

Monochrome

Gabriel Morales sees only one thing that day; gray. Such a dreadfully dismal color. After all, gray is the color of smoke and storm clouds and chain link fences and dead-end roads that lead nowhere. On his lap rests a small bundle of roses. He checks his watch. 7:58. He'll arrive around 8:30. God, why is he up so early? It's Saturday. It's not as though he has work or anything. Even if he did, he would've called off. He plans out his day in his mind: visit the cemetery, do some grocery shopping, run other errands... What then? Gabriel sighs. He doesn't even know; far too many hours in a day. Maybe he'll watch a movie with his wife later. Something to take his mind off things. Have five years really gone by already?

Sitting at the bus stop that day, Gabriel lights a cigarette and watches the cloudy skies stir overhead. A single raindrop falls inside the lens of his glasses and slides from his left eye down the side of his nose. He sighs again and reaches into his pocket for a handkerchief, then wipes away the raindrop from his eye. More grey things come to his mind: old keys, pencil lead, gunpowder—he shakes his head. No sense in reflecting on that last thing. Otherwise, the grief will ruin him again.

Only now does he realize how quiet it is—no children playing games, no dogs barking, no cars—nothing but the light chirps of a couple of birds, the rustle of leaves, and a wind chime. How odd for a summer morning. Although, it's rather early for any children to be awake, he supposes. Not to mention he lives in a more secluded part of town. Gabriel closes his eyes. Not long after, he senses a presence beside him. He opens his eyes again and there beside him sits a young woman with short, messy raven-colored hair and gray eyes. She can't be more than in her mid-twenties; the same age his only son had been when...

"Smells like rain. I bet a storm's coming," she says, also looking to the sky.

Gabriel doesn't respond at first. He's heard her voice, yes, but why speak? He has nothing of importance to say. He simply hums in acknowledgment instead. Heavy air around both of them indeed carries the scent of incoming rain. A bus pulls up to the stop soon after she speaks. She stands up and boards the bus. All his gray thoughts turn to the blue ribbon in her raven hair, a splash of color in a colorless world. Gabriel blinks, then quickly rushes after her, flicking his cigarette away. Good thing the bus driver is patient. After finding the young woman, he sits down next to her. Only now does he notice her clothes; she's dressed all in black. Could she be in mourning too?

"Oh, hey. You're here," the young woman says. Light from outside reflects in her silver eyes as she smiles kindly at him.

"Sorry. I'm Gabriel." He extends a hand to her. She shakes it gently.

"Rhiannon Valentine."

"That's a pretty name."

"Thank you. You may call me Rhia if you wish." She glances at the flowers on his lap, then looks in his eyes again. "Visiting someone?"

"I'm... going to the cemetery to see my son."

"Guess we're going to the same place, then."

"Did you lose someone too?" he asks. She nods.

"Mom and Dad. Murdered when I was eleven." She smiles sadly.

"Oh, God. I'm so sorry for your loss. I can't imagine..."

"It's okay. Couldn't have been stopped. I'm almost certain they're in Heaven now." She pauses before speaking further. "I'm sorry about your son. He's probably in heaven right now too, watching over you."

Gabriel closes his eyes and nods. He wants to tell her what happened, but he can't bring himself to form the words.

Once the bus stops, Gabriel and Rhiannon head for the cemetery. A light, misty rain is beginning to fall. As they walk together, they glance over some of the names on the other gravestones. None of the names are familiar to either of them. Before long, he finds the grave he's been searching for.

"David Morales. Lt. US Air Force 2001-2025," Rhiannon reads. Gabriel rests the flowers down on the grass in front of the grave, then looks up at the sky. By now, the rain has started to fall harder. Lightning flashes overhead, followed by the boom of thunder. Both of them quickly retreat to the cover of a nearby tree. Still staring up at the sky, Gabriel explains the incident.

"He was killed in action five years ago."

"Was he your only son?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry."

"Thank you. It's been rather quiet at home these days."

"Mm. You must still miss him. And that's okay." Rhiannon places a soft hand on his shoulder. Her raven hair sticks to her face. "I understand that silence." She gives an empathetic smile. Her gray eyes seem almost silver compared to the dark clouds.

"Thank you, Rhiannon."

"May I see your phone for a moment?"

"Sure." Gabriel hands her his cell phone and watches as she types something into it.

"Here. If you ever want to talk..."

"Are you sure? I'd hate to be a bother."

“It’s no trouble. As I said, it’s okay to still miss people we love who have passed on.”

“Thank you.” He pauses. “I’m sorry. I didn’t bring an umbrella.” He laughs for the first time in years. She does too. “Might be too late now.”

“It’s okay. I have one.” Rhiannon grabs her umbrella from her bag and opens up on top of them. Gabriel smiles as the two walk back to the entrance. Quietly talking the whole way, the stormy weather rages on. Once they reach the bus stop, Rhiannon bids Gabriel farewell.

When he returns home that evening, he reflects on his new friend’s silver eyes and the blue ribbon in her hair. Such a kind soul. Kneeling by his bedside, he utters a short prayer.

“Heavenly Father, thank you for blessing me with a new friend. I would ask only one thing of you: please protect and care for Rhiannon and David in my absence until I see them both again.”