



Rare Orchid

HEATHER H. POGSON

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This book is dedicated to a wonderful person who never fails to be by my side even when all I do is write. He is the true treasure of my heart, a gem that shines and sometimes blinds me.

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Misplaced Memories

Screaming pierces through the cool night air followed by a gush of pain and blood shooting through Evony. The luxurious Falcon jet smashed with a hard thud into the white cedar trees of the swamp. Suddenly, all of the passengers began to tumble with the plane until it crashed heavily into the swamp with the crushing sounds of bone, metal, and rock. Darkness and small increments of memory began to speckle the back of her mind like the twinkling stars of the night sky that waved to Evony a silent goodbye. A small breeze kisses the side of her cheek as she attempted to open her eyes but instead fell into the deep darkness of a dismal dream.

“Evony?” a womans voice calls out to her, “Evony, honey?”

Evony gazed out of the plane’s small oval window and stared at the ever expanding clouds. It is dark outside but small glimpses of trees and water appear from beneath the wispy clouds.

“Evony, will you look at me? I am trying to tell you something!” The soft voice was becoming more stern and finally Evony turned her head to look at the woman.

Evony opened her eyes and the memory slipped away leaving behind nothing more than a faceless portrait of a woman she once knew.

It was a bloody mess and the scent of burning flesh

still hung in the air as Evony stood in knee deep swamp water surrounded by flames and a mutilated plane. She could just make out the faint spot lights of Sun Valley, a lively isolated city, over the mountains rocky edge. "Sun Valley...Sun Valley...Sun Valley..." She whispered to herself as if by repeating the name it would spark some sort of memory.

The billowing smoke plumed over the mountain and the warmth of the fire longed after Evony. It crackled and flared out towards her with a fury but she jumped back and tripped over a slippery rock and fell into the freezing water. The water pricked her fair skin with tiny needles as she struggled to get back to her feet. Precious puffs of warm air escaped the depths of her lungs as the cold swampy water seeped through her frigid bones. The trees howled as a slight wind blew through them and instinctively she wrapped her arms around herself in an attempt to keep warm and started walking away from the site in a hollow daze. She continued walking aimlessly through the muddy water with the tips of tree branches reaching and grasping for her, threatening to consume her.

"I'm lost," she muttered feeling the hope dissipate with her warm breaths. She had been wandering for hours without even knowing the full reason for being in the woods. She closed her eyes again in a feeble attempt to try and recapture the memories but to no avail. The only memories she managed to scavenge were that of the woman on the plane, and a young man named Cyrus whose face and voice she could not quite place.

“It’s worthless!” Her frustration was now starting to take over. She continued to trudge through the thick brush of the woods until finally, far off into a clearing, a road empty of vehicles came into view. Her heart skipped a beat as she thought of her freedom.

The woods were starting to take their effect on Evony as she fought to keep her legs moving forward. Her dress, once beautifully baby blue with a white laced sheer, was not torn and polluted with dirt and mucky water stains. Her hair, a deep rich red, was crusted with her own blood and mud. A throbbing headache followed her with every step and she began to feel nauseated.

“The road...I have to make it to the road... Just a little bit further.” She kept judging the distance between herself and the road but it felt like miles away instead of meters. “So far...”

As she moved through the brush, the world around her started to get darker until she realized that she was losing consciousness again. She leaned against a tree for a short while and then continued the fight towards the road thinking of only Cyrus and the mystery that shrouded him. She refused to give her life to the swamp and felt a strange feeling of being robbed. In a few short steps, the familiar feel of pavement beneath her feet was welcoming. Slowly she soaked in the short-lived accomplishment as she turned to her left and became bathed in a warm light.

Not far up the road, a driver steers through the winding corners of the highway as a steady pace. The night sky, covered by clouds, invited a cold air from the north and a soft mist that cloaked the earth like a blanket. It became harder and harder to see. The driver took a last puff of smoke from his cigarette and crushed the remaining end into the cigarette container of the small sedan.

Just another night, he thought, like all other nights he headed eagerly towards home from a long day of work. Then suddenly, in the corner of his eye a white specter came floating into view. No, not a specter. He turned the steering wheel as hard as he could and swerved off to the left. No matter his efforts, he still clipped the girl and he heard a slight thud to the right front light. She tumbled instantly to the ground and rolled into the ditch beside the road. The car came to a screeching halt.

Overcome with fear he fumbled for the door handle and pulled himself out of the car as fast as he could. He ran towards the girl and saw her laying in the ditch, moaning. Suddenly, finding himself next to her, it seemed like she suffered no more than a broken leg but he could not be sure. He brushed her hair back from her face and saw a frightened and shivering stare.

“Dammit!” He panicked for a short moment but eventually managed to gather his wits. “What’s your name?” He asked the girl without really knowing what else to say. He could feel the hard thumps in his throat as his heart pounded.

“E-Evony,” she replied, stuttering from the cold and the

oncoming shock. The blood stains on her dress appeared to have dried and he wondered what sort of misfortune had befallen upon her before he had come along.

“Okay, Evony, I don’t have a phone so I will have to take you to the hospital myself. I need you to hold onto my neck, okay?” He tried to remain calm but he knew that by moving her he could possibly harm her more. But what choice did he have? He could not just leave her there, and waiting for another passerby was out of the question at this hour.

She reached for him and he picked her up, she was a lot lighter than he expected and freezing to the touch. “What was she doing out here?” He thought to himself.

He carried her quickly to the car and opened the back door with his right hand. She clung onto him with what little strength she had left and only kept thinking of the last memory she had. “Cyrus...Where are you?” She muttered barely audible.

