

# Fire and Flood

## A Short Story

[Ruby Bruce - Capstone](#)

“This is the beginning, not the end, y’know?” says one twin.

“I know,” another twin replies. “I can’t wait.”

“Me neither.”

The moon was almost full, that night.

It shone down like a spotlight of silvery blue, but not quite in a perfect circle, though almost there; it looked more like it was squashed on one end, almost like a pumpkin that had grown lying on its side.

Rue had made that comparison on the drive to the graduation ceremony that night, and Bea had laughed.

It is a strange time when twin sisters are to graduate in the same year; the same day, even. Everything is done twice; two dresses to be sought out and tailored, two hair appointments in side by side salon chairs, two caps and two gowns.

What’s stranger is that Rue and Bea were identical. When they had gotten called up at the ceremony, to many, it was like they were seeing the same student walk across the stage twice. The night had been pleasant, certainly, surrounded by the warm smiles of familiar faces and the rush of celebration. With the joy of the event, however, there came a sense of overwhelming bittersweetness, as is true of all graduations; a checkpoint marking the end of an era, a moving on, a goodbye.

The two sisters sit, graduation regalia clad, on the hood of Rue's car. It's a little beat up, and it's from the early two thousands, but it gets her from point A to point B. Bea doesn't have a car; she can't afford it quite yet, as she only works weekends at a coffee shop to make room for her studies on school nights (as opposed to Rue, who isn't big on studying, and is usually too busy playing local gigs to really get around to it).

"Are you scared?" Bea asks, whispering.

There's a long pause before Rue answers. "Yes," her voice cracks, and she surprises herself at its volume.

"Me too." Bea says. "I'm here with you."

"I know." Rue grumbles, tucking her knees into her chest.

Bea smiles weakly, and in that moment, Rue recalls a memory.

She's suddenly fourteen again, at the dinner table with her family. Her first eighth grade report card is in front of her, and Bea's own is the very same. Her mother looks on at her with a look of gentle concern, while her father's head is in his hands. Bea's report card elicited a proud moment of uproarious praise from both parents, even though her straight A's were nothing new. Rue was a different story; C plusses across the board. It wasn't that she didn't put in any effort whatsoever, but she certainly could have applied herself more. She was really beginning to get a head start on what would eventually become a career in music that she would fully realise in a few short years. She'd been working with a vocal coach down at the coast that had connections to people that Rue knew from singing competitions on TV, and he was more than happy to pass those connections on to her. She was proud of herself, and her mother was by her side, helping her find these opportunities, but it would seem that her father wasn't quite on board.

It's silent throughout the house, and not a word has been spoken in the last few minutes.

“I just think...” Her father breaks the silence, then he sighs heavily, clearly trying to sort out how he should finish the sentence. Rue looks up, fighting back tears. She notices, out of the corner of her eye, Bea averting anyone and everyone’s gaze. Some malicious part of her wants to strangle her sister for always being the *perfect* little scholar that she was, but this isn't about her.

Rue knows exactly what her father is about to say. She can feel it; it’s the elephant in the room. He had never been invested in her music, he never came to any of her gigs (namely guitar recitals and coffee house open mics) to watch her perform, blamed his lack of interest on work when she *knew* that if it were Bea at a more academic event, he’d be there in a heartbeat.

“I just think that you should think about your future... and spend more time on school instead of your... your music. That isn’t a career option for you” Her father says, slowly, cautiously, and with that, the match had been struck, and Rue boils over.

*“That’s what I thought,”* she speaks more powerfully than she’d expected herself too, an air of sharp command and seriousness that she didn’t know she had inside herself taking over. *He doesn’t understand. This will be my future. This will be my life.*

Adrenaline pumps through her bloodstream, and for a moment, she’s possessed by an indomitable fury that only either a raging firestorm or a teenaged girl could ever embody. She shoots upright out of her chair and is upstairs before anyone can even make a single move to stop her.

Her father’s apology later on goes in one ear and out the other. She’d process it when she was finished being a smoldering asteroid; when she instead would be a smoking ton of space rock, even then, still perpetually hot to the touch.

Then, in a blink, she’s back to being seventeen on the hood of her car, her sister by her side, a cool breeze on her cheek and crickets chirping in the distance.

She's older now, and it took her this long to realize that she had, in a way, ruined that night for Bea, who had excelled in her classes and put in mountains more work than Rue ever had. Bea's success should have been celebrated, but instead, her failure was the center of attention.

She doesn't see a point in apologizing now, as it's much too late, and Bea probably doesn't even remember it happening. Instead, she looks at her sister, who lately seems older than her despite being born second of the two. She's multitudes wearier than Rue, and she looks tired, not just physically, but like her brain is heaving breaths of the night air after running a mile a minute. Still, though, without fail, she sits up as straight as a board. Rue can envision a stack of books atop her head, not wobbling in the slightest. One would never be able to judge whether she'd stopped taking ballet lessons in seventh grade or just yesterday.

