

Angelic

“Good morning, Abigail, beautiful day, huh?”

Abigail rolled her eyes playfully and shot him a smile. “You say that about every day, Mistuh Edward,” she chuckled and returned to her paperwork. “Even when you ain’t even been outside.”

“Well, not a single day has proved me wrong yet,” he replied with a wink.

Edward strolled over to the front desk. “Is Victor up yet?” he asked.

“Mistuh Victor’s family came to take him out for the day,” she gave him a sympathetic smile. “I’m sorry, he won’t be able to play chess with you this mornin’.”

Edward waved the apology away. “Oh, that’s alright. I suppose I’ll find a new partner, hm?”

She smiled. “Yessuh. Have a nice day, Mistuh Edward.”

“You too, Abigail.”

Edward Carmichael continued his walk down Sunnyside Retirement Home’s front hallway. He took a sharp left into the activities room, which was already filled with familiar faces.

The smell of old perfume and oatmeal swirled around the room in an almost pleasant sort of mix as he took his usual seat at the chess table.

He pushed his outdated glasses further up his nose. The nurses had insisted that they were out of style, but he refused to get them updated. He said the old-school frames made him feel like he was sixteen again.

His soft blue eyes scanned the room of old faces much like his own. The room was relatively quiet, but it always was. A woman sat at the head of a table reading out

loud to a group, some of whom had already fallen asleep. Those who got around on their own stood in line at a little buffet of simple pastries baked by the home's chef, and a young nurse was playing a sweet tune at the piano as a little, wrinkled woman with rollers still in her white hair sat next to her in a wheel chair and sang along. Of course, at the front of the room, a few rows of tables were set up, and a dozen or so folks were playing bingo as an enthusiastic young man (overly so, in Edward's opinion, for 8 o'clock in the morning) called out the next letter and number.

Edward chuckled to himself at the cliché and shook his head as he ran his hand through his thinning, gray hair.

With careful, skilled fingers, he set up the chessboard, examining each character before he sat it down on the black and white canvas.

He leaned back in the wooden chair and allowed himself to gaze over the room once more for an opponent. Much to his dismay, everyone seemed fairly occupied.

All of a sudden, his eyes fell on a woman sitting alone directly across the room from him. She had a thin, simple book perched in her lap, though she didn't seem terribly focused on it, as her head bobbed up every now and then to look around.

He smiled and glanced over his shoulder at a nurse leaning standing beside a bingo table next to him.

"Excuse me, Marci?" he asked, a little loudly.

Marci looked over at him with a smile and cock of her dark eyebrow. "Yes, Mr. Edward?" she replied amusedly.

“Can you please tell me, now, who *is* that *beautiful* young woman over there, and *why* on earth is she sitting alone?” he gestured grandly to the woman, who had jerked her head up in surprise at his acknowledgment of her.

Marci grinned and rolled her eyes. “That’s Miss Lucy,” Marci said. “She’s only been here a few days.”

“Lucy, what a pretty name,” he smiled. “Would you mind terribly asking Miss Lucy if she’d like to join me for a game of chess?”

Marci glanced over at Lucy quickly before bending down next to Edward. “I don’t know, Mr. Edward,” she whispered. “She keeps to herself. She doesn’t like to talk much.”

“Oh, come on, just ask her, please?” he begged, his voice quieter as well. Marci sighed and nodded before straightening her uniform and walking over to Lucy’s chair.

She squatted down next to her and placed her hand on Lucy’s sweetly, speaking in a tone so quiet that Edward couldn’t make out what she was saying.

Lucy looked over at Edward. He gave her a warm smile that she didn’t reciprocate. She turned her attention back to Marci and hesitated before nodding and slowly pushing herself out of the cushioned armchair.

Marci helped her over to Edward’s table and pulled out the chair opposite from him so she could sit.

“Lucy, is it?” he asked. She nodded carefully, her light gray curls bouncing around her face as she did.

“I’m Edward,” he extended his hand across the table, and she took it gently.

“Do you like chess?” he asked. She tore her eyes from his to gaze over the board.

“Yes,” she said quietly. “I... um.”

He waited patiently for her to continue. “I’m... quite the master at chess,” the corners of her mouth tugged up shyly.

“That so? I’m not sure I believe you, I guess you’ll just have to prove yourself,” he smiled, and she smiled back.