The man carefully put Evony into the backseat of the car and then closed the door as lightly as he could, fearful that any bump might cause her more pain. “Dammit!” He rushed to the driver’s side and entered as fast as he could and when he was finally in the seat he peered into his rear view mirror and he saw her eyes close. His immediate thought was she fell unconscious, and this troubled him slightly.

“Evony? I’m going to get you to the hospital, hang in there.” He never accelerated so fast before in his entire life. His heart was racing as fast as the speedometer as he sped

to the hospital in the nearby city, Sun Valley.

The city was established sometime in the late 1800's. Surrounded by a lake and mountains, Sun Valley is secluded from the rest of the world. Its only connections are through two main bridges that cross the onto the shores of Canada.

Evony spoke, her weak voice breaking the awkward silence. "Who are you?" She inquired.

"I'm Ricky..." he said after a long silence.

"Where am I?" her voice was getting weaker.

"We are almost at the hospital..." Ricky became even more determined to get Evony to the hospital. "Dammit!"

Finally, the hospital came into view. Its bright lights created a large halo in the misty air making it like a beacon of hope. Ricky drove up the emergency entrance and ran into the building. He reemerged with two nurses and a doctor and they rushed to aid Evony onto a stretcher. Ricky could see Evony was barely hanging onto consciousness as she was brought into the hospital.

The doctor and the nurses scrambled to get Evony set up to the monitors. "Looks like a broken leg. Blood on her head suggests head trauma. Any other broken bones, signs of bleeding? Blood pressure?"

"What's the girl's name?" one of the nurses asked Ricky.

"Uh, Evony. I don't know her last name. Is she going to be okay?"

Gwen and Gabby sat in the living room of there mother's small two bedroom apartment and watched the news unfold of the Childs' family tragedy. Gabby sat on the floor between her Gwen's knees enjoying her sister's fingers running through her hair.

"I still can't believe it," Gabby grabbed Gwen's hand and faced her, "a heart attack almost took out the entire family! If I ever meet Eden, I am going to give him a great big hug." She sat back down and Gwen reached for the hairbrush on the side table.

"That's a big 'if', Gabby." The brush glided easily through Gabby's hair.

"I would want a hug...at the very least," she continued, "If I lost you I think I would rather die."

Gwen was flattered, "Please, don't say that. What if something really does happen? I don't want to feel responsible for your death too. I would be happier knowing that you are safe and living a good life."

"A good life..." Gabby trailed off and pondered, "What exactly is a good life?"

"Well...you will finish school for starters, then attend a higher education, get a good paying job, find your soul mate, and have lots of babies!"

"Sounds boring," Gabby moped and continued to watch the news. She gasped when she saw Eden moving through the sea of flashing cameras. He was quite handsome and had the same dashing good looks as his father, Holden. He was tall with a slim build, his cheekbones were high and complimented his chiseled features and brown eyes. His

fine side swept jet black hair reflected the flash of nearby cameras. He looked beaten, his eyes were swollen and had sunken in from grief, but still he stood tall and proud.

“Look! Gwen! That’s him! He is so hot...I wonder if I will ever get the chance to meet him...” She moved forward and placed her head in her cupped hands and rested her elbows on the inside of her thighs. Gwen laughed at her sister’s love struck face and continued to brush her hair.

It was a horrible shock to the world when the flight scheduled to arrive in Sun Valley never touched the landing strip. None of the people on board survived and one body was never even found, presumed buried in swamp mud. As hard as it was for the world to digest, it was even harder for the sole heir of Holten Hotels. Eden Childs, at the tender age of seventeen, decides to take up a position within the family company along side his guardian and Vice President, Jiro Spencer.

Eden spent the first week in grief and anger after the initial shock in his room. He was now officially alone. It was Evony who has, or had, trained her whole life to run the company after their parents. When he heard the news of his family he felt it only right that he took over. Even if he was ill prepared. Jiro was helpful though. He became acting CEO until Eden was more ready for the role.

Staring mindlessly outside, Eden watched the wind tear up the grass and brush harshly through the trees. Today was one hell of a day for a funeral. The sudden three tap

knock at his door startled him.

“Come in,” he coughed since his voice was unexpectedly hoarse.

Jiro opened the door and stepped into the oversized bedroom. Eden stood by the floor length window and barely looked at him. He was lost in some other world. “Eden, the limo is ready and waiting.”

“It’s too hard...” Eden lifted a hand to push back the hair from his face.

Jiro moved over towards him, he had been a family friend since he attended the same university as his parents. “If you don’t go, you might regret your last chance to say goodbye, sir. Let me help you with your tie.”

Jiro was a good man and he had stood by his side, rarely ever leaving him, in his time of need. He, in a sense, had become his new family and he was lucky to have his guidance with the company. The lifestyle of the luxuriously rich was different that people realized and it was often cruel being in the spot light.

With nothing but a black hole in his heart, he left to join the thousands of mourners at the funeral. He received many sympathies but none were so powerful than his friend, Cyrus Crawford. At the funeral home, Cyrus stood next to Eden like a brother and at times offered his support by placing a gentle hand on his shoulder.

Many people passed through to pay their respects to the closed coffins in the cathedral. Muffled tears and sobs filled the air. Eden tried his hardest to remain strong until the last person joined the mourners. The ceremony commenced

and the remaining distant family members followed by Eden walked down the aisle with heads bowed and tears streaming down their faces.

After the ceremony, Eden was directed to a limo following the caskets to the cemetery. The procession followed with a long line of friends, family, and business partners. Once at the cemetery the wind brought the rain and a gust of falling leaves. It was hard, but Eden managed one last goodbye.