"You're going to be so much better than me," Rue whispers. If there's one thing that Rue can foresee in the years to come, it's that Bea is destined for a life of success. She's brilliant, witty, and so level-headed (literally as well as figuratively). She's going to live comfortably, get a job at a publication or something, live in the big city. She'll get by so perfectly, and she'll be happy. Rue knows that no career in music is completely stable, and it relies on relevance. If she doesn't make it big, she doesn't know what she'll fall back on, and that's scary.

Bea looks at her, confused. "What're you talking about?" she asks. "You're gonna be a rock star." At that, Rue snorts, because she can't be serious. "That's not a joke." Bea adds, and it's then that Bea remembers the moment she realized that Rue was, truly and entirely, destined to build her entire life upon music.

She's still seventeen in this memory; it's a day only a few short months ago.

The persistent thumps of a kick drum pound in her eardrums as she watches her sister from her place backstage. She's playing a local venue with her band, it's nothing new, but this venue is *packed*; filled with attendees of all walks of life, looking to fill their Friday night with some live music and a good time with friends.

Rue is on stage, playing her guitar and singing with all of her might into the microphone, words that she wrote from the bottom of her heart echoing through the building, amplified at

top volume, meant to be felt deep in one's chest. Rue hated to call her work a form of poetry, but Bea knew enough about literature to know that her songwriting was impressive, just from a lyrical perspective.

Bea looks on at her sister, who radiates all the confidence of a chart topping rock legend, and she feels a sense of dread wash over her as she realizes that she'll never, *ever*, be able to do the things that Rue can do without batting an eye, and her stomach flips over.

The colour must have begun to drain from her face, because next to her, a stage attendant who Bea isn't in a position to remember his name, asks if she's okay, and just like that, the flood gates open.

While her sister had always been much more courageous than her, Bea had always been prone to feeling irrationally and *overwhelmingly* afraid, because she paled in comparison to the furious, undiminishable firelight that was Rue. Rue, who sang words from the bottom of her heart to a crowd without hesitation, who could walk through countless storms unbothered. Bea wanted to know that fearlessness, but something deep down screamed that she *couldn't*. She was a passive body of water, not rebelling, taking shape of all that she surrounded.

She was going through the motions, letting herself float along the current; she hadn't even realized she was crying until her mother was at her side. She hadn't realized that she was breathing too quickly until she was escorted back to the dressing room. She hadn't realized that the music had stopped until Rue was at her side. *The music stopped*. The concert was over. Bea hadn't been keeping track of time, and to this day she doesn't know if Rue had ended the concert early or if she had been panicking for the length of the rest of the concert and it had ended on schedule.

They're in the car driving home when Rue speaks up.

"Are you okay?" She asks, her voice just barely surpassing a whisper.

Bea does not give a proper answer, because she does not have one to provide. She feels any shred of coherency that she had left get washed away with the tide. A weak, hushed “I’m sorry,” is all that bubbles through her still quivering lips.

And then, almost as quickly as the memory appears, it’s gone, and Bea is back in the present.

Two sisters, two futures, two roads diverging from a single path in a forest shrouded in an uncertain darkness, where one path is on fire, and the other one is flooded.

“I think I’m gonna move to Vancouver.” Rue says, suddenly, her voice gravelly with misuse.

“Yeah?” Bea asks.

“I’m not going to school yet.” Rue continues with a shrug. “I might not ever. I’ll find a job, probably, opening for bands and stuff.”

“Rue, you were *gonna* go, you just missed the application deadline, remember?”

“Changed my mind.”

There’s a spitefulness to Rue’s voice, and Bea knows why. She wants to prove their father wrong, after all this time. She swears she can see tiny licks of flame off of the top of Rue’s head, smoke rising in faint ribbons.

“Sorry. You can change your mind, that’s okay.” Bea mumbles.

“It’s fine.” Rue says, and then it’s quiet again for a little while, before Rue speaks up again.

“Where do you see yourself in twenty years?”

At that, Bea laughs. That was a question that she’d been asked by countless teachers in the past, and she’d always given a halfhearted, easy answer. The fact that her sister was asking it genuinely took her aback. “Seriously?” She asks.

“Seriously.” Rue confirms, not laughing,

Bea hums in consideration. “Um... I think I’d like to work for some kind of arts and culture publication. Like Kinfolk or something. Or maybe at a university. I don’t know, somewhere I can tell stories.” She answers. “What about you?”

Rue shakes her head. “No, no, not career wise,” she says. “I should’ve clarified. In twenty years, how do you hope you will be doing? How do you hope that you will have changed?”

“Oh,” Bea replies with a nod. She thinks she understands now, and she thinks about it for a long time before answering. “Happy. And comfortable.” She pauses, then adds, “And unafraid. Brighter.”

Rue smiles.

“What about you?” Bea asks.

“I hope I mellow out a bit.” Rue answers without much hesitation. “I hope I’m smarter, *wiser*. More peaceful.”

Bea nods.

And with that, it’s quiet again as they gaze out at the view in front of them, together, always together. Two sisters, two sides of the same coin; fire and flood.