

PRIZE FOR NEW TALENT IN TRANSLATION

Rose by Frances Hedges

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Yes, her name's Rose. She often wears a rose-pink dress. When the dress gets dirty, she puts on jeans instead. I like how she looks in jeans and I like how she looks in the rose-pink dress.

Rosa rosa rosam i'm not very good at Latin. And I get out of breath trying to say the words, because of my asthma. Me and Rose, we've known each other for a long time. Forever. I already liked her back in kindergarten. I wonder why I like her i can't help it. She's not all that pretty, she's got a turned-up nose and pale eyes. Sometimes she snorts. This one time she annoyed me it was when she was sucking her thumb. These days she hardly ever sucks it. Or at least only when she has to do sums using the rule of three. I help her with them.

I help her with everything. I push her mum's trolley at the supermarket. I take the sheets by the corners and I tug them flat. I write her New Year's cards. I sign her bad reports. I go to the fair with her and I buy her a portion of chips with my pocket money. She says thank you. Sometimes.

I'd like to kiss her. She lets me kiss her on birthdays. And at Christmas. But she says that it doesn't commit her to anything because one day she'll marry Georgio. Her big brother.

I tell her you can't marry your brother it's not allowed it's against the law, she shrugs her shoulders. I say, well, you'll change your mind. She says do you think so, ha, do you really think so? The more I argue the more stubborn she gets. Georgio points us out to his mates with a wave of his fat paw smeared with dirty oil, saying, Look at Rose and her sweetheart. He knows, does Georgio. Knows he's not in love with her. Knows he can't be Rose's lover. Knows that I'm in love with Rose.

On Wednesdays, I stay at her side all day long. We explore the woodlands. I only

leave her when I have trouble breathing and when I'm stuck with using my inhaler and breathing apparatus. When I show up again, she says, are you better? We line up the slugs from the ditch in pairs, we pick mushrooms and lug them around in a bag until they get beaten to a pulp so my father says what a waste and what if they're poisonous, you might drop dead just from licking your fingers. Rose scrubs her hands in the water from the fountain. I catch her nearly putting her thumb in her mouth and I shout out, Wait, not yet, you've still got death beneath your fingernails. Although she can't have much of it, because her nails are all bitten away.

On other days, when we're sitting on the grass in the meadow, Rose pulls her pink dress up her legs, claiming that an ant's climbing up towards her stomach and it tickles. I look but I can't see anything. All I see is her pink thigh with a brown mark it's a beauty spot. She says, are you blind or what? she says she can feel the creature wriggling about. She says Georgio will know how to catch it.

Georgio's almost a grown man he works at a garage. He's always covered in oil. It's not as dangerous as mushrooms (poisonous ones) but he doesn't like to soil her dress. By the time he's washed his hands Rose will already be gone, she fidgets, she thrashes about, that girl's the very devil. The ant on her stomach clings to her and then loses its strength, gives up, jumps to the ground and hurries off, even an ant which falls from a hundred times its own height won't break its back. Even a thousand times. An ant which manages to slip beneath the elastic of her Petit-Bateau knickers, even if it ends up falling out, is sure to return to its anthill with nothing but happy memories of the journey.

I love Rose. It gets harder as we grow up. My mother says, you can't spend your holidays lazing around, ask your teacher to give you some maths practice. Or else read your dictionary, it's useful to know words. Rose rosy rosemary learning's more important rosette rosebush rosehip than messing around.

We don't care we just wander around, me and Rose, all around the meadow. Sometimes I try to hold her hand. At first she lets me take it then suddenly she says, Stop, you're holding too tight, you're crushing it. She explains, when Georgio asks for it, my hand I mean, imagine how mad he'll be if I'm missing a finger or two.

There are several possible endings to our story. It could be rosy or dark.

Rosy: Europe and the euro have collapsed, countries don't get along anymore, it's wartime, Georgio's going to fight. It won't matter there whether or not he's a brother, whether or not he's a good mechanic, that won't change anything, whatever happens he'll get killed. As for me, I'm declared unfit for service. Because of my asthma. I'll comfort Rose. We'll dig a lovely tomb for Georgio. We'll put a bunch of asphodels on it, what a nice word, it needs to be special.

Or else. Dark. As stories sometimes end. The battles end in peace. We find out that Georgio's a foundling child. A king's son. The fairy waves her wand. So the king takes off his crown and welcomes his beloved son with open arms. The evil genie who had kidnapped him gets back to his own business. The son decides to marry a shepherdess, young Rose. The king assembles his Council, transforms Rose into a noblewoman and calls her Lady Rosa. Rose and Georgio will get married they'll have children and send them to boarding school to make life easier. They'll live happily ever after.

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No. Not forever. Not for long. I'll be a grown-up by then. I'll buy a gun.