

DESERT FLOWER

by Ece Velioğlu

Setting:

A desert in Tunisia, a square in the desert with settlement around it, meeting room

Characters:

ELIZBETH COX: 27 years old, long wavy blond hair, brown eyes, English, poet, passionate, curious, Fred's daughter.

DAVID VASILIOU: 32 years old, tall, wearing glasses, Greek, he works at Fred's company, son of a beloved family friend, he wants to marry Elizabeth.

ISTVAN SZEKELY: 30 years old, blond hair, blue eyes, Hungarian, partner of the work to be carried out in Tunisian, intelligent, liar.

FRED COX: 57 years old, Elizabeth's father, English, owner of the company, thickskinned, ambitious.

SCENE 1

(A desert in Tunisia. ELIZABETH, DAVID and FRED have just got off the plane. FRED and DAVID have smiles on their faces because of the money they will make with their new project. ELIVABETH questions why she came here. There is a slight desert wind but nobody cares.)

FRED: Isn't it such a wonderful place, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: It is just sand, dad. There is nothing more.

DAVID: You are right, Mr. Cox. This place is wonderful and it will become more wonderful.

ELIZABETH:*(Rolling her eyes)* You're talking like that because of money.

FRED: Oh, sweetheart! I know, you haven't wanted to come here anymore but as your father I just wanted you to see our success. Success is a family affair, after all.

ELIZABETH: Really, dad? Is that what you think? Yours and David's, you mean. I'm just here to watch, right?

FRED:*(Sighing but smiling)* This isn't just a project, Elizabeth. This mine, it is going to bring us recognition, respect. When we bring it back to England, they will all see what we have achieved. It isn't just about money; it is about making our mark, something people will talk about for generations.

(ISTVAN and some other people come in to welcome ELIZABETH, DAVID and FRED.)

ISTVAN: Welcome! Welcome! We were also waiting for you to come.

FRED: Hello, Mr. Szekely. It's nice to see you. Let me introduce my daughter Elizabeth.

ISTVAN: *(smiles)* Welcome, Ms. Cox. It's a great honor to meet you.

ELIZABETH: Same with you, Mr. Szekely.

FRED: Elizabeth, Mr. Szekely is our partner for this project. He also knows this place very well so I asked him to be our guide.

(They laugh)

ISTVAN: You will see me here a lot, Ms. Cox.

(FRED comes between ELIZABETH and ISTVAN.)

DAVID: Not as much as you will see me.

DAVID: By the way; we haven't met yet, Mr. Szekely. Let me introduce myself. I am David Vasiliou, I was the person who corresponded with you about the project.

ISTVAN: Nice to meet you, Mr. Vasiliou. Actually, when I first saw you, I guessed it might be you. It's obvious you are Greek.

DAVID: Yes, I am Greek but I can't understand, How...

ISTVAN: How did I match you and your name? Easy; your surname, Mr. Vasiliou. It explains it all.

DAVID: *(laughs nervously)* Oh, you should know a lot of things about surnames. Are you a surname explorer or something like that, Mr. Szekely?

ISTVAN: Unfortunately, no. I have just read a lot, Mr. Vasiliou.

ELIZABETH: Do you love reading books, Mr. Szekely?

ISTVAN: Yes, I like reading.

DAVID: How nice, two bookworms come together.

FRED: You're right, David.

DAVID: Am I?

FRED: Yes, you're. It's good that Mr. Szekely likes the same things as Elizabeth. They can spend time together. Maybe Elizabeth will even enjoy this literary conversation and may even like this desert. Right, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: You're right, dad. It's not very common to see someone who loves reading. If Mr. Szekely wants to spend time with me, I would be very happy.

DAVID: (*Jealous, rolling his eyes*) Great! Seems like Ms. Cox found herself a "new guide".

ISTVAN: Don't worry, Mr. Vasiliou. Right now, we are only talking about books.

DAVID: (*Smiling tensely*) Just books? I'm not so sure. Looks like you have managed to get her attention.

ISTVAN: Seems like it caught your attention too, Mr. Vasiliou.

