

Juliette

Juliette usually enjoyed the serenity of her bedroom, but today was an exception. Instead of curling up by the window with a good book, she was being tortured by her godmother and a curling iron.

"Remind me why I'm putting so much effort in?" Juliette grumbled as her godmother yanked the brush through her curls for the hundredth time. Juliette probably would've laughed at her godmother dramatically waving the hairbrush towards the ceiling if she wasn't so annoyed. The older woman looked like she went through the wringer with her flushed cheeks and wild locks falling out of her messy bun.

"Because Paris is coming, and you must look your best!"

The woman spoke to her goddaughter like a small child, with a hint of exasperation in her voice, though her eyes softened looking at Juliette. It was no secret that the wealthy Capulets were interested in a marriage between their only daughter and Paris County, a rising star in the business world. Rumor had it the Capulet's big party tonight was to be an engagement celebration, which only further crushed Juliette's spirit. She could only hope that her parents would change their minds and let her live the life she chose.

Taking a peek at her reflection in the mirror, Juliette couldn't help but admire her godmother's handiwork. Her usually dull, straight locks cascaded in supple, golden waves, framing her face with a soft glow. Her usual storm-grey eyes actually sparkled from her godmother's expertly applied eye shadow, while her naturally plump lips gleamed with a rosy touch of gloss. Dressed in a shimmering teal cocktail dress that hugged her figure perfectly, she felt like a mermaid stepping straight out of the sea. She turned to wrap her arms around her real-life fairy godmother and whispered, "Thank you."

Her godmother sniffed slightly as she turned Juliette back around. She continued chatting nervously as she put the finishing touches on her makeup, but the woman fell silent as her mother swept into the room like an unwanted cold front, ruining the good mood Juliette had just barely mustered. The tight ponytail emphasized the sharp angles of her mother's face while she looked around the room with obvious displeasure.

Juliette flinched as her mother's voice cut through the silence like a knife. "Please remember that everyone is invited to celebrate with us this evening. This marriage is more than just about your happiness. It's about securing the future of our family. Do you understand?" Juliette looked down at the tiled bedroom floor, her heart dropping at her mother's words. The weight of her family's expectations crushed her last bit of spirit. When she still didn't respond, her mother *tsked* in annoyance, stepping to Juliette and forcing her to look into her dark eyes. She nodded silently, knowing it was useless to protest. The disgruntled expression never left her mother's face, but after briskly inspecting her daughter one last time, Juliette's mother left the room with her godmother in tow. Now that she was alone, Juliette couldn't stop the heaviness that settled in her thoughts. It was strange, but Juliette couldn't shake the feeling that tonight's party would only end in despair and heartbreak.

Music and laughter drifted from the gathering below as she took a deep breath to compose herself, pushing aside her negative feelings and pitiful reflection. With a forced smile plastered on her face, she straightened her shoulders and prepared to face the night ahead.

Romeo

Romeo and his friends slipped through the gates as they headed to the party. The Capulets had a thing for showing off their wealth and status, as evident in the extravagant mansion looming ahead, but Romeo didn't pay attention to any of it. The group navigated through the party, doing their best to blend in. Marco was already cracking jokes with strangers, his wild curls flopping around him as he hooted with laughter, but Bennie kept nervously looking around, his eyes never settling on anything or anyone longer than a brief second. Romeo ignored them, solely intent on finding Rosie, the girl of his dreams. His body buzzed nervously as he ventured deeper into enemy territory, but he had to do whatever it took to spend time with Rosie. Even if he had to dodge Tyler Capulet the entire night, the end game was worth the risk.

Romeo continued working his way through the dancing bodies before finding the object of his desire at the party's center. Naturally, spotlights shone on her as she swayed to the music, her eyes closed, surrounded by friends and admirers. Romeo gazed appreciatively at her curves on display as he pushed through the crowd. Before he could fully reach her, Rosie's eyes snapped open, taking in bodies writhing under the flashing lights around her. When it seemed like she would finally come to him, the girl's gaze slid over Romeo as if he were invisible. Still, he tried catching her attention by reaching out to grab her hand, but she brushed him off, utterly uninterested. His shoulders sagged with disappointment when he finally realized she didn't even know he existed. A large hand clapped down on his shoulder. Romeo lifted his head up, meeting Marco's sympathetic look. His friends must've caught up just in time to witness Romeo's obvious rejection.

“Don't look so glum, man!”