“Your move first.”

Lucy picked up one of her pawns carefully.

“What were you reading over there?” Edward asked casually as he moved next.

“Oh.” She picked up the little book that rested in her lap. “It’s nothing.”

“Emily Dickinson’s Complete Works.”

“Boring, I know,” she chuckled sheepishly.

“Boring?” Edward gaped. He cleared his throat dramatically. “*‘You left me, sweet, two legacies – a legacy of love, a Heavenly Father would content, Had He the offer of; You left me boundaries of pain capacious as the sea, between eternity and time, your consciousness and me’.*”

Lucy smiled in surprise. “Very good,” she laughed. “You like poetry? I’m afraid most men find it to be rather dull.”

“Depending on the poet, of course, I find it to be rather charming,” Edward spoke. “‘Poetry is language at its most distilled and most powerful.’ Do you know who said that?”

Lucy nodded eagerly. “Rita Dove, of course!” she smiled widely, and Edward couldn’t help but marvel at how beautiful her smile was. “I’ve admired her since I was a teenager!”

Lucy's sweet brown eyes fell down to the book in her hands. "My mother used to read these to me every night before I went to sleep. I didn't understand them much then, but I'm so glad she did it."

"Oh, I'm sure a little girl would have appreciated it more than a boy would have," Edward shook his head. "My mother could hardly get me to focus when she was reading *Huckleberry Finn*! She eventually just let me fall asleep to the Dodgers game!" They both erupted in laughter.

"Oh, and Edward?" Lucy said in between chuckles.

"Yes?"

"Checkmate."

Edward glanced down at the board to see his king completely surrounded. "Well, I'll be, Miss Lucy, your charm seems to have distracted me from our game!"

He grinned as a faint pink swelled on her fair cheeks.

"Miss Lucy?"

Lucy turned at the feeling of a nurse's hand on her shoulder. "It's time for your medication, sweetheart," the nurse said, giving Edward a kind smile. "Oh," Lucy's face fell a bit. She turned to Edward. "This was very nice, Edward. I'm glad I met you," she said sincerely.

She stood slowly and gently pushed in her chair as the nurse took her hand.

"Lucy," Edward spoke quickly. She turned back to him.

"So... I'll see you tomorrow, then?" he asked carefully.

Lucy smiled, a twinkle sparkling through her eyes. "I'm counting on it."

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The next day, Edward woke up with an inevitable smile that seemed to capture every step he took.

He strolled into the activities room and beamed when he saw Lucy sitting in the same armchair as yesterday, with the same poetry book perched on her knees.

He straightened his shirt a bit, pushed up his glasses, and walked over to her. “Good morning, Lucy,” he said with a smile.

Her head snapped up, and she stared at him dully.

“I’m sorry,” she said quietly. She paused and closed her book slowly. “A-are you talking to me?”

“Well, of course, you’re still Lucy, aren’t you?” he chuckled, but his grin soon vanished when she didn’t laugh back.

“Well... yes, I am,” she paused again. “But... how did you know that?”

“Pardon me?”

“Have we met?”

His eyes searched through hers for some sign, any sign, of a joke. “You’re... not kidding,” he spoke, more to himself than to her. “But, yesterday, w-we played chess, don’t you remember?”

She shook her head and shrugged her shoulders lightly. “I’m very sorry, you must have me confused with someone else.”

Edward opened his mouth to say something, but no words came out. Instead, he just stood there, staring at the woman.

“Oh, I’ve upset you,” she said slowly. “I didn’t mean-”

“-Of course not,” he interrupted quickly. “O-of course.” He stumbled over his words. “I just- I, um- Sorry to have bothered you.”

His cheeks burning, Edward rushed out of the activities room.

“Mistuh Edward!” he heard Abigail’s voice call. “Is everythin’ alright?” He stopped in his tracks and turned sharply to her.

“Will someone please tell me that I’ve gone mad because I could have sworn that I met Lucy yesterday, and we played chess together, and we talked about poetry, and we had a nice time,” the nurses all stared at him as he continued. “Now, if all of that did happen, then why does she have no idea who I am?”

Abigail exchanged looks with the nurses standing beside her.

“Oh,” one of them said solemnly. “You don’t know.”

“Know what?”

It was dementia, the nurses told him, a severe side effect of the chemotherapy used to treat the tumor worming its way through her brain.

