

A SEASON FOR ROSE

23-DE05-W28

When a rare Persian rose surrenders her life to a genial apothecary, his cruelty makes her fear her essence will be lost forever before she can fulfill the glorious purpose he promised.

FADE IN:

EXT. ANCIENT PERSIAN GARDEN - DAYBREAK

A cheerful APOTHECARY with a face and figure like Santa Claus emerges from his hut. He strolls into his breathtaking garden, rubs his bountiful belly, and strokes his beard before flinging his arms wide.

APOTHECARY

Good morning, my children! Another day has been granted to us to celebrate the gift of life.

He wanders down a manicured path, patting his shrubs and flowers like cherished children. Some he sniffs, and some he kisses. At one juncture, he halts and stares at a small bush sporting only one flower--an oversized, many-petaled crimson rose.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

What's this? At last my Persian beauty blooms?

Reaching down, he cradles the blossom in his palm, the stem clasped between his fingers. He whiffs her scent.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

Glorious! Just what I hoped for.

He brushes her petals against his cheek, which has blushed with pleasure to nearly the same color as the rose.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

My dearest, newest Rose, you are a treasure. I dreamed your purpose long before you were born, and it is more lofty than you can imagine. My beloved, will you surrender your life to me?

The Apothecary releases Rose. Her branch springs up but returns to brush his hand. A gust ruffles her petals against his fingers.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

Your acceptance gladdens my heart, little one. We will journey together to your destiny. Do you trust me?

A gentle light glows from Rose's center.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

So we begin.

The Apothecary draws a curved dagger from his pocket. A shadow moves over Rose and her light wanes. He cuts Rose from the bush and cradles her against his breast as he returns to his hut.

INT. APOTHECARY'S HUT - DAY (CONTINUOUS ACTION)

The hut is a jumble of well-worn vessels, dried plants, and implements. The Apothecary hums while he brushes dust from a corner of his worktable and sets Rose there.

A gust from an open window blows her to the floor, where Rose's colorful petals are sullied by dust. The Apothecary picks her up and sets her on the table again, giving her a light pat.

APOTHECARY

Now, now. It's too late for second thoughts. I promise, you have nothing to fear.

The Apothecary rummages through a cabinet and pulls out an ugly clay bowl. He fills it with sand and nestles Rose in it, petal side up.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

Have faith in me. You feel struck down, but you are not destroyed. Sleep, my sweet.

He covers Rose completely with sand and encases the bowl in a sheet of burlap. He places it on a wooden shelf near the window and leaves, whistling a happy tune.

INT. APOTHECARY'S HUT - DUSK

A bird flies in the window and pecks at the burlap, which falls to the ground. A breeze blows some sand from the bowl, and the edges of Rose's petals peek out as if she may escape her fate. A glow, not as bright as before, pulses for a moment.

The Apothecary returns, refills the sand, and covers Rose again. Night falls.

INT. APOTHECARY'S HUT - DAWN (NEXT MORNING)

A cat jumps through the window, walks down the shelf, and knocks Rose's bowl to the floor. It shatters. The cat jumps down and bats Rose across the floor like a toy.

The Apothecary enters and shoos the cat away.

APOTHECARY

Perseus! See what you've done.

The Apothecary tenderly rescues rose from the floor.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

My dear Rose, you must forgive him. He does not understand your worth, but I do.

The Apothecary places Rose in a new bowl, covers her completely with sand, and puts the little bowl inside a larger vessel with a lid.

Instead of placing the double container on the shelf, he sets it prominently on his work table and departs through the back door to the garden.

APOTHECARY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Good morning, my children!

INT. APOTHECARY'S HUT - EVENING (A WEEK LATER)

The front door opens. A muscular NUBIAN, 40ish and imposing, strides in.

NUBIAN

Is it ready?

The Apothecary protectively lays a meaty, dirty hand over the vessel that holds Rose.

APOTHECARY

Not yet.

