

## Bouquet of Roses

By Cheye Bieber

Claire sat upright in her chair in the library at her university. Her crystal blue eyes gazed dreamily on her boyfriend, Josh, who sat at the table next to her. Her full lips parted as she mouthed the words “I love you.”

The corners of Josh’s mouth rose as he gave her a slow wink. Josh ripped a piece of paper out of his notebook and started writing. He folded the paper twice and slid it onto Claire’s desk.

Claire blushed as she read the words written in Josh’s finest cursive. “My darling Claire, you have a special place in my heart. You will always be the most beautiful girl I have ever laid eyes on. I can’t believe I can call you my girlfriend. Happy anniversary! I have a surprise for you that should be arriving soon. I hope you like it.”

Just as Claire flashed an excited smile, there was a knock at the door. A short woman with gray curly hair came in carrying a big bouquet of a dozen or more red roses. “I have a delivery for, uh...” she paused to read the tag on the flowers. “Claire Gee-ovary?” This got the whole library’s attention. People started to look around to see who the flowers were for.

“Geoffrey,” Claire corrected politely as she rose from her desk and made her way toward the woman. She thanked her as she gingerly took the bouquet in her arms. She heard a few girls “awe” at the sight of the huge set of flowers. Claire and Josh beamed at each other as she made her way back to her seat. “Josh! Thank you! They’re lovely.” Claire’s eyes were shining.

“I have another surprise for you.” Josh took out a small envelope from his pocket.

Claire looked at the wrinkled paper of the envelope and could tell there was a small metal object in it. A flash of heat enveloped her, and her cheeks turned pink. “Josh,” she breathed as she took the envelope.

Josh noticed a tiny flash of disappointment on Claire’s face when she felt that it wasn’t a ring. He watched eagerly as she ripped the envelope open and pulled out a shiny, copper key. Josh grinned.

“Oh, my goodness. Are we moving in together?!” Claire hopped out of her seat and kissed Josh hard on the mouth.

Josh took Claire’s hand, kissed it, and whispered, “Look at the notes on the roses.”

Claire didn’t notice them at first, but every single rose in her bouquet had a small piece of cardstock tied to it with twine. “What is all this?” Claire giggled as she reached for one

of the notes. Her smile disappeared in an instant. “Matthew Smith May 26? What?” She read another one. “Allen Wilder January 11?” Claire’s eyes were full of confusion. “Josh, what is this?”

“Well,” Josh smiled, “This is the key to your apartment,” he pointed at the key that was now sitting in the desk, “I don’t need it anymore. And these,” he said touching one of the roses, “are all the times you’ve cheated on me.”

Claire’s mouth hung open in bewilderment. “Jo- Wha-” she stammered.

Josh was still smiling. “Oh, honey. You don’t need to pretend you don’t know what I’m talking about. I started hearing rumors of you sleeping around about 6 months ago. I didn’t believe them, of course, but when I saw some other guy’s underwear in your laundry basket, I got a little suspicious. I contacted the security for your apartment complex and asked to see the surveillance footage, and sure enough, you were bringing a plethora of men to your place late at night.”

Claire choked on her words. “So, what do you mean by all this?”

“What do I—?” Josh laughed as if Claire just told a good knock-knock joke. “I’m breaking up with you.”

The look on Claire’s face turned from confusion to fury. She could feel all the people staring at her. Tears were escaping her eyes and her face was as red as the flowers next to her. “If you were going to fucking dump me, why did you wait for our anniversary and go through the trouble of buying me flowers?” Claire snapped at him between sobs. “You’ve humiliated me in front of everyone!”

Josh shrugged. “Yeah,” he chirped, “that was kind of the point.” With that, he collected the things off his desk and stood from his chair. He gave Claire a brief, mocking kiss on the head.

“Happy anniversary!” he said and left the room smiling.

### **Inspiration**

Arnold, Eddy. [“Bouquet of Roses.”](#) *Anytime*. RCA Records. 1948.