

Red Flag

By Lana Elsehemi

Let's see other people.

“Are you kidding?” I screamed, my arms flailing so much that a passerby must have assumed I was doing some new interpretive dance, expressing my devotion to this man standing before me. Ironic. He just stared at me in a way where he almost took pride in his act of abandonment.

Stupid park, I should have never agreed to meet here, we should've just met at the movies. It was the bane of my existence. Our first picnic was here, we got rained on and I got the worst flu here. Even when I was nine, I was terrorized by the park. and I wandered from my parents like a duckling. I strayed from the waddling line at this same park. They didn't notice for a few hours, but I've made my peace with it. Just unlucky and neglected, twenty years later, here I am again. Neglected.

I saw something in his eyes at that moment, like the feeling of trying to avoid roadkill. An ick at the pit of my stomach made me want to vomit and cry simultaneously.

“You think that's what's best, don't you?” He spat it out as if he waited his whole life for this.

“I don't, no.” My tear ducts wanted control of my eyes, and my mind was overflowing with laughter tainted with pain. As if he genuinely cared whether I thought it was best or not, he never cared. The bare minimum seemed phenomenal, which was degrading, but I ignored that for most of our relationship.

“Relax, we can still chill.” He was driving me nuts at this point.

Chill, right. He really must like my laugh, spitting out joke after joke. Maybe he drove up here to share this new prank you thought a merely five months after April Fools.

My grip tightened around my purse; spots of red started to take over my vision. But no, this couldn't happen again. I shook my head, trying to calm my emotions.

“Maybe get out of your head and listen to what I'm saying,” he rolled his eyes.

I was listening. To insinuate differently was out of line. He just wanted an out, and I couldn't give him that.

“Julius Caesar and Brutus come to mind; those closest to you know the best way to hurt you. Et Tu Finn?”

He gave me a glassy blink, not a thought behind those gorgeous eyes.

“Petra, this is literally why we can't work. I talk and talk and talk, and all you do is try and confuse me with crap. You never pay attention to what I like, what interests me. You never listen, and I'm so done dude, it's just not for me anymore. You just don't care enough, which is cool, got this nonchalance thing working for you, but it's not working for me, ya know?”

It was raining now, the angels cried for me, or I like to think they did, and it wasn't just bad luck.

This damn park.

I felt my rage make its way up my neck; it overtook me joint by joint. I scoffed at his remark; to say I didn't care was ridiculous. After everything I've done, everything I would do, I would have died for him, gory and dramatic, but it was true. Is that what he would need, some grand gesture? If only he just gave me a minute to show him my shrine. Not that he needs it. I cook for him, I clean for him, kill for him. All that, and I can't even get him to stay? He couldn't stray from my duckling line; he couldn't leave

me. I wouldn't let him. His eyes, they were weighing my soul, seeing whether I was worth his time.

"Please, you can't just leave me here; we're perfect together," I pleaded.

He just shook his head.

"Just let go," he said.

I couldn't see why he wouldn't just get it. I am incapable of doing so. I need to be around him all the time to feel complete; I need him to look me up and down and make me feel seen.

"But we worked so hard at this; please just acknowledge the blood, sweat, and tears I've put into this. No one else will do for you what I do. I sold my soul for you." I was nudging him towards my car; if I could just get him by the door, he'd see why he should stay.

He looked around, almost scared, as if he was cornered, and I didn't get it. I just needed to show him how much I love him.

"Petra, I-I appreciate everything you've done. But you are one crazy bitch."

"Crazy? You're the crazy one giving up on true love. I lied, stole, and killed for you. And you just wanna run? At least acknowledge what I've been trying to show you."

I pointed to this display of my affection, photos from our times together, some of his t-shirts, and locks of hair I gathered from his apartment. He was my life, and he needed to know it.

"You are one crazy b- umm, what's that?"

I couldn't help but smile at the question. He pointed to the empty box in the middle of the shrine, I hadn't hoped for this. But I needed him around whether he wanted to be there or not.

"Oh, it's for your head," I pointed to the flagpole I was parked under, "Imma just snip that off and hang it up there with the rest of the shrine babe, okay?"

He tried to make a break for it, emphasis on tried.

I stared at this breathtaking man on the floor, a hippie, yes, but one who had stolen my heart and would pay for his crimes.