He had to yell to be heard over the deafening bass booming out of the speakers. “There are way too many pretty girls around us to let one spoiled snob ruin the evening!” He whirled around, throwing his arms around two girls, pulling them closer. Marco wiggled his eyebrows at Romeo as the girls giggled, like that was proof enough to support his obnoxious claim. Bennie shook his head at their buddy but shrugged as if to say it was useless to stop him, especially once Marco had found his targets for the night. Despite his friends' attempts at comforting him, Romeo still couldn't take his eyes off Rosie's retreating back. But then, as if by fate's design, he caught sight of a stunningly beautiful young woman across the room. She looked like a delicate fairy among the array of bodies, her dress glowing shades of green and blue in the lights. Changing course, he headed towards her like a moth to a golden flame, not even sparing a glance at the man standing with her. Romeo didn't know why, but it seemed like she needed someone to rescue her. When she was within arm's reach, her eyes, the darkest blue he'd ever seen, locked onto his.

Juliette

Hours later, Juliette's face was ready to crack with how long she'd been fake smiling. She was surrounded by people fawning over the couple, all vying for her attention as they eagerly congratulated her impending engagement. She glanced hesitantly to Paris, standing at her side, his charming smile masking the cold ambition hidden beneath. He was good-looking by most standards, sporting a fit, lean body, straight nose, and sandy hair neatly swept back, but Juliette didn't feel any attraction for him.

"My dear, you look absolutely gorgeous tonight." Paris purred, wrapping his arm around her. "I can't help but brag about being the luckiest man here."

She held back her grimace, feeling slimy under the man's touch. He seemed unbothered by her lack of conversation, but he'd tug her back to him any time she attempted to pull away.

This is too much for me to handle. I need space.

She scanned the room, desperate for any sign of escape, as she struggled to maintain her composure, but the crowd was overwhelming. Then, she saw a group of young men moving through the crowded dance floor out of the corner of her eye. Turning, she saw one of them flirting shamelessly with other partygoers while another stood stiffly like he was keeping watch. However, they were cast aside once she caught sight of the man between them. He towered above most people, and his dark curls were naturally tousled like the perfect rolled-out-of-bed look. He walked confidently through the sea of people, a bored look on his face as he walked in her direction. Butterflies quickly flooded her body, their wings fluttering in sync with her increased heart rate. She could feel the heat rising in her cheeks as dark eyes clashed with hers.

He is the most handsome man she's ever seen.

Romeo

Romeo's heart pounded as he stood before the girl, throat tightening. She was tiny, her eyes barely level with his chest. Her hair fell down her back like a silky, golden waterfall. He saw the long lashes that framed her eyes, the ones reaching out to his soul. He could hear Bennie and Marco calling out him, but he told them he'd find them later, pushing them away. They grumbled, but he knew they were just worried about him. They didn't need to; he was precisely where he needed to be.

He hadn't realized she wasn't alone until he saw a man leaning down to whisper something to her, but she didn't appear to be listening. Her eyes never left his, even when the other man walked away. He felt a deep, selfish desire to drag her out of this party to have her all to himself, and he didn't even know her name. After what felt like an eternity later, he finally found his voice.

"Who are you?" Romeo asked, his voice barely audible over the music. "Why does it feel like I should know you, even though we've never met?"

Her eyes widened, and a faint blush spread across her fair skin. "You feel it too, then?"

"I know we haven't met before. I would never forget a face like yours." He tentatively reached out to her, holding her small hand in his. "Let's find somewhere else to talk."

He didn't wait for her to answer, holding her protectively under his arm as he guided them upstairs, finding a secluded balcony. Unable to control himself, he grabbed her into a tight hug. Burying his face in her hair, he knew that if sunshine had a smell, it would smell like her.

Juliette

Juliette felt Paris leaning over to say something but didn't hear a word he said. She didn't even bother to look at him when he walked away. She was happy he left without her because she was completely awe-struck by the man before her. He took over every thought in her mind. She didn't care about the stupid party; she hadn't even wanted it. She didn't care about anything except the handsome stranger pulling her towards an empty balcony upstairs.

Dazed, she allowed him to drag her along. Unlike Paris, who kept her next to him as a show of power, this man with eyes that shined like dark onyx held her protectively, shielding her from the people as her heart continued to flutter. These feelings were foreign, inexplicable, something she'd never felt before. She knew she had to talk to him eventually, but she struggled to find the words to fully express the emotions running through her.

When they finally walked outside, he crushed her to his chest, taking her breath away. She should've been appalled by his boldness, but she could only feel relief that she was finally in his arms. She stood rigidly in his arms, but he didn't stop holding her. She felt her body loosen as the seconds slowly passed. His musky scent invaded her senses. His hard, muscled body was a stark comparison to her own softness. She basked in the warmth of his body. Was that his heartbeat or hers?