DAVID: Anything that interests Elizabeth, attracts my attention too, Mr. Szekely. Mr. Cox found me in an orphanage in Greece and took me to him. I can say that I grew up with Elizabeth. I know her likes, dislikes, everything about her. As

you can see, there is a bond between us that has been around for years. A bond that will not be broken easily...

ELIZABETH: *(Fake laughing)* David exaggerates. Of Course, we spent a lot of time together. We know each other very well, but not as much as David says.

FRED: Well. you three will talk about it later. David, Mr. Szekely now we need to talk about work. Elizabeth, If you want, you can go to your hotel room.

(As they leave, DAVID stops.)

DAVID: I am sorry Mr. Cox, I recognized that I have something to say to Ms. Cox. I will join you later.

FRED: It's okay but don't be late David.

DAVID: I won't be late.

(FRED puts his hands on ISTVAN's shoulder and they walk away, talking business.)

ELIZABETH: *(Smiling as she watches them go.)* David? What happened?

DAVID: Actually nothing urgent. I just want to warn you about Mr. Szekely.

ELIZABETH: *(Raising an eyebrow)* About Mr. Szekely?

DAVID: I know it sounds weird but... I don't like this man. There's something about him that doesn't sit right with me.

ELIZABETH: *(surprisingly)* You are running a project with him.

DAVID: I know but... I care about you Elizabeth and I don't want you to get hurt.

ELIZABETH: David, you always worry about me, and I appreciate that, but... I like him and I don't think anyone who reads a book can do any harm.

DAVID: *(Smiling, though slightly disappointed)* You can't trust someone just because they read books, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: I know but let me decide whether I trust him or not.

DAVID: I know. Just... be careful. I'd rather not have to worry about you. I need to go now. You know, you can always talk to me.

ELIZABETH: *(Laughs softly, reaching out to squeeze his arm)* I know. David, you're my best friend. I trust you more than anyone else. You know that, right?

DAVID: Yeah, I know. And... I just want you to be happy, Elizabeth. That's all that matters to me.

ELIZABETH: Thank you, David. Really.

(They leave.)

SCENE 2

(A cool desert evening. A square in the desert with settlement around it, the place is crowded and traditional music playing. ELIZABETH is sitting on a bench alone and ISTVAN comes and sits next to her.)

ISTVAN: It's a very beautiful night. Why are you sitting alone?

ELIZABETH: The crowd looks better here. Besides, shouldn't you be with my dad and Fred?

ISTAVN: Actually, no. Our work is finished and you are missing all the fun.

ELIZABETH: Fun? I don't hear anything except whispers of people's quiet conversations.

ISTVAN: But I hear the echoing drum sounds.

(The wind blows.)

ELIZABETH: Where are you from? It's clear that you are not from here.

ISTVAN: I don't feel like I belong anywhere but I have been in the desert for a long time, so maybe it would be best to say I'm from here.

ELIZABETH: Are you from the desert?

ISTVAN: Actually yes. The desert is silent but also deep and meaningful. Here every grain of sand and every wind tells a story. Even silence is not actually that silence. Maybe that's why I feel like I belong here.

ELIZABETH: Interesting. I guess I've never tried to hear silence. Crowds and conversations usually feel closer to me.

ISTAVN: The further away you get from the crowd, you better know yourself.

ELIZABETH: Maybe this desert will bring me some peace. Maybe it's a way to escape from myself. And finding someone like you... I think it helped me to understand that.

ISTVAN: Let me, Ms. Cox; I will introduce you to desert tonight. Let me share the secrets of the desert with you.

ELIZABETH: I let you, Mr. Szekely. Make me love the desert tonight.

(ISTVAN stands up and extends his hand to ELIZABETH.)

ISTAVN: Would you dance with me, Ms. Cox?

ELIZABETH: *(Smiles)* Yes, Mr. Szekely. I will dance with you.

(ISTVAN takes ELIZABETH's hand and leads them into the music and dancing people. They constantly look at each other while dancing. While they are dancing, ISTVAN leans over slowly and whispers into ELIZABETH's ear.)

ISTVAN: *(whispering)* There is no other like the desert flower. Who bets the odds of nature and wins.

ELIZABETH: *(Chuckles)* I think I'm starting to like the desert.

