvis sang "It's Now Or Never." Time to hold her tight. Who could argue with "The King"? At least, for now.