Finally at the reception hall, Cyrus and Eden found a place to chat by themselves.

"You have lost just as much as me, Cyrus." Eden started by saying, "Evony really loved you, I think. The last time you saw Evony was at the airport going to Vancouver and I saw what you did."

"It was a parting gift, you know, food for thought?" Cyrus shrugged and stared at the table as he sipped from a cup of coffee.

"I can't seem to bring myself to believe that she is gone. I keep going over it in my mind and nothing adds up."

"Why not?" Cyrus asked, "She was also on the plane?"

"Yes, but they never found her body. If anything, she's just a missing person!" Eden began fidgeting with a napkin, twisting it and ripping in to pieces.

Cyrus bowed his head and closed his eyes. He wanted so much to believe the Eden was right, that Evony had somehow survived the crash, but he was skeptical. If she managed to escape then why is she not here now? Why is she still missing? When it came to his feelings for Evony,

he already knew that his parents would pressure him into marrying her and upon seeing her he realized that maybe he would be okay with it.

They only met a year ago. Everything was different then. There was no real pressure about marriage but once she graduated from high school and became enrolled in the same university as him the pressure became intense. His father, Ambrose Crawford, wanted to strike a business deal with the Childs family, but the only way that Holden Childs would agree to merge the companies was through marriage. Supposedly, the most secure way to connect the family fortunes, he supposed. The rich get richer. He did not seem to mind though. Evony was a rare beauty, she had beauty in looks but he became more blown away by her charm and voice.

If he had to be married to anyone, then she was ‘the one’. Suddenly Cyrus felt empty and he thought more about his last meeting with her as she was preparing to leave for Vancouver.

“What do you think, Cyrus? She could be alive right?”

“I think we shouldn’t keep our hopes up. True, they never found her body but we buried a casket. We said goodbye and now we are expected to move on. If we keep holding onto silly hopes and dreams then we will never move forward in the world. Evony was special, but now she’s just a specter of our memories. Eden, we have to let her go, and move on...” He half believed what he said, but he also knew that the business world was cruel. Evony would be nothing more than a mere headline rapidly

disappearing into last week's news. "Eden, your sister, no one will ever replace her, but we can't be naive in our world."

With that, Cyrus got up from his chair and patted Eden on the back. He knew that Eden meant well by believing in things even if he was just grasping for straws or raw hopes.

The night went on and eventually everyone parted ways leaving Eden alone. He returned to the empty mansion in a grave mood, loathing being alone and walking the empty halls.

The next day was quieter and the mansion seemed to take on some life when the hired help started working. Breakfast was served to him in bed and his clothes for the day were laid out for him in the walk in closet. He ate barely anything, still lacking an appetite from grief. Then the butler entered the room to help him dress. It was just another typical day only this time he was the boss. He never dreamed about this day when he would have the power to fire people or look for new ones. For once, he just wanted the life of an average citizen. Wanted the chance to change his own clothes and make his own meals.

"Irving, where's Jiro?"

"In the Grand Hall, sir."

Irving moved quickly but each task was expertly done. He dressed Eden in a well tailored grey suit made with silk. Each detail of the suit demonstrated the wealth of the family and gave him a stylish appeal. After Eden slipped into the coat the butler made a quick sweep of his look and adjusted the tie one last time. He carefully placed the

polished shoes in front of Eden and continued on his way to other duties.

“Thank you, Irving.”

As Eden was leaving he could see the butler move towards the bed, normally the maids would be in his room making the bed but Eden complained too many times about all of the people in his room. His parents finally decided that Irving would wait on Eden, and Irving alone. Irving was in his thirties and his black hair was prematurely going grey on the sides. It was sometimes hard to imagine the hired help's life before servitude but with Irving, you can sort of see he had a wild side. Just before Eden would complain about having any help at all, he gave Irving a chance and ever since then, they have had a mutual respect for each other. That wild side of Irving's? Well, when Irving was busy making the bed you can sometimes catch a quick glimpse of a tattoo peeking through the crevice of his gloves where they meet the cuff of his coat.

Step after echoing step, Eden made his way through the wide hallways but stopped when he reached his sister's room. The door had remained closed since she left for the business conference. He was almost afraid to open the door, afraid that by doing so, he might see her ghost and then she might actually be 'dead'. He refused to believe it. There was no thought in the world that felt more true than his sister still being alive. Evony was more than a just a sister, she was far more dear than any other person because she was also a prisoner of this lifestyle.

“She still alive, I know it!”

Grave Choice

Evony laid in the hospital bed with bandages wrapped around her head and IV tubes and monitoring wires attached to her. She felt helpless and even more so now that her leg was broken. Her head still throbbed with pain but the painkillers were finally starting to take effect. As all the pain in her body started to subside, Evony took a deep breath.

A nurse came into the room with a food cart and greeted her kindly. She set out the food onto a tray in front of Evony.

“How are you feeling today?” She asked, smiling.

“Okay, I think...but, I don’t remember anything...” She trailed off trying hard to remember her past. She wished that she could remember something more than just a name and the haunting image of the woman on the plane.

“You suffered a lot. I’m not surprised. Is there anything you remember at all? Where you were from, for example?” The nurse fumbled around the food cart and found some cutlery and immediately placed a set beside the plate of food.

“No...wait, I remember Cyrus.” An image finally started to come into focus but still she fought to see his face.

“Who’s that?” She sounded intrigued.

Evony refused to say. In truth, she was ashamed to admit that she forgot what Cyrus meant to her. All she

could remember was that he had wonderful green eyes and smile that warmed her heart. She imagined his face when she was in the woods. “The woods?” She thought, “How did I get there?”

