

Rose, now on her knees, grabbed a second pillow and alternated hitting him with both. Peter clutched his arms over his head in defense. Long forgotten memories of playtime with her sister and brother came flooding back. A broad crescent-moon smile rose on her face! When he got hold of one of her play weapons, she looked around.

"I totally need more pillows! Call the front desk; have 'em bring more pillows."

"What?"

"C'mon, call the front desk. I want more pillows."

"There's four here."

"More... 'More, More, More.'" Rose, still on her knees, hit him with the cushion again while jumping up and down on the mattress.

"While we're at it, I want a pumpkin carriage; I want glass slippers; I want a gorgeous blue satin and silk dress; a pearl necklace, a diamond tiara; ruby-red slippers, a—"

"But you already have the glass slippers."

During a bounce Rose extended her athletic legs and now stood next to Peter. She hit him with the pillow, again.

"Sooo, I want more, more, more."

"Aunt, aunt, aunt," Peter cried. "Okay, I'll call, geez."

He crawled across the bed to the phone, then stopped and turned to Rose. "Whose room?"

"Mrs. Hamilton."

Peter dialed. "*Hallo, können Sie bitte noch ein paar Kissen auf Frau Hamiltons Zimmer schicken? Sie kann sonst nicht schlafen...Danke.*— Hello, could you please send some more pillows to Mrs. Hamilton's room? She can't sleep otherwise...Thank you."

He turned his head to look at Rose. "They're sending housekeeping. What's this with her room?"

"I let her reserve it, so my name doesn't show. Once I get the key, like, who cares?"

"You don't check in as a cartoon character like in *Notting Hill*?"

Rose laughed. "Like 'Miss Pocahontas'? Cute, but my assistant worries her pretty head about that."

"Frankly, you look more like a 'Mrs. Flintstone.' Maybe, even 'Mister Flintstone.'"

"Awe, pillow!" She hit him again. A knock interrupted the one-sided pillow fight.

Rose said, "Go fetch, cubby, and don't let anybody in."

Peter came back with four pillows. Rose took them with a gleaming baby face and an excited cry.

He knelt next to her on the bed and said, "Why do you need so many, anyway?"

"The better to hit you with."

"Oh, this is bad, bad, bad." Peter raised one arm as if holding a skull. "I could have handled Shakespeare..." He brushed his hair in front of his eyes like the late Nirvana singer. "...maybe, even Kurt Cobain." Peter threw both arms in the air and rolled his eyes. "But out of all things, you have to quote...*Little Red Riding Hood!* That makes me so mad, mad, mad."

Peter leaned over from behind, and tickled her sides. Rose laughed hysterically while wiggling to try to escape. She snorted, laughed, and tried to hit him with a pillow, but he had her arms pinned down to the bed. His hand made a dash for the two pronounced objects of men's desire, but even in her helpless state, her arms managed to thwart his advance.

"Aunt, aunt, aunt," she cried.

He stopped tickling her and rolled to the side. Rose turned to face him lying on the bed. Peter reached out to caress her hair. When his hand came near Rose's breasts, she took it with both of her hands, and held his in front of her. He looked puzzled.

She just flashed that smile of hers and said, "Not now, cubby. I told Anna to cancel my appointments tomorrow. We can, like, do somethin' together."

"Great." Peter sounded disappointed. "Have you seen the city, yet?"

“No.”

“Then, I'll give you the grand free tour. We can...they have these tourist buses, number 100 and 200. I mean, they're like regular buses, but go the tourist routes, past all the big stuff.”

Rose exclaimed indignantly, “I so can't go on a bus! Some creep will recognize me.”

“But that's exactly the point. Who in their right mind is going to suspect the famous Rose O'Rourc on a bus? Wear that gaudy outfit of yours, and we'll look like a poor backpacker couple. Well, maybe, a backpacker with his mom.”

“*You!*” Rose cried out, as she spanked him with the pillow. “Bad cubby, bad, bad, cubby. As punishment you have to, like, totally spill the beans. Berlin. Yourself. With music from your iPod. Here I am now, entertain me!”