NUBIAN

You promised it weeks ago.

APOTHECARY

These things take time. You asked for the best I can make, and you shall have it. I can't hurry nature.

NUBIAN

My master will be unhappy with the delay.
 (beat)
 If I tell him.

APOTHECARY

I promise, it will be worth the wait.

Though unhappy, the Nubian leaves. The Apothecary caresses and kisses the lid of the vessel.

INT. APOTHECARY'S WORK ROOM - MORNING (A WEEK LATER)

The Apothecary bursts through the door, which slams against the wall and remains open. He spreads his arms wide, joy in every feature as sunlight streams around him into the dark hut.

APOTHECARY

Today! Today is the day, my precious Rose.

He scurries to Rose's vessel, pulls her out, and brushes the sand from her petals. They are brown, ugly, and wilted.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

Perfect. All is going according to my plan.

One of Rose's petals falls to the work table. The Apothecary lays her beside it and turns to his shelves. He makes a lot of racket with his back to her.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

Where is it?

The cat weaves his way between the Apothecary's legs and leaps on the table.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

You little beast. What have you done with my--

(beat)

Ah. Here it is!

He turns, holding aloft a marble mortar and pestle. The Apothecary drops Rose into the mortar. After a pause, he also tosses in the lone petal. He picks up the pestle and dangles it above Rose.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

Now, my beauty. It's time for our next step. This is the only way to accomplish my will for you, or else I could not bring myself to do it.

The Apothecary grinds Rose to dust while singing a cheerful song. He pauses, sniffs the mortar, and sighs with great satisfaction.

Perseus jumps on the table, and the Apothecary shoves him away.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

No! Not one whiff will be wasted on the likes of you. She is too precious.

He resumes his grinding. At last, he sets the mortar and pestle aside and pulls a kiln-fired ceramic bowl from his hoard. He grabs a pitcher of oil and pours it in with a flourish. He picks up the mortar.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

(reverently)

You are destined for nothing but greatness, my Rose. Receive this as my blessing.

The Apothecary sprinkles what's left of Rose into the oil. The remains of Rose float on the top.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

Now, now. Have courage. I know it's frightening, but down you go. Let my joy be your strength.

The Apothecary begins to stir the mixture with a wooden paddle. Soon every speck of Rose is immersed in the oil. The Apothecary keeps stirring, sniffing, and groaning with pleasure.

He turns to his shelf again. Rattles and bangs precede his satisfaction at finding what he seeks--two parcels wrapped in giant leaves and tied with twine. He unwraps the first and recoils at the stench. Perseus is too interested, and he gets shoved away again.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

This will make no sense to you, my beloved. But to reach the height of perfection sometimes you must endure a season of imperfection.

(MORE)

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

This ambergris has a foul odor, but it will bring forth the best in you. It cost me dearly, but I gladly spend it on you.

The Apothecary grinds the ambergris to dust and adds it to Rose's mixture. He unwraps the second parcel. Perseus takes one sniff and bolts out the door. The Apothecary chortles.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

Ha! Our feline friend is not attracted to any musk but his mate's. But in time it will make you irresistible, my Rose.

The Apothecary swirls in the musk and a few other ingredients, sniffing and hovering over his concoction like a picky cook. Finally he sighs, lays down his tools, and pats his belly.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

Now we must wait again for the perfect time. To bed, my little Rose.

The camera pans to the bowl, and its contents look like chunky, vile soup. He pours the mixture into a plain-looking vessel with a stopper and sets it again on the shelf.

INT. ON THE APOTHECARY'S SHELF - MONTAGE OF TIME PASSING

- Daylight waxes and wanes several times.

- A blossom on a bush outside the window wilts and falls.

- Rain blows through the open window and drenches everything. The Apothecary moves Rose's vessel aside but pays no attention to her after he closes the window.

- A patron wants to buy Rose's vessel. The Apothecary pretends it's ugly and offers a more ornate one instead.