“Well, whoever he is,” the nurse proceeded to say, “Don’t forget him. Who knows, maybe he’s your boyfriend!” The nurse smiled and Evony peered down at her name badge, Eleanor. Evony blushed slightly and realized that maybe she was right.

“Thank you, Eleanor,” she was genuinely thankful to her. Ever since finding herself at the hospital Eleanor had provided her with more kindness and encouragement than she ever hoped for. Each night she started her shift and greeted Evony with a kind smile and asked her more about her life. Of course, she almost always failed to remember something new to say.

“Through dark times, we must keep hope!” she chimed. This seemed to be her mantra because she said this every night she visited Evony.

“Yeah...” After a long sigh, she was finding it difficult to find hope within faded memories. It felt like she was erased and then brought back to live as an empty canvas.

“Hey, I have to get back to my station, if you need anything, just buzz.” And with that Eleanor disappeared pushing the food cart with empty trays out into the hall. All that remained of her were the echoes from her shoes bouncing off the walls and the food in front of her. Spaghetti with meat sauce...and milk.

Evony reached for her fork and dipped it into the

spaghetti. As soon as the tangy sauce touched her tongue, hunger consumed her. Now thirsty, she reached for the milk but knocked it onto her plate and she fumbled hastily to get it back up right, but it was too late. The deed was done. The plate looked like a creamy spaghetti soup and as suddenly hunger visited it dispersed with the quick splash of milk.

The fog this morning seemed to know exactly what was going on in Evony's mind. She struggled everyday to remember something, even if it was just a snippet of information. When she stared at the fog that was all she could think of.

Apparently, the hospital had told her once she woke up, that she had been in a comatose state for three months since the beginning of September. When she finally did open her eyes the world was just as dark and foggy as the only night she remembered.

Burning debris, cold swamp water, a flash of light, and the wires all around her. Everything seemed to mesh together and she was not even sure if the memories were actual memories or just bits bits of dreams her mind made up as she slept. Oddly, she did not even remember dreaming while being comatose.

However, a man was notified of her existence because of her likeness to a famous heiress. When he arrived, he was tall and had very dark hair but not quite dark enough to be called black. His eyes were a silvery grey color and

when she looked into them she thought she saw a glimmer of a tiny speck of a memory, then it slipped away.

He introduced himself, "Hello Evony. My name is Jiro Spencer and I am the new CEO of Holten Hotels," when he paused he took a bit of a deep breath as if considering his next words carefully. "Your mother, Sofia, wanted to keep this a secret. As it seems for the rest of her life. I was not even made fully aware until recently, but, you are my biological daughter."

Nothing. Not a single memory of this man returned.

"Your daughter? I don't understand. I hear people whispering in the hallways and I have never heard your name mentioned as my father."

"Love is complicated, and I loved your mother very much," he quietly said.

"I'm so confused..."

He pulled a chair close to Evony's bed and proceeded to tell her her history. She was the heiress of a mega corporation and rumored to be engaged, or soon to be, to Cyrus Crawford. Her brother, after the knowledge of his family's passing in September, took up a position on the board of directors and worked alongside Jiro for the last three months. He is only seventeen and still has a lot to learn. After learning more about her past, she still tried to think back on the memories of her brother, but not even a single picture of his face came back. Cyrus, he had touched the side of her cheek and whispered in her ear, but that was all she manage to picture.

"I know that you are probably having a very difficult

time remembering things, and I want to help you. You are my own flesh and blood.” The words echoed in her head, ‘flesh and blood...’ The stench suddenly filled her nostrils and she felt the urge to throw up into the bed pan next to her on the side table. Breathing heavily, she looked back at Jiro and saw that he had moved slightly away to avoid the splash of vomit on his suit but immediately he went back to comfort her. She covered her mouth but the flames in her mind continued to burn and for a single instant she saw the face of a woman staring back at her from the cabin of the plane. Her face had been horrifically contorted and her smooth skin was charred and melted.

Jiro started to pat Evony on the back as she continued to vomit. A look of concern creased across his face until finally she was able to sit up again. There was an awkward silence as they both sat in that small hospital room. After awhile Jiro eventually expressed what had been on his mind since entering the room. “Come live with me...” His request came as a shock and he continued, “I will make sure you have the life that you have always wanted and I will hide you from the rest of world until you can remember your past. Or if you really want, you can never go back, but whatever you choose, I will help you.”

Evony had now laid her head back on the pillow, exhausted from the entire ordeal. He got up from his chair but never picked up his briefcase or winter coat and instead walked towards the door. “I’ll go get you some water.”

Now alone, she thought about what he had said, thought about his request or offer or whatever it was. She tried

to process everything but it was as if her thoughts never possessed any true meaning. 'Flesh and blood.' She knew that woman and her face very well. It was a face that haunted her dreams and her screams hurts her ears. Jiro returned moments later with a cup full of water and handed it over to Evony.

"Have you decided?" he asked averting his eyes.

"She continued to sit in silence until finally responding.

"I don't know who I am anymore. I just want to find out who I am... If I go with you, will you help me?"

"I have never failed you in your requests before."

"What happens when I leave the hospital?"

"You will be released into my aid, or I can return you to your brother's side."

"My brother...I'm not ready for that..."

It was hard to picture her life from before the plane crash and from Jiro told her about her family history she was liking the idea of returning 'home' less and less. A brother with whom she could not place ever a picture of his face and a big empty estate. Still, she did fight the idea of leaving her brother alone. "I'm better off dead," she thought.

The time came, however, to make a choice and the choice was clear. "I will go with you, Jiro." Without any hesitation, she suddenly became aware of a future that was refreshing and new.

