

## The Things We've Left Behind

By: Tiffany Wang

So there I was – *again*, might I add – trying to decipher a map amidst truly horrible driving. “Rosaline!” I snarled, as the car drifted to the left. “Keep to the road!”

She pushed her sunglasses up to her forehead, and strands of her blond hair escaped her loose braid. “Oh,” she said a little dreamily, which really did nothing to encourage me. She twisted the wheel sharply, knocking me against the car window. “Better?”

“No,” I said loudly, but she had already turned the radio up. Whatever the newest pop craze was blasted into my ears, nearly deafening me, as, next to me, Rosaline hummed along cheerfully.

I gave her a sideways glance. I had no idea why she was so *happy* – and after nine years of being her best friend, that was certainly saying something. As I studied the map once more, I decided her good mood must be because we were finally on our traditional road trip, which we had every year at the height of summer. In the past, we'd gone to Chicago, New York City, and Washington DC – but for the life of me, I couldn't understand why, this time, she insisted on visiting the town of Oro, Tennessee, population seven hundred.

“Are we almost there yet, Eagan?” Rosaline yelled, nodding her head along to the heavy beat. I could see her foot tapping lightly against the brakes, impatient as always.

“Turn here,” I said, and she did, drumming her turquoise fingernails along the steering wheel as the car tilted dangerously. I grasped the door handle tightly and thought that this was the problem with Rosaline Wyatt – she never sat still, not even for a minute. She was the kind of

person who ran directly into the thunderstorm and screamed at the sky for pouring rain, then walked away, soaking wet but completely satisfied.

When we finally arrived at Oro, she grinned at me triumphantly. “Told you we’d get here in one piece.”

“That’s a relative thought,” I reminded her, but she’d already walked away, practically skipping into the sea of gray buildings.

It was an unimpressive town, with a run-down gas station rotting behind a thin, chain-linked fence. There were squatted houses lined up further back, dulled with time and wear. I imagined Oro must have been like this a hundred years ago, and innovation – and color – had simply passed it by.

“Why are we here?” I asked, as I followed her down the well-worn path.

She beamed, like she was concealing a secret. “Freda,” she said to me.

I stopped. “Rosaline,” I said slowly. I reached out and grabbed her arm abruptly.

“Rosaline, do your parents know you’re here?”

She pulled out of my grasp. “They’ll know eventually,” she replied airily, and took off at a run, zigzagging through the shallow smattering of houses. I tore after her, but I never could catch her, even when we were children, racing on the track outside the elementary school.

So I couldn’t grab her arm again, before she pulled it back and knocked hard on a bright blue door.

Freda. Freda Wyatt – *her sister*. Nobody in the Wyatt family had seen her in *four years*, ever since Freda packed a bag, skipped out on college, and never looked back.

“Rosaline,” I hissed. “How did you find her?”

She gave me a quick look. “Where do you think all my birthday money went?” she asked, and, suddenly, I realized that this idea had been anything but spontaneous.

The door fell open, and a thin, high voice said, with an edge of astonishment, “Rosaline?”

I had never seen Rosaline smile so widely before. “Freda!” she said, her smile spreading across her lips. She took off her sunglasses and stuffed them in her back pocket, before waving at her sister shyly.

Freda just stared.

Frankly, so did I. I still thought this was a horrible idea, but it was too late now. “Hi,” I said warily. I stuck out my hand, trying to be polite. “I’m Eagan – Eagan Tate.”

Freda seemed dazed as she turned to me. “Yeah, I remember you,” she said, unsmiling. Then, she put her attention back on Rosaline. “What are you two doing here?”

The corners of Rosaline’s smile crumbled. “Looking for you,” she said, more hesitantly than before. “I mean, you got the money, right? I found your address on that envelope you sent Dad, but that was ages ago, so I wasn’t sure it was still right. I mean – you wrote back, so it must’ve been. Did the cash help with the bills –”

I nudged her gently in the ribs. When Rosaline got nervous, she rambled. Freda, on the other hand, was a living statue. “Well,” she said. “It did help, Rosaline, thanks. I –”

Rosaline lit up. “Did it?” she chirped. “Freda, I’m so glad! We have so much to talk about – did you know that Mom got a new job at the firm? She was promoted and everything. And Dad went on this trip to Venice and saw the lights and –”

“Stop,” Freda said. Her voice was very low and very calm, almost completely devoid of all emotion. “Rosaline, there’s a reason I left our town. There’s a reason I never called and only wrote once and haven’t visited.”

Rosaline froze. Heat rushed to her cheeks, flushing her pale skin red. “Freda,” she said, and she sounded like she must have the summer before ninth grade, when she was fourteen and watching her older sister walk out the door. “Freda, that was four years ago.”

Freda nodded. “I know,” she said back, her eyes the color of stained glass. She took a step into the house. “Don’t come here again, Rosaline.”

When the door closed, we both heard the lock turn. I looked over at Rosaline, who was rooted to the spot, her hands trembling. “Rosaline,” I said quietly. “Rosaline, are you okay?”

And, suddenly, she shrugged lightheartedly, like she hadn’t a care in the world. “I’m fine,” she replied breezily, jamming her sunglasses on the bridge of her nose. “It’s all good.”

I knew better than to believe her. “Really?” I asked scathingly.

She nodded. “There’s a motel a few blocks down – we can rent a room and come back tomorrow. Eventually, she’ll have to hear me out. After all, she is my sister.”

I stood there, openmouthed. Rosaline Wyatt was my best friend and witty and wore a different shade of bright nail polish every day– and, above all, she *wasn’t* a fool. What she was proposing now, though, was the epitome of foolishness, and *enough was enough*.

“No,” I said.

She jerked to a halt as she heard me through the crashing thoughts dancing in her minds. “What?” she said, sounding injured.

But now I was shaking and furious and tired of her stupid, wonderful trust in people – the same trust that broke her heart time and again. “*No, Rosaline,*” I said, my voice filtering out through my gritted teeth. “*You can’t keep doing this.* You’ve been looking for Freda for the past four years, and when you don’t find her, you start over. Remember ninth grade, when you tried to get on the bus to Arizona, because you thought she was there? Remember eleventh grade,

when you spent months working in that stupid restaurant and used the money you'd made to hire a private detective? Now that you've found her, now what? *Now what?* “

And that's when Rosaline Wyatt started to cry. I watched as the tears dripped down her chin, splattering onto the dusty ground below. “Eagan,” she said softly. “I need her to come back. She's my sister. If she comes back, she'll remember how much she loved all of us.”

“Rosaline,” I said, touching her shoulder. “She left for a reason. It was her reason and she still believes in it and that's her choice. We can't fix people, you know.”

“I wish we could,” she whispered, and I hugged her as tightly as I possibly could, trying to hold her together in the only way I knew how – with years of our friendship and inside jokes and glorious road trips to everywhere glorious and beautiful. We stood like that for the longest time, not saying anything – just standing there, inhaling in the life we were given.

I pulled away gently. Rosaline's ridiculous sunglasses had fallen off, and were resting at a funny angle on the street. I saw the two of us reflected in the lenses – warped slightly by the surface, but still recognizable. “You okay?”

Rosaline wiped her nose, and pushed her hair out of her face. “Yeah,” she said, as she stooped down to pick up the sunglasses. She set them on top of her head and spun around, turning her back on the gray houses of Oro. “Yeah, I'm fine. I, for one, don't need fixing.”

As we walked out to the car, I thought she was exactly right.