END MONTAGE

EXT. APOTHECARY'S HUT - FRONT WALK - DAY

The Nubian stalks toward the hut, his brow furrowed and glistening with perspiration. Anger oozes from every pore.

EXT. APOTHECARY HUT - BACK DOOR - DAY (CONTINUOUS ACTION)

The Apothecary flees, high-stepping down the garden path.

INT. APOTHECARY'S HUT - NIGHT (THE NEXT WEEK)

The Apothecary takes the vessel from the shelf and removes the stopper. A wisp of nearly invisible white smoke escapes, and the Apothecary's eyes roll back in ecstasy.

APOTHECARY

At last. You will be my masterpiece. But it's time for one last step.

The Apothecary places a cheesecloth over the mouth of Rose's vessel and strains pure liquid into a smaller, highly-decorated perfume bottle. He puts the stopper in the new bottle, seals it with wax, and sets it on his table. A moon ray falls upon it, making it sparkle.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

My Rose, your future will take you away from me, but I will always keep part of you near to my heart.

He meticulously folds the cheesecloth which holds the last remnants of Rose's physical existence and tucks it into his breast pocket with a last, loving pat.

The moon ray disperses, and a shadow passes over Rose's bottle. He leans close and speaks tenderly to her.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

No sadness. You are not ruined, merely changed. Your true beauty was not your petals, but the fragrance within them. I know my efforts seemed cruel to you, but they have brought forth an unseen treasure--an aroma without compare. A perfume fit for a king.

Fists POUND on the door, startling the Apothecary. He nearly knocks the bottle over. The Nubian forces the door open, marches in, and slams a pouch on the work table. It bursts open, and several gold coins spill out.

NUBIAN

Tonight. I must have the perfume tonight or your life is forfeit.

APOTHECARY

(defensively)

I pledged you would have it when it was ready, and not a moment sooner.

The Nubian moves as if to strike a blow. The Apothecary flinches and picks up the bottle.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

Thankfully for both of us, it is ready tonight.

The Nubian snatches the bottle and leaves. The Apothecary watches wistfully and speaks through his tears.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)

Godspeed, my rare Persian Rose.

INT. PERSIAN PALACE - HAREM DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The large room is crowded with women who titter with excitement. Attendants arrange their hair, adjust their ornate garments, and paint their faces with elaborate makeup.

One YOUNG WOMAN sits alone in a dark corner, attended only by an elderly woman, also a Nubian. In contrast to the others, her garb is very simple--a flowing white gown with a gold belt low on her hips. Her shiny, raven hair falls in loose waves to her waist, and her complexion is natural and flawless.

The Nubian enters, and everyone falls silent. After a dramatic pause, he points to the solitary young woman. When she rises and follows, her head bowed, the others shout objections to her being chosen. The Nubian silences them again with a glare.

INT. PALACE - ALCOVE NEAR THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

We see the throne room from the alcove, but the throne is currently empty. The Nubian closes a curtain to shield himself and the young woman from prying eyes.

He removes the perfume bottle from a pocket, breaks the seal, and pours the fragrance liberally over the young woman's head. As he does, a wisp of smoky white twirls and enters the nostrils of both the Nubian and the woman. Her eyes--which have been shut--fly open wide.

The Nubian chuckles, low and hearty.

NUBIAN

I might owe that old fool another coin or two. I've never smelled anything like it. It's perfect.

He leans close to the young woman, his eyes fixed on her.

NUBIAN (CONT'D)

I've waited many months for this moment. You have been summoned, and now you are ready.

The Nubian lowers his head as if to kiss her forehead, but he steps back. He draws himself to his full height and nods to her.

NUBIAN (CONT'D)

This is your time, my child.

The young woman bows her head, her lips moving in prayer. The Nubian affixes a veil across her face and opens the curtain.

We see the king sitting on his throne in the otherwise empty room. He beckons the young woman, and she steps forward.