“Evony is dead.” It was a thought that Eden refused to believe and it was often the mere mention of it which offended him. There were constant condolences about her and his parents. Though he firmly believed that his parents had died in the plane crash he could not convince himself that Evony also died. There was just not enough proof and even if they found the evidence, somehow, he still might cling to what he thought was truth. In his mind, admitting she was dead meant she was really dead. He opposed the thought because he did not want to give up on her. “She is alive, I don’t care what anyone thinks.”

Over the past few weeks, Eden had been battling with himself about Evony and there were times when he thought she really was gone. A moment of weakness was always his conclusion and now it was his mission to prove she still lived. He often imagined her all alone and lost with no where to go. This often woke him up in the middle of the night where he would then go to the large window close to his bed and stare out as if she would just walk over the horizon. Maybe tonight is the night she returns home, where she belongs.

Perhaps the sole reason for not wanting to give up on his hope of her being alive was because he had put himself in a position, as the heir of Hotlen Hotels, to run a big corporation which involved leaving his childhood behind, and secure his right to the family fortune. He needed to be sure that money was going where it should and that no one was taking advantage of him. He did not want to think of himself as alone. Two siblings, lost and alone but fighting

to reunite, this was the thought that kept him going.

Eden walked out of the huge mansion, more or less like an estate with acres of land and a garden that turned out to be a haven for when life in the real world became difficult. He found himself returning to the garden more and more each day to relax and hide from his waitstaff. Today, however, he slipped into the limousine where Irving was waiting patiently with the door open. Normally, the cold rarely phased him but being November, there was a high windchill. There will be no hiding after returning home tonight.

“Irving, take me to Laguna Falls University first. There is a new cafe that recently opened up and I am meeting Cyrus before work,” he ordered casually.

Irving rarely said anything beyond two or three words, “indeed, sir.”

The ride to the university was quiet and the odd bump and gentle hum of the engine was almost enough to calm Eden back to sleep. He fought it, however, and finally managed to make it all the way to the university where he could see Cyrus waiting in the doorway of the new cafe. As usual, you could see many of his admirers peeking glances whenever he was not looking.

Irving stopped the car and walked around the other side of the limousine and opened the door. When Eden stepped out, his hair immediately began dancing in the wind. He looked up at Cyrus who was suppressing a laugh.

“So this is the new cafe?” Eden asked once reaching the door Cyrus was now holding open for him. They both

walked in and went to the counter to order. The girl behind the counter was small with huge black rimmed glasses. Though her eyes were hiding from them both, they could immediately tell that she was in awe. Cyrus blurted out their orders, his a simple coffee with cream and sugar and Eden's a peppermint mocha.

"What if I didn't want a mocha?"

"Then I would think that there was something wrong with you, but since you didn't protest and it's normally what you get, I thought that by adding the peppermint might be a good change!"

"I never tried the peppermint...That was quite the risk."

"A risk worth trying especially since this is my treat."

They both laughed. More recently, Cyrus was always trying to bring up Eden's mood. With Eden being all alone in a big mansion by himself, Cyrus worried for his friend.

"Did you know they have live music here on weekends? They are always looking for new talent..." Suddenly Cyrus trailed off remembering Evony and losing his words. Eden watched as his mood quickly went from optimistic to completely somber.

"Oh really? Maybe we should come here and check it out then! I'm sure that just by showing up, business will be good!" Eden smiled for his friend. He knew full well that Evony was his weakness. There were times where Cyrus would sit down at the piano to play a song just to hear her sing. He often remained humble about his piano skills saying he was 'not all that good'. But for Evony, he worked hard to learn how to play. This was the main reason why

he liked Cyrus, it was his devotion to make her happy. He could tell that his feelings for his sister were than a mere friendship and he had a hunch that she knew it too.

He laughed halfheartedly, "You're probably right. Our admirers would follow us to the ends of the world!"

"Yup, that's why we should help this little business by showing up this Friday!" "Sounds like a plan. How's the mocha?"

Eden failed to notice that his mocha was already disappearing rapidly. "Well, I admit it, you chose great."

Cyrus finished up the last of his coffee, "Shouldn't you be heading off to work, I hear Jiro is tough on flakes."

"Hey, I'll get there on time even if I leave late. You know Irving. Thanks to him, I have never been late for anything. Oh, and I am NOT a flake!" Eden quickly drank the rest of his mocha and got up to leave, "So, I will see you Friday night then?"

"Of course." Cyrus also got up and took Eden's hand and patted him on the back.

Cyrus watched Eden get back into the limousine and be driven away. He always tried to cheer him up teese past weeks but this time Eden was the one doing the cheering. It worked, but his heart still felt a little heavy. He hated the idea of not being able to see Evony to the point where he thought he was going crazy. He thought he saw Evony, from time to time, walke the streets of Sun Valley or sometimes he would see her in the reflection of a glass

window.

As he walked towards the main building of the university he breathed in the cold air and let out a huge sigh. More and more he was receiving pressure from his parents about finding a mate. It no longer mattered who she was as long as she was from a good 'breed'. They felt the shock of Evony's death in a different way. It was all about business. The merging of two families through marriage.

This year when Evony was expected to attend school with him he was waiting for the opportunity to announce an engagement. They had known each other for only a short time but he already knew that she was special. The way she laughed still lingered in his ears. Now, this year at the annual Christmas Ball, he was expected to propose to someone else. The Christmas Ball was a masked tradition held every year at a Vanda Orchids hotel nearest the university for the students. It was often regarded like a second Valentine's day on Christmas Eve.

