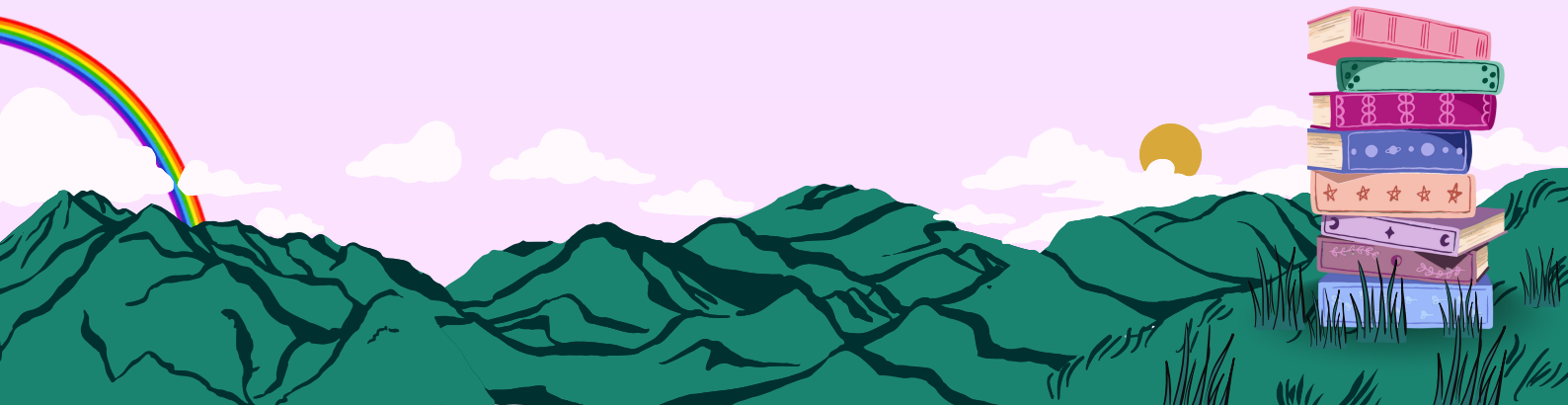


ROSA

Amber Cook

I remember the way she looked, just before she left, our promises still floating close, easy to reach, easy to keep. I remember the way her hair looked, just before it disappeared into the crowd; and the flash of her face, turning for a last glimpse back. She always had a pretty face. I think she is the most beautiful person I ever met. Or saw. I don't know. I forget what I did after she left, I must have driven, I guess, because I got home. I remember the first night, I cried. I don't think it was solely her leaving, I think that simply tipped the scale from being able to handle things to not. I remember going out onto the roof, lying with my back on the still-warm corrugated iron, night air cold on my skin and tears, tears, tears running from me, silent and impossibly sad. I thought I might die. But I didn't. Or maybe I did. I don't know.

Looking back, that was the moment she stopped being a person, I think, in my head. After she left, she became something more, something I could never hope to meet. Could never hope to see, could never hope to leave, could never love. And I never did meet her again. Never. Despite our promises, a few calls were all we ever got, and all I could think was how I thought she was better. Better before than she was now, better in my head than she was in real life, better admired from a distance. I wish it hadn't turned out like this.



I think that was my problem, that I made her more than she could ever be, more than she ever was. I think, if I met her now, I could love her. I could do it right where before I did it wrong. Maybe. Back then, everything was so much simpler, somehow, more natural, more free. I wish I could meet her again, just to see. Just to know. I wonder where she ended up. I hope she was swept off into her dreams, she was going to be a pianist, and she was good, real good. She was too good for our little town, too good for the little town and her little friend. I wasn't though. I stayed in the little, hopeless town, just barely living, barely making it along. God, I see why she left. Always the brighter one, caged down by cracked pavements and stupid people. Or maybe that's just my head elevating her too high again. She was always good at piano though, that I could never make up. I remember going over to her house, and her playing for me, just for me. Looking back, that was when I started to love her, truly love her, when I heard her play. The memory is tainted now, smudged by fingerprints and hazed the way everything is after a while. But I remember enough. Her face, her beautiful, beautiful face, illuminated by sunlight from the window beside her, how the sunlight caught on her forehead, her cheek, her lips. She had very beautiful lips. I remember the way her fingers seemed more than human when she played, aliens from another planet came down to dance over the keys.

If we had met again, just once more, I think things would be different. Then, I think I could love her. Maybe I love her already. I wish we could have stayed close, not that she stayed in the little town to be with me, but that I had gone with her. I wish I could have seen her play just once more. If I could, I would listen to her play every night, look into her beautiful, beautiful face and kiss her beautiful lips and drift into sleep with her beautiful arms around me. Oh how I wish. I am sure she will have made it. To the big stages, the big shows. Where she can play a Steinway and I can sit in the front row, where we can go out afterwards and then go home together. Watch a film. Be in love. All I truly wish for is her. I know that.