(ELIZABETH and ISTVAN spend the whole evening together. They sit in a place where they see people having fun where no one sees them.)

ELIZABETH: Mr. Szekely... I think I found what I was looking for. For a long time I thought that words were missing, but what was missing was you.

(ISTVAN takes ELIZABETH's hand and places it on his heart.)

ISTVAN: Can you feel my heartbeats, Elizabeth? For the first time, I feel like I truly belong somewhere. To you... I fell in love with you, Ms.Cox.

ELIZABETH: I turns out I looked for you in every poem of mine. I fell in love with you too Mr. Szekely.

(ELIZABETH and ISTVAN sit together for a long time until the sun sets.)

ELIZABETH: Do you know, Mr. Szekely, I would like to learn more things about you. Not only your feelings, but also your past.

ISTVAN: My past is very complicated but I'll try to be honest to you, Mr. Cox. I had a difficult youth. I spent a long time trying to find myself. I made a lot of mistakes when I was young. I made bad decisions with some businessmen I met. In the end, I ran away from all of them and came here, all by myself. This palace where no one could find me.

ELIZABETH: The desert... Seems like a good choice to escape from everything.

ISTAVN: *(Lowering his voice)* Yes, like that. I want you to promise me something, Ms. Cox.

ELIZABETH:*(Curiously)* What is it?

ISTAVN: No matter what, don't let your past define you, Ms. Cox.

ELIZABETH:*(With determination)* I promise you, I hope you can make the same promise.

ISTAVN: I promise.

SCENE 3

(Meanwhile DAVID is secretly investigating Istvan's past. He notices something about the project and becomes suspicious of ISTVAN. Afterwards he realizes that ISTVAN is not what he seems and goes to tell FRED what he learned. DAVID enters FRED's tent, which he uses as his office, while FRED is working on the project. Even though they won't stay here long, there are books DAVID brought all over the tent.)

DAVID: Mr. Cox, I need to say a very important thing to you.

FRED: Okay, David. What makes you that embarrassed? First come and sit please then you will explain everything.

(DAVID sits across from FRED.)

DAVID: Thank you, Mr. Cox. Actually, I don't know where I should start and how I can say that but I did some research and I found that Mr. Szekely isn't what he seems like.

FRED: *(Surprisingly)* What are you saying Fred? We researched this man before we decided to work together with him. He is a trustful guy.

DAVID: I thought so too, sir but it seems like we were wrong. Mr. Szekely works alone, and he has been involved in partnership with several companies in the past. However, in each partnership, he deliberately sabotaged the project, causing the companies serious losses. He ruins every collaboration for his own gain.

FRED: *(Angrily)* So he is planning to sabotage our project.

DAVID: Yes, sir.

FRED: *(stands up angrily)* And to think Elizabeth has been spending time with this man... We need to stop this, David.

DAVID: Absolutely, Mr. Cox. If we are not careful, he could destroy everything we have built. I'll keep gathering information but it is crucial that Mr. Szekely doesn't suspect anything yet.

SCENE 4

(While ELIZABETH and ISTVAN are alone in the room, DAVID and FRED enter the room. DAVID has a determined expression on his face and FRED has an angry expression on his face. Before ELIZABETH understands why they came, DAVID speaks up.)

DAVID: *(With a strict voice)* Mr. Szekely, the game is over. We learned everything about you and your small plan.

ELIZABETH: *(Surprisingly)* What? What plan? Mr. Vasiliou what are you talking about?

DAVID: Ms. Cox, Mr. Szekely was lying from the beginning. His intention is not what you think. He wanted to ruin this project from the beginning and used it for himself.

ELIZABETH: Is this... Is this true?

ISTAVN: *(Bowing his head silently)* Yes, what he says is true.

ELI ZABETH: How could you do this? I believed you, I believed every single word that you say.

DAVID: You need to face the facts now, Ms. Cox.

FRED: *(Calmly)* Explain everything.

ISTVAN: *(Takes a deep breath, eyes filled with regret.)* Well, Mr. Vasiliou is right. At first everything was for my benefit. Disrupt the project... But things took a different turn. As I got to know you, my plans lost meaning. But now it has been revealed. Because I deceived you, I don't deserve to be with you... We must leave, Ms. Cox.