Finally, the spell cast by his embrace ended. Holding her at arm's length, he studied her intently. She could make out his strong brow in the moonlight, and the Lord must've personally graced him with such a sharp jawline. He was truly magnificent. They stood there, lost in each other's eyes, while the world faded away, leaving only the promise of something that only existed in their wildest dreams.

Moments passed before his deep voice broke through their silence.

"Please, you must tell me who you are."

His eyes never left hers, lighting a wildfire wherever they landed. She didn't even realize they had yet to introduce themselves; it felt like they'd known each other for a lifetime. Suddenly shy, Juliette looked down, using her hair as a curtain to hide behind. Rough fingers gently grabbed her chin, making her look back up as he tucked a strand behind her ears. He held her face, patiently waiting for her to speak.

"Please, I just want to know the name of the girl who unknowingly claimed my heart and soul."

Her breath hitched, the weight of his words settling in. Their connection was undeniable, a force of nature that defied all reason and logic. She shouldn't fall into this trap. She should turn back, return to the party, find Paris, and fulfill her duties to her family.

She must be out of her mind.

She knew she should have turned her back but couldn't stand returning to the gilded cage of her life after this small glimpse of freedom she found looking into the stranger's eyes. She shook her head resolutely. It was out of the question. *No, she couldn't go back. She wouldn't.* Her gaze returned to the handsome man, still waiting for her name. She knew nothing would ever be the same because, from this moment, he owned her wholly, and she was ready to give up everything for him.

And yet, Juliette felt a strange sense of unease creeping over her, a nagging doubt that whispered from the back of her mind.

"Please, you must tell me who you are," Romeo pleaded once more, his eyes burning with intensity as he searched her face for answers.

Juliette's heart raced as she struggled against the lump in her throat. But before she could speak, a voice cut through the darkness, shattering the moment.

"Juliette, dear, are you alright?"

Startled, Juliette blinked and looked around. She was not on a moonlit balcony outside but in a different cage of white walls and fluorescent lights. Dr. Berry, concern clearly etched on her face, stood before her.

"Juliette, do you remember us discussing the progress you've been making?" her doctor asked gently.

The girl just stared blankly back at her. The doctor frowned slightly.

"It's important that we continue our sessions if we're going to help you," Dr. Berry insisted. "You suffered a great loss, which led to your attempt at taking your own life, Juliette. Between losing your cousin and your friend, the emotional toll is too much for one person to deal with alone."

Juliette's heart sank as reality crashed down around her. Memories of the fighting, the gunshots, the pills, the spilled bottle next to the lifeless body, his wild curls she used to run her fingers through spilling around on the floor. Panic clawed its way into her chest. She jumped up, eyes darting all over the room, desperately searching for him.

Her Romeo.

There, leaning against the wall, his curls still perfectly ruffled. He smirked when she sighed with relief, a dark angel protecting her in this hellhole. His face grew dark, however, when Dr. Berry moved between them without a glance in his direction.

Juliette gestured wildly behind the doctor, eyes shining with the wild gleam of madness.

"He's not gone." Her voice was barely above a whisper. "He'll always be with me."

Moving closer, Romeo hugged Juliette from behind, quietly murmuring, "I promised we'd never be apart. And I don't plan to ever break that promise." He kissed the top of her head gently.

The psychologist watched on with concern, but Juliette's mind retreated once more into the fractured reality she created, where Romeo waited for her to return, both of them prisoners of her madness.

Romeo

Romeo couldn't keep the glare off his face. This "doctor" keeps staring at Juliette like she grew two heads. She couldn't even see him standing before her, so who was she to judge? Tightly clenching his hands by his side, Romeo closed his eyes and took a deep breath before opening them again.

He needed to stay calm. He thought to himself as he peered down at his girl, looking as beautiful as ever despite these people trying to tear her down. He felt useless. Her parents locked her up in this loony bin or whatever, and now everyone wanted to say she was crazy, all because she couldn't deny the love they had for one another. It made him sick.

Romeo shook his head sadly before wrapping his arms back around Juliette. She tried to hide her snuffle, but he grabbed her chin, turning her face. He could see the unshed tears glistening in her beautiful eyes, her pain breaking Romeo's heart. He pulled her closer, snuggling into her just how she liked it.

"They're just jealous," he whispered soothingly to her.

"I know, but I wish they could see you so they could stop calling me crazy." Her voice cracked at the end, afraid she'd be stuck here forever.

Nothing he could say could take away her fears, so he rubbed her back gently until she calmed down. Two burly men in white scrubs escorted them back to her room. Closing the door behind her, she went straight to her bed, curling into a ball under the cover. Romeo spooned her from behind, brushing the hair off her face as she finally let sleep take her away, back to their spot, like always. There was no tragic blood feud between their families or arranged marriages here.

It was just Romeo and Juliette.