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## Copper Begonias

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# Copper Begonias

*Jalyn Gilmore*

Tuesday 7:05 p.m.

“How could you do this to me?”

Rue said nothing, merely kept her eyes down with her hands in her lap.

“Rue!”

Finally Rue lifted her head. “Babe, I’m not doing this to us. There hasn’t been an ‘us’ for a long time. And you know that.”

“You can’t do this. Please. I—I need you. What am I supposed to do without you?”

“Char, c’mon.” Rue stood and extended her hand.

Char recoiled bumping into the mantle above the fireplace still cradling the flickering remnants of a fire. The gentle waves of heat wafted up Char’s back, drying the cool sweat.

“Char,” Rue said once again, reaching for her.

“No!” Char swatted at Rue, catching a fingernail in the back of her hand, birthing fresh pearls of blood.

Rue wiped the blood on her jeans. She sighed. “Goodnight, Char.” She headed for the bathroom, cuddling her scratched hand close to her heart.

9:45 p.m.

Char pounded another shot of brandy. Having run out of Coke a little over half an hour ago, she took it straight. The fire flickered and snickered as the smoke crawled up the chimney. She sat at the bar watching the living room. Everything was so red, Rue’s favorite color.

Even her hair was a glossy burgundy. Most of this furniture belonged to Rue. Would she take it with her when she moved out? Char clenched her fists and gritted her teeth against the thought. She tried and failed to blink the image away, Rue packing up and leaving just to move into some other woman's house. Leaving Char alone...again.

“It's not fair,” she whispered.

First her father, then even her mother, and now Rue? When did ‘goodbye’ become standard practice? Char glanced out over the living room again and caught a glimmer from the mantle. Stumbling over her own feet and once over the leg of the coffee table, she stood before the mantle, gently lifting the silver picture frame. It was the two of them the year they met. Rue laughed at Char trying to get the perfect shot. Her deep amber skin glowed in the summer sunset, her box braids a warm hazel fay. And Char with her carnelian auburn hair in the bob that took her three years to grow out. She ignored a tear racing down her cheek as she gazed at the photo.

*There hasn't been an 'us' for a long time. And you know that...*

Char tore the photo out of the frame and threw it into the fire. She staggered back to the bar for another drink, but not just a shot. She stood on her tip-toes reaching for a glass when her wrist knocked another mug to the ground. She watched wide-eyed as it shattered. It was Rue's R mug. It matched her C mug that Rue had made for their first anniversary. Char fell to her knees trying to piece the mug back together only to cut up her fingers. She froze and retrieved her C mug, holding it softly between her fingers. She smashed it to the ground. Her chest heaved as she surveyed her work.

“There,” she whispered. “Now they're together. Always together.” She looked over her shoulder at the fireplace where their photo smoldered. “Always together...”

10:01 p.m.

Rue gasped and shot up in bed. She was drenched head to toe, completely doused in water. Her head whipped around when she saw

Char standing a foot away, face expressionless, her cream skin glowing an ashen white.

“What the hell, Char! What’s your problem?”

Char said nothing but stepped closer into the moonlight. Her emerald eyes shone bright and feline.

“Just because you’re mad doesn’t mean...”

Rue caught a glimpse of the bottles around Char’s feet—bottles of lighter fluid normally kept under the grill. Rue’s eyes traveled down her own body glistening and sticky. She pulled her tank top up and sniffed it. Rue’s eyes returned to Char, who was also damp now that she took a better look. Char held out the lighter she’d given Rue for Christmas last year.

“Char, please. Don’t do this to me.” When she still said nothing, Rue whimpered, “Please...”

Char clicked the lighter; the tiny flame danced about, waiting for purpose.

“Char—”

“Don’t worry. We’re together. Always together.”

Rue held her breath as the lighter slipped through Char’s fingers.