Cyrus reached into his leather messenger bag and inside one of the pockets was a small box. The box had laid forgotten since Evony's death in his bag until one night out of frustration, he threw his bag onto his bed. The little box rolled out and rested against the pillow. When he looked back at his bed, he saw the box and remembered the precious contents it once held. Now, his fingers came into contact with that little box and as soon as they touched it he retracted them. The cold box was nothing compared to the warm touch of Evony's hand.

Suddenly, a shriek startled him from behind. He turned

quickly to see the source, a young girl lying on the ground with a pained look. When she looked up at him, he could see her embarrassment on her face.

“Are you hurt?” He reached out a helping hand towards her.

She reluctantly took it and nodded. Her beauty momentarily stunned him.

“Thank you,” she started to say and then she yelped as she started to stand.

Cyrus did not hesitate in taking her arm and putting it around his neck and proceeded to pick her up. “I’ll take you to the nurses office. What’s your name?” She was blushing now, “G-Gwen, Gwen Laney. Y-you don’t have to carry me...I can find my own way there. Don’t you have a class?”

“Don’t you? It’s fine. Being a campus celebrity has its perks.” He managed a half smile and started walking minding the ice on the ground.

“A celebrity? Please, you’re more like royalty!” she gushed.

He was amused and slowly his mood began to sway a little lighter. “Are you saying I’m prince charming then?” The soft scent of her perfume reminded him of lilacs in the spring.

“Are you always so full of yourself?” she was quick to respond jokingly, and all the embarrassment that was only there a moment ago had melted away.

She looked up at him with a face cold from the wind, her eyes still sparkled a deep azure ocean blue. It was hard to look elsewhere and within that moment she took his

breath away.

Gwen held her breath every step Cyrus took towards the nurses office. She almost could not believe her luck when she slipped on a small patch of ice. It was stupid, she thought, but totally worth it because she inadvertently caught his attention.

Just another cold and chilly November day, the sun was not even shining when Gwen caught site of Cyrus slowly walking to class. He seemed to be deep in thought and when he reaching into his messenger bag she mustered up the courage to take the opportunity to talk to him. She flipped her hair, though it was not really necessary because the wind was already so intense, and patted her face with her soft red gloves. With one deep breath and a single step, she found herself on the ground and Cyrus staring at her with a look of concern.

He started to walk towards her and her heart began to beat faster.

“Are you hurt?” he asked, his voice warming her.

The memory played repeatedly in her mind and she blushed whenever she saw his concerned eyes looking at her. She was done for when he picked her up in his arms making her feel as light as the fluffy snowflakes that started to fall. Now inside the school, Cyrus looked down at her. They barely said a word to each other on the way there, she was afraid to spoil the moment. Cyrus was the first to speak.

“We are almost there and you will finally be rid of Prince Full-of-himself.”

Her jaw dropped, and within that short reaction, she tried to recover with a witty comment but failed. His laughter broke the silence and with a few short steps they found their way to the nurses office.

“I-I was only joking about the full of yourself thing!” she fretted.

“I know,” he smiled, “I just wanted to see if I could embarrass you!”

“You’re so mean!”

He entered the office, minding her head from hitting the door frame and was instantly greeted by the nurses.

“Oh! What happened?” One nurse too a look at Gwen and directed Cyrus to put her on the closest bed. Gwen blushed again and at the same time felt a little remorseful. The moment was gone, and Cyrus was leaving.

“She fell on a patch of ice,” he explained and looked at Gwen and smiled again. It seemed that every time he smiled at her she melted just a little bit more. ‘Won’t mom be glad if I bring him home!’ She thought.

“Cyrus?” she hesitated and he faced her with a questioning look. “Do you want to meet me for coffee later? There’s a new cafe I still have yet to visit...if you want...?” The butterflies in her stomach suddenly intensified as she anticipated his answer.

He paused for a moment before answering, “You mean the Laguna Falls Cafe? It’s nice. I was just there this morning.” He looked at his watch, “I have an afternoon

lecture at one, maybe I can meet you there around noon?”

It was more than she could ask for, a lunch date with Cyrus. “I can make it!” She glowed.

“Then, I will see you then,” he nodded to her and the nurses and turned to once again leave. When he was gone, Gwen was smiling like never before and the pain she had felt in her ankle had subsided. Everyone in the nurses office was now giggling over Gwen and cheering her on.

Songbirds

Days quickly passed into weeks and soon Evony was given the chance to walk around with crutches. It takes some getting used to but she happily accepts the chance to move around freely. After some struggling, Evony manages to make it to the edge of the room and out into the hallway. In addition to spending so much of her time in the hospital, she thought about everything that had happened to her.

The man, Ricky, that had hit her had disappeared never to be seen again. She refused to think too much about it because being in the middle of the road was partly her own fault. All she could think about was getting to the road and when she finally got there she tried to catch the attention of the driver. She succeeded but not in the way she had hoped.

“Crutch first and then push forward,” she thought aloud.

Evony tried to encourage herself and eventually she came to the chapel. Music poured from it like the sweet taste of honey. The melody floated on the air and caressed Evony. She knew the song and began to mouth the words, “You’ve got a heart as loud as lions, so why let your voice be tamed...” Evony took a peek inside the chapel and saw a young man sitting and playing the piano.

He was about her age, maybe slightly older, and she could see the passion in his face as he played. Hobbled

inside, she found a seat in one of the pews and listened quietly to his playing. He played an array of popular songs and some she never even heard of before. After he finished, he closed the piano and got up from his seat. He seemed to stumble a bit but quickly regained his composure. Once he turned, he saw Evony watching, but he said nothing.

"You play beautifully," she said shyly a few pews away from him.