ELIZABETH: *(With anger)* No! You can't do this to me. You lied to me all this time but now I know everything. Are you expecting me to go away?

ISTAVN: *(In pain)* Yes, because I deserve it. I betrayed you. I can't hurt you anymore.

DAVID: *(Stepping forward, angrily)* Come on, Mr. Szekely! What you say is just an excuse to justify yourself. If you cared about Ms. Cox, you would have been honest at first.

ISTAVN: You are right but things have changed later. Telling the truth wasn't as easy as I thought.

DAVID: Was it not easy? What you did was more than just immoral, it was a huge betrayal to Ms. Cox. You fooled not only her but all of us. You are a cheater!

ISTVAN: Yes, I betrayed her. I don't deny that but my feelings for her were real. I can't deny that either.

DAVID: Your feelings? Can someone like you have feelings? Ms. Cox is not one to be included in your little games.

ISTVAN: *(Taping a step towards DAVID)* Are you going to tell me that the only reason you're so hateful towards me is to protect Ms. Cox?

DAVID: *(Momently hesitates, then firmly)* Yes, because Ms. Cox deserves respect, to be defended honestly!

FRED: *(Strenly)* Enough! This argument isn't leading anywhere. Mr. Szekely, you admit to what you have done, but it is more than emotions. This is professional betrayal. You must face the consequences.

ISTVAN: *(Lower his head in silence)* I understand. It would be best for everyone, and for Ms. Cox, to get away from here.

ELIZABETH: If you can just leave me now, it will hurt me most. You may have been betrayed, but it doesn't mean that it's something you can't change. I love you, Istvan Szekely. Despite this project or your plans, I won't let you leave me.

ISTAVN: *(Calm and emotional)* Well, I... hurt you. I hurt you.

DAVID: *(Quietly, clenching his fits as he watches)* Elizabeth, you can't mean that...

ELIZABETH: *(In a determined voice)* Yes I'm hurt but I didn't stop loving you. And I won't quit from now on either. No matter how many mistakes you have made. It's gonna take a lot to drag me away from you. There is nothing that a hundred men or more could ever do.

(ISTVAN looks at ELIZABETH with tears in his eyes, he doesn't know what to say. ELIZABETH hugs him tightly. From a distance, DAVID realizes the strength of the bond between the two. When FRED sees her daughter's devotion to ISTVAN, he can't control his anger.)

FRED: *(With a strict voice)* Elizabeth, I'm warning you! This man is dangerous. You will risk everything.

ELIZABETH: Dad, I love him. He may have made a mistake, but he is different now.

FRED: *(With anger)* This man will destroy you!

(As Istvan turns to ELIZABETH and wipes her tears, DAVID's expression darkens. DAVID struggles with his emotions, feeling both protective and envious.)

DAVID: *(Softly to himself)* You deserve so much better, Elizabeth. Someone who would never lie to you. Someone who would give anything to keep you safe.

ELIZABETH: *(With tears)* I can't... I can't... I can't leave you Istvan.

ISTVAN: *(In a soft voice)* I don't know if you can trust me but... I don't want to leave you either, Elizabeth.

(Meanwhile, DAVID is watching everything that is happening. He gets angry when he sees ELIZABETH protecting ISTVAN. His love for ELIZABETH becomes more apparent and turns into jealousy.)

DAVID: *(Talking to himself)* Elizabeth... You will never love me, will you? Because of him. After all these years... I gave you everything I could, yet it was never enough.

(At the moment a memory comes to DAVID's mind. One summer day, ELIZABETH and DAVID were walking by the sea. ELIZABETH took off her shoes and playfully splashing her feet in the water while DAVID watched at her with admiration. ELIZABETH looked at him with her usual cheerful expression and DAVID's heart raced. He wanted to tell her how he felt but seeing her look at him such a friendly, innocent way made his words catch throat. From that day on, DAVID admired her silently, treasuring every moment they shared but never daring to reveal his true feelings.)

DAVID: *(Watching ELIZABETH now, showing that same affection and loyalty to someone else, makes his heartbreak deeper. Talking to himself)* Even back then, I knew... I love you, Elizabeth. But you will never know.