“She hasn’t remembered much of anything since her husband died a few years ago,” Lucy’s nurse, Julia, told him. “The doctor said her depression wasn’t helping with it either. She didn’t want to remember anything. Her family didn’t want to deal with her anymore, so they put her in here.” Julia shook her head. “And I’m not sure that the poor thing even knows why.”

“So... she will never remember me,” Edward said slowly.

“The doctor said a recovery is unlikely. She forgets everything from the last day when she goes to sleep. I’m sorry, Mr. Edward.”

“Well,” Edward paused and swallowed hard. “Well, I can still be her friend, can’t I? I may have to start over every morning, but it’s not nothing, right?”

Abigail sighed and stood up slowly from her chair. “Mistuh Edward, ya know that we all think you’re a very kind man. But... there ain’t no hope for Miz Lucy,” she hesitated. “And we know that things haven’t been easy since ya family-”

“-I know,” Edward stopped her, despising the familiar lump forming in his throat.

“We just don’t wanna see you hurtin’ again,” Abigail said, rubbing his arm gently with her hand. “So I don’t know if tryin’ to make somethin’ out of you and Miz Lucy is gonna be good for ya.”

“I understand,” Edward said regretfully. “I appreciate all of you looking out for me.” He tried to smile at the little group of ladies.

“Well, suga, if we didn’t, who would?” Abigail smiled, wrapping her arm around him and giving him a reassuring squeeze.

The group laughed, and he laughed with them, but he couldn’t ignore the dull throb that shot through his chest.

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The very next morning, Edward decided that chess didn’t suit him anymore. He came to the conclusion that he’d much rather walk through the retirement home’s little garden instead.

He walked along the nicely laid stone path as he admired the beautiful roses. Ahead, under a gorgeous overlay of long, lazy, tree branches was a little, wooden bench that he frequently liked to sit at and read. It was peaceful, and he liked that.

As he approached the little bench, however, he noticed a familiar set of soft, gray curls peeking through the holes in the branches. He rounded the corner to see Lucy sitting with a pen and pad of paper.

“Lucy,” he said in surprise. Her head bobbed up. “Oh, um. Hello,” she said meekly before looking back down at her paper.

“I’m, uh, I’m Edward, I live here as well,” he said, his heart aching slightly with the second introduction.

“Nice to meet you,” she said with a small smile.

“What are you doing?” he asked, titling his head in an attempt to see what she had written on the paper.

She sighed and sat down her pen. “Well.” She looked around. “I wanted to go outside and write for a bit,” she paused with a smile. “And I’m also hiding from my nurse. She worries about me so much.”

Edward chuckled and slid his hands into his trousers’ pockets. “Would you mind if I sat with you?”

“Not all at.” She scooted over to one side of the bench and patted the spot next to her.

“What are you writing?” he asked, careful not to be snoopy by reading over her shoulder.

“Poetry. Or, at least, I’m trying to,” she laughed sheepishly. “I’m having the hardest time remembering how many lines are in a sonnet, though.”

“Fourteen?”

“That’s it!” she exclaimed before scribbling something down on her paper.

“Thank you.”

He gave her a smile.

“You know,” she smiled back. “I won my sixth grade poetry contest with a sonnet. My teacher told me that Shakespeare himself would have been very impressed.”

Edward’s busy eyebrows shot up. “Really? What did you write about?”

“Lilies.”

“The flower?”

“Not just any flower,” she insisted. “My favorite flowers. They’re beautiful, don’t you think? How could you not be inspired every time you see them?”

“Oh, yes,” Edward agreed. “Have you seen the ones here?”

Her eyes widened, and she turned to him. “They have them in this garden?”

“Would you like to see?”

He laughed as she nodded eagerly.

Edward stood and offered his arm to her. She carefully tucked her pad of paper and pen into her little purse and took his arm.

Edward wound them down the little path, passed the daises, the sunflowers, and the magnolias. Nestled in between the yellow daffodils and purple irises was a beautiful batch of freshly bloomed, pink lilies.

Lucy breathed in slowly when she saw them. “Oh, Edward, look how gorgeous they are!” She hurried towards them, cupping one of them gently between her hands. She ran her thumbs softly over its petals.

“Isn’t it just the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen?” she asked, glancing over at him with a huge, childlike grin on her face.