Her words were only met with a silent stare as he moved down the aisle and passed her without saying a single word. Completely ignored and slightly embarrassed, Evony struggled out of the pew and followed after him out into the hall. His strides were long and once she made it out into the hallway, he was gone. The disappointment in Evony never felt more profound as defeatedly leaned against the door frame of the chapel. "Tomorrow, you won't get so easily," she mumbled to herself.

The next day she waited by the chapel but no one came. She wondered who this man was and became even more determined to know more about him. For the first time since her admittance she felt excited and shy.

The day she awoke in the hospital was day she was presented with a fresh new life, no memories threatened to provoke the old Evony into being again except for Cyrus. For some reason whenever she thought of him her heart would begin to beat a little faster and she realized that maybe Eleanor was right. It was clear to her that Cyrus had a special meaning and the more she thought about it, the more it confused her. "Cyrus..." Evony sighed and

jumped when the young man was suddenly in front of her. He stared at her and then leaned forward until his face was in front of hers. She abruptly pushed herself back against the wall and bowed her head in surprise..

“Where you waiting for me?” he asked already seemingly knowing her answer and he moved past her into the chapel with a bit of a smirk. He sat in front of the piano and stared at the keys.

Evony shuffled clumsily after him and asked, “Who are you?”

“No one special,” his answers were short and curt.

“I don’t believe that!” Evony moved closer to him until she was next to him. He looked at her almost angrily but subsided.

“Would you leave me be.”

“You’re going to make a girl with a broken leg get up and walk all the way out of this chapel? That’s not very gentlemanly!”

“You are also the one who walked over here without asking if I wanted you this close. You did that to yourself.”

“Seriously, just let me hear you play?”

“No.”

“Why not?” Evony looked at him sternly and took in every detail she could about him. His hair was a dark brown, almost black, and held a slight curl in the front nearest his eyes. It fell past his ears just slightly and looked reserved without a hint of a smile.

“Why don’t you smile?” she asked him, “Is it because you have bad teeth? I really don’t think that’s anything to

be ashamed of.”

“Will you just go?” His annoyance was becoming more evident on his face and he closed his eyes as if to focus on something other than the nuisance beside him.

Evony refused to give up and looked off into the distance in front of her and sighed, “Ah, if only I could just know your name.”

“Everett. Now go. I can’t play when I’m distracted.”

Evony smiled and picked up her crutches, “That wasn’t so hard, now was it? Do you mind if I sit in the pews, at the very least?”

She knew that she was pushing her boundries but she so wanted to get to know this man. “Everett, please don’t push me away,” she thought.

“Fine.” With that he brought his hands to the keys and started to play. She moved to a pew nearby and at first she sat quietly but the song was something she knew and was very found of. As if on cue, her voice grew out of her throat and filled the chapel. Everett stopped playing, momentarily stunned but continued again. It came as a surprise but there was a sweetness to her voice that if felt wrong to deny her the pleasure of singing. They sat there in the chapel, two songbirds having fun with the melodies and then it happened. It was small at first and almost unnoticeable, the smile, then they both started to laugh.

Everett was laughing so hard that he had to stop because he started to cough. “Where did you learn to sing like that?” he asked still coughing a little.

“I don’t remember, but I think it wasn’t from the usual

sources,” she giggled and sighed.

“Well, you’re quite good,” he smiled at her and this time it was warm and welcoming. Evony almost blushed when she saw his clear blue eyes sparkle. “I have to go, shall we do this again...tomorrow, maybe?”

“Absolutely!” She was delighted.

The yellow glow from the lights of the chapel illuminated the deep red carpet and dark wooden pews. At the alter there was a simple podium where the pastor would commence his sermons. The chapel was rarely visited which gave Everett the perfect opportunity to play the lonely piano.

He played a song that reminded him of Evony. She was very beautiful, even he noticed her beauty past the hospital gown, bandages, and the cast on her leg. The melody he played had a slow tempo that followed the beat of his heart. At first, he focused on the piano but slowly his thoughts turned towards Evony and soon enough, without his noticing, she was starting to sit next to him.

He stopped playing, temporarily surprised by her presence.

“You shouldn’t sneak up on people, you know?” he raised a hand to his chest and took a short breath.

“Sorry, I couldn’t help it. The song was so pretty, I didn’t want to disturb you!”

“Mission unsuccessful.”

“You don’t have to say it like that...” she pouted.

He laughed quietly to himself.

"So when does the cast finally come off?" "Well, the doctor is very optimistic that it will be off within the next week or two."

"So, I will never see you again..." he went back to the piano and started to tap away at the keys. It was a mellower tune.

"Don't be like that," he continued the sad song and closed his eyes pretending to be far away in his sorrows.

"But, you will go away and never come back. Far away the princess flees from the lowly minstrel player." The song continued and started to get a little bit more sorrowful.

"You're so dramatic," she huffed.

Everett stopped playing and laughed again. "Okay, seriously, what are your plans after you leave?" This question seemed to silence her entirely. They awkwardly sat at the piano until he could not take the silence. Whenever he felt awkward he resorted to music but this time he was not sure if that was the right thing to do.

"I guess," she finally started to say, "I will be going to university."

"It took you that long to say that? I was beginning to think that I said something to upset you."

"Well...I don't know, I'm still confused...I guess."

"You can always be a singer. You have the voice for it."

"Maybe..." her mood appeared to be dropping fast.

"Or not. Maybe you would rather work at a convenience store?"

"What? No, I don't have the skills!"

“What kind of skills would you need?” He raised an eyebrow. “You go in, work a register and give people there food and smokes. That’s about it. High school kids can do it.”

She bowed her head and said, “I don’t know what I’m good at...”

