

- 1) 26. 10. 2020
- 2) 04. 03. 2026

WILDLINGS

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INT. BEDROOM - DAY

PUNK ROCK music deafens the ears.

A low-fi, rhythmic assault that shatters the quiet of the countryside outside of the bedroom window.

ROSE (ROSINA by her Italian name) (15) rolls her tongue over her lips with an intoxicated smile. Her eyes are dilated.

Beside her on the bed is MONI (15).

They spring on each other and kiss. Highly energised, they laugh, mimicking wild hyenas.

High, animalistic.

They break apart and then leap at each other again.

*TITLE CARD: ONE WEEK EARLIER*

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

A modest COTTAGE with a garden, set deep in the British countryside. Bleak but pretty.

INT. ROSE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Colourful walls half-plastered in Teen Vogue and comic book cut-outs, pasted over sun-bleached outlines of where family photos used to hang.

Rose stares at herself in the full-length mirror. She wears a dull SCHOOL UNIFORM.

A black jumper that scratches at her neck. A white shirt with collar, not feminine or fashionable at all. Totally flat, designed to erase any trace of identity.

Rose chews on her lip.

ROSE

Nice look, 'Rosina'.

She scoffs at her own name. Then traces the line of her jaw, finding an angle she looks most pretty.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Rose. Welcome to the middle of nowhere.

INT. LIVING AREA - DAY

DAN (10), Rose's brother, is glued to the TV. STAR WARS: A NEW HOPE. The room is cluttered with arty things, a nice armchair, and a stack of old jazz records.

ROSE  
You've seen this shit a hundred times.

DAN  
Wait until they've destroyed the Galactic Empire!

ROSE  
The empire doesn't fall in the next 10 minutes.

Rose snatches the remote and scrolls the channels.

Their mum LAURA (late 30s, attractive with a new lease of life) enters the kitchen and stares at her daughter. She wipes a smear of TERRACOTTA PAINT from her thumb.

ROSE (CONT'D)  
What?

LAURA  
I see what you mean.

ROSE  
The uniform sucks. And it's itchy.

LAURA  
But you look good, 'Rosina'.

ROSE  
(sharply)  
Rose.

LAURA  
Rose. You look good whatever you wear.

ROSE  
Look at the arms. They're trunks. I have no hands.

DAN (O.S.)  
(groans)  
I'm hungry.

LAURA  
(to Dan)  
Two hours. Patience.  
(to Rose)  
Come and see the studio.

INT. LAURA'S STUDIO ROOM - DAY

A small studio with an artist's desk and easel. A window looks out over the garden and fields beyond. The air reeks of turpentine, Rose almost gags.

Laura's work is of the countryside and its wildlife, not a master but she has developed a style with a primal edge / perspective worthy of being exhibited.

One canvas is particularly striking - birds with eyes that are too dark, perhaps too intelligent.

ROSE

Lovely, Mum.

LAURA

Lovely is a dull word. You know that.

ROSE

Sorry. Great.

LAURA

That's worse. Come on. What do you like?

ROSE

I like that it's yours. Your own space to do whatever you want. Isn't that why we came here? To be isolated from the rest of the world?

Laura reaches out. She brushes a stray lock of Rose's hair behind her ear - very imperfectly.

LAURA

What's going on in that unquiet mind of yours?

ROSE

I'm not mental. But we just moved from the best city in the world to the middle of nowhere. What do you think?

LAURA

I think you're going to be surprised.

ROSE

About what?

LAURA

How many friends you'll make in the country. And how laid back people are.

ROSE

Really, you're not serious? Have you been dating already? Dad's still single. He's not even unpacked his furniture yet.

LAURA

No.

A little smirk breaks Laura's mask. Rose sees it. She turns and bolts from the room.

Laura watches her go. Not too anxious. Not yet. She picks up a brush and begins to paint over a translucent(ish) wing of a bird.