(At the moment, DAVID comes up with a plan.)

DAVID: *(Talking to himself)* I must stop them forever.

(DAVID walks away to carry out his plan.)

ELIZABETH: Istvan, we can't stay here. This place... These people... They will never let us be together. We need to leave now.

ISTAVN: I will go anywhere you want, Elizabeth. Just say the word.

(ELIZABETH's eyes meeting with her father's who stands between them and the door. He looks at her daughter with disappointment on his face.)

FRED: Elizabeth, don't do this. Don't throw your life over him.

ELIZABETH: Dad sorry but this is my choice. It seems like it's the right thing to do. When I was little you talked about the time you met my mother. You talk about how much you love her and you said that when we find true love we will know it. Now I feel like I found true love, dad. Like your and my mother's love...

FRED: *(Sighing)* Your mother and I... We shared something special but I never want you to follow the same path at any coast. I don't want you to do anything you will regret looking back on.

ELIZABETH:*(Softly)* I know, dad. I know you only want what is best for me. But my heart tells me that this is where I'm meant to be, with Istvan. I want a chance like you and mom.

FRED: I can't say I understand. But if you really believe he is the one for you then I won't stand in your way. I'll let you go, Elizabeth. Even If I lose everything... You will be happy, my sweetheart.

(ELIZABETH quickly runs to her father and hugs him. After thanking him several times and talking about how much she loves her father)

ELIZABETH: Thank you, dad. I know it's hard for you. Thank you for understanding. I love you so much.

FRED: *(Holding her close)* I love you too, Elizabeth. I just want you to know that whenever you want to come back I will be there for you.

ELIZABETH: *(Smiling)* I know, dad.

(ELIZABETH joins ISTVAN and together they walk toward the door, leaving Fred standing silently behind.)

SCENE 5:

(While ISTVAN and ELIZABETH are sitting on a bench and talking about what to do next, they hear the sound of a plane in the distance.)

ELIZABETH: *(She raises her head)* It's strange, this plane is flying very low.

ISTAVN: *(With concern)* Yes, very low...

(The plane rapidly approaches ELIZABETH and ISTVAN. When ELIZABETH and ISTVAN see the plane approaching them, they jump up in panic.)

ELIZABETH: *(In shock)* Is that David?

(When the plane comes rapidly towards ELIZABETH and ISTVAN. ISTVAN and ELIZABETH quickly hide behind a rock. The plane hits the ground and there is a huge explosion. Flames are everywhere. ELIZABETH and ISTVAN hug under the effect of the explosion.)

ISTVAN: *(Breathless)* This is crazy. David... How could he do this?

ELIZABETH: Istvan...

(ISTVAN turns to ELIZABETH and he sees that she is injured. ISTVAN quickly goes to ELIZABETH.)

ISTAVN: *(With tears in his eyes)* Elizabeth... Please...

ELIZABETH: He was jealous of us. Please don't cry, Istavn. I love you despite everything.

ISTAVN: Please, don't talk like this is the end, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: But it is. Never forget me, Istavn. It's a little bit selfish but please never stop loving that girl who you met in the desert. Don't love others. After all these sacrifices, my lifeless body can't handle it. I love you Istvan and I will always love you.

(ELIZABETH takes her last breath.)

ISTVAN: *(Shouts)* No... No... Elizabeth, don't leave me. Please, Elizabeth...

(ISTVAN doesn't leave ELIZABETH's body for a long time. Hugs the body and cries. After a while he gets up and staggers towards the plane. He sees DAVID's lifeless body in the driver's seat.)

ISTVAN: *(With anger)* Is this the victory you won? Is this your idea of revenge? You ruined your own life... Mine too...

(ISTVAN pauses for a moment and looks around. Flames began to surround everywhere. ISTVAN lifted ELIZABETH's body off the ground.)

ISTVAN: *(To himself)* No it won't end like this, her memory won't turn to ash.

(ISTVAN leaves the desert, carrying ELIZABETH's body. He looks at DAVID's face one last time. As the plane slowly bursts into flames, ISTVAN walks away silently.)