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Love

Clare Rankine

Earlier, he had stood outside the iron gates that stretched to the sky. It was cold and he wrapped his arms around himself, pulled his hood further over his head. She was a good twenty minutes late, she always was. But for her, he could wait for hours.

Here she was now, a bright flash of colour in the grey distance; instantly his arms dropped away from his sides, and she ran to him, engulfing him in a hug. She smelt like cherry blossom, and he would continue to smell her afterwards, as he closed his eyes, as he dreamed. Thinking of her made something in his chest soar. Together they walked into the park.

They made their way to their place — the willow tree on the top of the hill. When they pulled back the green curtain of willow, it hid them from the rest of the world. When they stepped into that green room the sounds of the park disappeared; they rolled out the picnic rug that she had brought, and placed sandwiches, mandarins and strawberries among bottles of beer and cracked plates. They sat, speaking quietly, the silence only punctuated by their laughter. He watched as she delicately peeled and ate a mandarin, her hands moving from the mandarin to her skirt to her hair. The sky peeked in through the willow and he read her pieces of things that he had remembered, everything that had happened before the accident. She listened intently, reading the scraps of paper that were covered in his messy writing. In return, she told him

about her fears, her obsessions, her paintings, her future. She was funny, always making him smile with her quick jokes; leaving him stumbling over his words like an awkward teenager, the alcohol never helped. When she laughed she would throw back her head, her hair would cascade down her back and the ornate silver hair clips she always wore would catch the sunlight. She was forever losing those clips in the long grass, and together they would run their hands through the soft undergrowth searching for a flash, a sign. He always bought her the hair clips for her birthday, wrapping them up and slipping them into her pocket or bag. He forgot other stuff in his life — his name, his mother's address, sometimes he forgot how to walk — but he would always remember to buy her the silver hair clips.

They had met through a friend at a party, she was wearing a blue dress and looked so out of place; she reminded him of a fairy that he'd seen once in a cartoon. Her eyes were closed and the silver glinted in her hair as she twirled, dancing to the ear-splitting music. It had been about a year after his accident, but watching her he forgot all the doctor's orders, all the precautions, all the warnings, and he danced with her. He felt like he was on fire afterwards, but dancing with her was the best choice he had ever made.

He was shy at first, he never did have much luck with girls, they flittered and flirted their way into his life, but once they saw the scars on his face, and heard him retching in the bathroom at night, they were gone in the morning. They flew away from him at incredible speed and he could never keep up. She was different. She touched his scars with soft fingers and held him as his back arched and his body convulsed. When he was allowed to, they caught the tram down to the beach and he held her hand as they walked along the hot sand. They went to the cinema and watched old 1930s films, where he finally got to taste her lipstick as the credits rolled. She tucked sheets and

blankets onto the fold-out bed in the corner of his hospital room; but when everybody left and the lights were turned out, he heard the padding of her feet and felt her warm body slip in between the sheets. She brought him to life, and with her, he could be.

It was the time of day when the afternoon melted into evening, the light slipping away, the shadows growing longer. The light through the willow had deepened and the smell of dust swept up by rain was in the air, but he was so comfortable as she traced the scar that ran from the top of his neck down to his stomach. His bad leg had gone to sleep so she helped him get up and together they pulled back the green curtain, walked through the park, passing the lovers that stared into each other's eyes, the teenagers playing soccer, the paupers reaching out, begging, the children running and laughing with fistfuls of chocolate, the old woman with the sad eyes opening up her umbrella for the oncoming rain. They walked back to the hospital and he looked down at her with his heart full of love.



Clare Rankine wrote this in 2011 when she was in Year 12 at The Canberra College in Australian Capital Territory.