INT. ROSE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rose lies supine on her bed. PUNK ROCK music barraging through her headphones. Her foot taps a staccato beat against the mattress.

She heaves herself up. She reaches in a bedside drawer to find a packet of cigarettes. A smile of anticipated stress release rises over her face.

She leans out the window, into the night air. She lights up, the cherry-red glow illuminating her in the dark, as she blows smoke and watches it dissolve in the light fog.

INT. LIVING AREA - DAY

The blasting of pistols in space - Dan is before the TV again. Rose enters, nursing a repressed hunger.

ROSE

Did you even sleep? 'Galactic' freak.

Dan ignores her, lost in the screen. Rose gulps an instant coffee.

Laura is already in her overalls, splattered with blooms of fresh ochre. She begins to GRIND COFFEE BEANS. It's bone-snappingly loud.

Rose winces, covering her ears. She spills milk and cereal across the table. It pools white, ready to stain the wood.

LAURA

Are you going to wipe that up?

ROSE

In a minute!

LAURA

Keep the house tidy. Don't leave a mess for me.

ROSE

Yes, Madre.

Rose snaps a fascist SALUTE, a most cynical jibe.

LAURA

Don't joke like that. It's inhumane.

ROSE

Sorry. I forgot that Nonno's people were Mussolini's men.

LAURA

(cold stare)

Don't joke about that either. It's dead history. Now drink some real coffee with me.

ROSE

No. I'm not a drug addict.

LAURA

Coffee isn't a drug, Rose. It's legal. And it's the only thing keeping me awake this morning.

ROSE

That sounds depressing, and obviously that's not what I meant.

LAURA

I have a meeting with a gallery in Plymouth.

ROSE

Plymouth? I read it was bombed so badly it never recovered and most people there are unemployed chavs.

Rose giggles, but it's harmless. She crosses the room and cuddles her Mum.

ROSE (CONT'D)

I'm joking. That's great news, Mum. But, will you drive me to school? Just today. I can't face the bus on my first day. I'll look desperate.

LAURA

OK, 5 minutes. If you aren't dressed, you can chase the bus through the fields.

Rose clutches the lapel of her BLUE DRESSING GOWN, her last defence / pleasure against the purgatorial uniform.

ROSE

I'd learn better if the school allowed pyjamas. Madonna save us from school uniforms, from all sorts of uniform.

She runs up the stairs. Laura stands alone, savouring the perfect hit of the caffeine.

INT. LAURA'S CAR - DAY

A dated, rattling ORANGE FIAT. Embarrassing. They crawl down a steep, quiet country road, into the TOWN.

LAURA

Your hair looks better up. It shows off your face.

ROSE

(staring out the window)  
Really? I don't think so. It makes me look like a girl.

LAURA

Do you need a hairband?

ROSE

I have one.

LAURA

What's her name-

ROSE

What? Who?

LAURA

Charlotte's son. Aaron. That's his name. They live in the Old Vicarage.

ROSE

That's a guy's name. You said 'her' before. Definitely. You're a native English speaker, Mum.

LAURA

What does it matter? He has lots of friends. His Mum was so friendly.

ROSE

Great. A socialite who lives in the middle of a field.

LAURA

Stop being sarcastic. I find it vile.

ROSE

Give me a break. I know how to make friends. I've survived West London. I can handle a few country ducklings.

LAURA

(faintly amused by her daughter)

I don't mean that.

ROSE

Why are you so worried then? Miss Unquiet Mind.

LAURA

I'm not worried, but you want to fall in with a good crowd. Not like the lot you-

ROSE

'Fall in'? Mum, that sounds like I'm doomed or something. Just chill out. Whatever happens, happens. That's what you tell Danny.

LAURA

(grips the wheel)

I know. You'll be fine. You are a little rose, thorns and all.

They share a loving / knowing smirk.