“Singing,” he simply said, “Singing is what you’re good at and you should pursue that.”

Everett returned to the piano and started to play a jazz melody and the mood improved dramatically.

The winter days were at a stage where the days would quickly turn into night and take forever to return to day. Eden watched the sun disappear over the horizon as he tried to focus more on his work. He sat at his father’s desk in the old wing of his estate and shuffled papers around looking at statistics and revenue numbers. There were only a few more sheets to go but he lost hope as he discovered more sheets hidden in the mailbox.

The intercom on the corner of the desk buzzed to life, “Master Eden.” It was Irving. Pausing only a short while he reached over to the intercom and pressed a button to answer.

“What is it?” he asked flatly.

“Master Cyrus is here to see you.”

“Ah, okay. Send him in.”

There was a long silence and then the door to the office jarred open with rattle of the knob and Irving directed

Cyrus into the vast room. Cyrus thanked him with a bow of his head and proceeded to walk towards Eden sitting at the desk.

“How have you been lately?” he asked sitting across from him in one of the padded chairs.

“Could be better...”

“You look rough. Maybe we should both go and get something to eat.”

“Why? Irving makes a great Shepard’s pie!” Cyrus laughed and raised a hand to his mouth as if to suppress it.

“That may be, but sometimes it’s good to get out of this place. Since the loss of your family, you quit school for the company to work with Jiro.”

“My father always said to trust no one when it comes to money.”

“Sure, I suppose. The point is, you never do anything for yourself anymore. You need to treat yourself to something special every so often. What was wrong with finishing school and then later taking over the company anyway? Jiro is a trustworthy guy, I mean he has only been a family friend for decades.”

Eden thought about what Cyrus was saying as he leaned back in his chair. “I guess it just makes me feel closer to my father.”

They both sat in silence and at a loss for words. Cyrus sighed, “I see...Okay, well just this once, will you join me for dinner?”

There was still a endless pile of work sitting on the desk

in front of Eden. In the past he always took his father for granted and now that he was in his shoes and living his life he quickly became aware of what life was really about.

“Fine, just this once,” he got up from the office chair and the guilt of his unfinished work grasped for him, crying for him to finish at least one more page. He ignored it and left the room with Cyrus, relieved that his friend had rescued him at least once.

Everyday, Evony’s leg was getting stronger and hobbling to the chapel started to resemble more like walking. Jiro visited more frequently and he kept true to his word, bringing in pictures and videos of her family on his laptop. The memories were vague and blurry but slowly they were returning. She was happier and spent a lot of her time in the chapel, when Jiro was away, with Everett and his smiles were more frequent.

Today, when she moved her way to the chapel where Everett was waiting patiently by the piano, he was a lot quieter than usual and he barely said a word to her as she hobbled to her usual seat next to him.

“How do you do kind sir?” she chimed.

He remained silent. Now concerned she looked harder into his face and she could see that there was worry in his eyes. She looked away towards the keys and remained silent. After awhile she put her head on his shoulder and she felt him shudder.

Everett was normally quiet but whenever something

was bothering him Evony learned to just respect the silence. At least until he was ready to speak. Only this time, he turned towards her making her head move abruptly. When she looked at him, he was staring at into her eyes with an intensity that she was not used to.

"I need to go," he said unexpectedly and quickly he got up to leave.

"Wait," Evony was confused, did she do something wrong?

"No, I can't see you anymore."

"Hey, you can't just do that! We only just became friends. You can't just leave without telling me what's wrong!"

He stopped walking when he reached the chapel door. He never wore a hospital gown which suggested that he may just be a visitor but when she looked at him standing in the door frame she realized how frail he really appeared.

"I can't be your friend. I don't think it's fair to you."

"What do you mean?"

He hesitated and then continued, "I thought that for one moment that I could live a normal life. I forgot that I was sick. The day is coming when I won't be here anymore and that day might be a day when you are waiting for me. I was selfish."

"Sick? But I always thought that you were just visiting someone?" It surprised her at how little she actually knew about her silent friend.

"I only come in for check ups but ever since I met you I came more often than I should have. Evony, I have a heart

condition and I'm dying."

Everett stayed in the doorway when Evony got up from the piano and carried herself with the crutches with more grace and determination. When she stood in front of him the look of loss was evident on her face. "But you never gave me a chance! You are always trying to pull away. When I get close, you pull farther and farther away. If you can't trust me in the first place then why let our friendship get so far?"

Everett was at a loss for words and became incredibly quiet. You could see his battling thoughts run across through his expressions. He was at war with himself and he was dying. Evony hobbled a little closer to him and she realized that their friendship meant more to her than she originally thought. Not only was she losing a friend, but she was losing someone she admired very much.

Her next move took Everett by surprise and forced every ounce of strength to fight it off, but he failed. Her embrace was too warm, and too comforting. "You are the only friend I have, please don't leave me just yet?" she pleaded.

Later that evening when Evony was back in her room laying in bed and alone with her thoughts, she accepted that Everett was dying, but it was what she felt the moment she embraced him that had worried her. She had gotten so close with him, two songbirds sharing the same cage, that she failed to recognize her growing admiration for him. Admiration which was quickly growing into love. "Cyrus!" Her thoughts darted to the man who had been

with her since the plane crash and he flooded her mind. An increment of a memory came flushing back. A gentle touch, a charming smile, and the soft lips touching her delicate hand.

Was she in love already? Her hand lifted a necklace and the ring that hung on it. She wrapped her fingers around the warm metal and the questions kept pushing through her mind until there were more questions than memories. “Love...” she whispered, “I don’t want to love.” With the heavy thought of love the lull of sleep greeted her with open arms.