INT. PALACE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS ACTION)

The Nubian strides forth and takes his place, standing at attention behind the right shoulder of the KING.

The young woman glides across the tile floor with slow, graceful steps, never raising her eyes from her feet. Kneeling before the throne, she extends her arms to the king and presses her forehead against the floor.

A white wisp of smoke wafts from the young woman's hair to the nose of the king. His head snaps back and his jaw goes slack.

KING

What magic is this? An aroma from the gods?

(to the Nubian)

Hegai, where have you been hiding this one?

HEGAI (NUBIAN)

I have not hidden her, sire. I have prepared her, as you asked. A wise man once told me these things take time.

The king stands and bids the young woman to rise. He removes her veil, traces a finger down her cheek, and lifts her chin. Her eyes remain shut.

KING
(gently, to the woman)
Look upon your king.

The woman opens her luminous amber eyes, and the king is entranced. When he smiles, she returns it. He gazes intently on her face as he speaks.

KING (CONT'D)
(to Hegai)
Return in the morning.

Hegai bows to the king, turns, and nods to the young woman before departing. He shuts the door behind him.

INT. PALACE - DRESSING ROOM - DAY (NEXT MORNING)

Hegai supervises while the elderly Nubian woman puts the finishing touches on the young woman's finery. Her bejeweled clothing and headdress only enhance her beauty. The only makeup she wears is a touch of kohl around her eyes.

When the servant woman indicates she's finished, Hegai approaches and anoints the young woman again with the Apothecary's perfume. He slips the bottle into an embroidered pouch and ties it to her belt with a golden cord.

HEGAI
You are now the King's chosen one. Your life will change from this time forward, but never forget who you are.

The woman looks puzzled.

HEGAI (CONT'D)
You are a rare flower. Your beauty is not from anointing with a costly perfume, but a pleasing aroma that comes from here.

His hand hovers over her heart.

HEGAI (CONT'D)
And here.

He taps her brow with his index finger.

HEGAI (CONT'D)

And here.

He touches her lips.

HEGAI (CONT'D)

In the fullness of time, this day has
come. Now, walk into your destiny.

Hegai extends his hand. She places hers atop his, and he
escorts her from the room.

INT. PALACE - ALCOVE NEAR THRONE ROOM - DAY

The Apothecary and a FRIEND stand in the shadows of the
alcove with the curtain partly drawn. The Friend wears a
Jewish prayer shawl around his shoulders. They hear a
buzz of excited conversation from the throne room, but
they cannot see inside.

Hegai and the young woman reach the grand doorway to the
throne room and halt in full view of the men in the
alcove. She sniffs the air and looks for the source of a
familiar fragrance--the Apothecary, who grins like a
Cheshire cat. He taps his heart and nods his head.

She smiles at him, but also looks warmly at the Friend,
who returns her regard.

FRIEND

(quietly, to the young woman)

Remember, you were born for such a time
as this.

The woman assumes a regal posture as she faces the throne
room. Hegai smiles (the first we have seen from him) and
flips a gold coin to the Apothecary.

The conversations from the throne room fall suddenly
silent.

KING (O.S.)

"People of Persia, our long wait is over.
Wise men, satraps, slave and free--the
gods have given us a new queen. I present
to you...

(beat)

Queen Esther.

Cheers and applause erupt, and the young woman (ESTHER)
walks into the throne room, disappearing from sight.
Hegai follows.

The Apothecary pulls out a hidden prayer shawl from under his mantle. He and the Friend both cover their heads.

APOTHECARY

Mordecai, our people have waited many years to see God's deliverance. I thought this day would never come.

FRIEND (MORDECAI)

Nor did I, my friend. Now we will see what God will do.

The Apothecary draws out the pouch with Rose's ground petals. He kisses it and presses it to his forehead as he prays.

The pressure releases a wisp of white smoke that climbs upward and dissipates near the ornately tiled roof of the alcove.

FADE TO BLACK.