EXT. SCHOOL CAR PARK - DAY

The Fiat pulls away, leaving a plume of grey exhaust. Rose turns her back on her Mum's mechanical wave.

SCHOOL KIDS in black uniforms swarm towards the main BUILDING, an ugly mass of brick and glass.

Rose digs into her RUCKSACK, a mess of rock-band stickers and frayed fabric. She pulls out her crumpled timetable. It is soaked through from a leaky water bottle.

ROSE

Fuck.

The ink has run on the paper. She holds it up to the pale sun, squinting to make out the name of her 'Tutor'.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Mr. Barnes.

She changes direction and heads towards a different, more rundown building.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

MR BARNES (young-ish, balding, and defeated) gossips with a cluster of girls at the back.

- SOPHIE (15): Outspoken, street-hardened, insecure.

- HAYLEY (15): Calculative and comfortable. Her uniform is the smartest.

- MONI (16): The wild one. Coolest and she knows it. Sleeves rolled, tie knotted into a tiny nub.

Rose blunders in. The door CREAKS on its hinges - a whining fanfare for her arrival. She is caught in the class headlights.

She instinctively nears the rear of the room, a little tense.

MR BARNES

Hello, Rose. Welcome.

SOPHIE

New girl. Welcome to the dump!

MONI

(her eyes locking onto  
Rose)

Sit with us.

SOPHIE

(sarcastic)

Why would she go anywhere else?

Rose sits. The register sits next to Hayley. She offers Rose a rather insincere smile.

MR BARNES

Sign your name, please.

HAYLEY

To prove you exist.

Rosie signs the register.

SOPHIE

Is that Irish, Rosa?

MONI

Spanish?

ROSE

It's Italian. Rosina,  
traditionally. But just Rose.

HAYLEY

I was going to say Italian. Or American. The Old World loves to copy the new.

SOPHIE

No you weren't, smart-ass.

MONI

Barnsey got something right for once. Rose it is.

Sophie runs up to Mr. Barnes, dangling a TAMPON PACKET.

SOPHIE

Can I leave early for the toilet?

MR BARNES

There's still 10 minutes.

Then he notices the biological necessity and winces.

MR BARNES (CONT'D)

Fine. Go.

Sophie bolts. Moni watches her go with a sly smirk.

MONI

She's a dipshit. But I blame Jonty, her boyfriend. An even worse dipshit.

ROSE

Dipshit?

HAYLEY

Meaningless slang.

ROSE

Somebody who dips their feet in shit?

Moni laughs, that hyena sound. Hayley just finds Rose's question dumb, weird.

Rose looks out the window. She sees Sophie land in the arms of JONTY - uniform a ruin, a joint tucked behind his ear. They snog with savage intensity.

MONI

Yeah, that's Jonty. He does throw house parties though, with opium dreams.

ROSE

He looks like he's full of shit.

MONI  
(locks eyes again with  
Rose)  
Yeah, savage truth. Jonty is a  
wanker through and through.

A flicker in Moni's iris tells us the attraction is instantaneous - a web already cast between her and Rose. Hayley senses this shift and leans in, possessive.

HAYLEY  
So, what's it like in Italy? The  
place of great beauty and all that?

ROSE  
I've only been once.

HAYLEY  
Oh.

MONI  
Where are you from?

ROSE  
I grew up in London.

MONI  
Fucking hell. London.

HAYLEY  
That sucks.

MONI  
No, that's bad-ass. But why move to  
the shitty sticks?

HAYLEY  
Moni's just desperate to get out.  
She thinks the world begins at the  
M5. It's the nearest motorway, an  
hours drive away.

MONI  
True that, the day I get out of  
here will be the beginning of the  
rest of my life.

HAYLEY  
(touching Moni's shoulder)  
That was poetic for you. Maths.  
Coming?

Moni picks up Rose's CRUMPLED TIMETABLE.

MONI  
No, I'm staying with the 'new  
girl'.