She had entered his “Smells Like Teen Spirit” world, while her irresistible smile sucked him into her sphere.

Rose and Peter talked for hours about Berlin, him, her, movies, music, the world, and more movies. He cracked jokes. She laughed and told anecdotes from her movie shoots, like outtakes and bloopers.



Rose lay on her side, bracing herself with one knee. Her head rested on her arm. Peter sat on the edge of the bed next to her. His small iPod on the night stand playing songs in “shuffle” mode labored against the steady hum of the air conditioner. He was on a roll.

“So, you know, time is running out, so, Charlie throws the ball wide. And I am running, running, running, way past the end zone, and the ball's still high. So...” He laughed. “I jump backward, and I hit it, and the ball spins around in mid-air and drops in my hands, and...ha-ha...I'm flying over a mud puddle...ha-ha...”

Rose laughed, too.

“So I come down in this mud puddle...touchdown...ha-ha...and mud flying...ha-ha...everywhere...”

Peter fell on his back. The two laughed and laughed. Then, both fell silent.

*What now?* Peter thought while staring at the smooth, off-white ceiling. Time for goodbye. A sudden sadness took hold. He did not want to go. They had shared their souls like him and Natasha. And, he was stuck in the same situation like years ago, if not worse. Best friends. A shoulder to cry on. Nothing more.

*I told her I love her. What more does Natasha want?*

His hand cautiously reached out for Rose again, and once more felt only the soft but cold bedspread. She had stayed an arm's length from him since the pillow fight. Might as well have been a league. Or a universe. Neukölln met Beverly Hills. Of course, it did not work. He could not compete. The sweat from his palms dampened the fluffy bedspread, as heat rippled through his body.

He knew about all her boyfriends. Tabloid papers relished in revealing details about them. The stories may have been made up, but Peter remembered the photographs. Tall, handsome, famous, young studs wearing the finest custom-tailored Italian clothes. How could he possibly join that parade? King or prince he was not. He would never amount to more than the cheap evening entertainment before someone else got to enjoy the sophisticated nightly dessert. What confidence and courage he had built up ebbed away.

Peter sat up and muttered, “I should go now, before the trains stop running.”

The star's angeleyes would suck him in and make it too difficult to leave, so he stared instead at the fine texture of the gray carpet, disappointed and discouraged.

*This is not happening!* Rose thought. She looked at him, but the young man could not see her frightened expression. Panic set in. Rose was used to men swooning over her, courting her,

even fighting over her. Marriage proposals came in on a daily basis, as letters, e-mails, tweets, or other posts.

Men would do anything to touch that gorgeous body and conquer her for the night. Most turned into a disappointment later. Real conceited assholes at times. Now, she had chanced upon a rare nice guy, one who had already won the vote in her beauty pageant, and he renounced the crown on the last step of the catwalk!? Cast her away like a pair of Manolos with a broken heal.

All her wonderful feelings drained away. In an instant Rose noticed her sobriety. The effects of the alcohol had worn off a long time ago. When sober her emotions remained smoldering most of the time, but Peter had relit her fire. Suddenly, she felt empty, depressed, and forsaken.

Rose began to shiver, as the cold of the air conditioner overpowered the warmth of the previous moments. Any other night she would have found solace in a drink, but she did not want to get drunk alone. Not tonight. Not after all the wonderful happenings. And certainly not alone. She had to do something.

As Peter attempted to stand up, Rose grabbed his shirt sleeve, sparkled at him with her angeleyes and whispered, "Stay."

*My Natasha does recognize me!* Peter thought. Amy Grant's "Stay for Awhile" played in his head. Soft and slow. His gaze was lost in her bright eyes and that warm smile. What more did he need to hear?

The puppy saw his chance. The beauty had thrown him a bone. He had to prove himself worthy of her. Convince her he was just as good, if not better, than the men before him. Show Rose that he could satisfy her. Fan her desire to match his burning flame in an arena that a softy remained competitive. Quickly, before he lost his courage again. He had to go on the offensive. Without undressing, to preempt her thwarting his advances once more.