He paused. “Second most beautiful,” he mumbled.

“What was that?”

“Oh, nothing.”

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Edward carefully tied the pink bow around the little bouquet of lilies. He smiled and brought them up to his nose.

They were beautiful, but he couldn’t stop thinking about how beautiful Lucy’s smile would be when he gave them to her.

He knocked lightly on her door. “Lucy?”

There was no answer. He turned the knob slightly and cracked the door.

He peeked in to see Julia slowly packing Lucy’s things into a suitcase, her eyes red and puffy.

She jumped up from her spot next to the bed when he walked in. “Oh, Mr. Edward,” she wiped her eyes quickly. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know you were coming.”

“Julia, where’s Lucy?” he asked, the lilies feeling so heavy in his hand all of a sudden.

Julia’s bottom lip began to tremble. “She collapsed this morning, Mr. Edward,” she said slowly, and he could see her trying to swallow the lump in her throat.

“What?”

“I-I was helping her out of bed, a-and I went to get her clothes for the day, and when I came back, she was-”

Julia erupted in sobs, and Edward dropped the lilies on the ground to embrace her. “It’s okay,” he breathed, rubbing her back soothingly. “It’s gonna be okay, I promise. Where is she now?”

“The hospital,” she said with a sniff. “I’m sorry, Mr. Edward, I know how much you like her, and how kind you are to her, but, I wouldn’t get your hopes up on things being okay.”

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He couldn’t get over how small she looked. Her fair skin was dull and lifeless, the complete opposite of the Lucy he knew. Her once shiny, bouncy curls lay flat against the pillow as her chest rose and fell so slowly, it scared him. Her hands were freezing, and he knew that because he hadn’t stopped holding them since he arrived at the hospital.

“Mr. Carmichael?”

A tall, slim, young man entered the room dressed in a white coat, one hand carrying a clipboard with a stack of papers. He extended his free hand to Edward. “I’m Dr. Fitzgerald, Ms. Williamson’s doctor,” he gave Edward a firm handshake. “The nurses have informed me of the situation between you and Ms. Williamson. I’m very sorry, sir, I wish there was more we can do.”

Edward forced a smile and nodded. He glanced over at Lucy and sighed. “So, it’s hopeless, really. There’s nothing you can do?”

“Not at this time. Unfortunately, I fear that Ms. Williamson’s dementia may be permanent due to the tumor not responding to the chemotherapy.”

“And her memories? They’re just gone?”

“Well, as you know, her short term memory has vanished, she doesn’t remember anything of the day before. Her childhood years are now gone as well, I’m afraid.”

Edward’s head shot up. “Her childhood years?”

“Yes, sir, she cannot recall a single detail. Hasn’t been able to for a month or so now.”

“But,” his mind raced to the first time they met. “That’s not true. She-she told me that her mother her read Emily Dickinson when she was a child!”

The doctor’s eyes widened. “Sir, what do you-”

“-A-and she said that she loved Rita Dove as a teenager! And that she won the poetry contest in the sixth grade! She told me that!”

“Sir, when did this happen?”

“Don’t you see?” Edward exclaimed. “She remembers poetry! That’s what she knows! If I read her some, would she remember? Do you think she would remember?”

“W-well, sir,” the doctor stumbled over his words, failing to keep up with Edward’s rapid thoughts. “I-I’m not sure, sir, I mean, all brains are different, so I suppose-”

But, Edward had raced out of the door before the doctor could get out his final words.

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Edward returned shortly with her book of poems.

He sat in the little chair beside her bed. Carefully, as not to wake her, he took one of her hands in his as the other held the book.

He read to her. Every word on every page, he read to her.

He watched as her chest rose and fell as slow as before, and his heart ached to feel her squeeze his hand back.

As he read, he couldn't help the frozen feeling in his stomach of the last time he sat in a hospital, holding a patient's hand.

He remembered the accident very vividly, and he remembered how many times he prayed for the day to start over, so that he could be in the car instead of his beautiful wife and daughter. He entered himself into the retirement home soon after, so he wouldn't have to live in that big, empty house all on his own.

He eventually came to the last poem of the book. His eyes scanned it lifelessly, but he read it anyway. *“You left me, sweet, two legacies – a legacy of love, a Heavenly Father would content, Had He the offer of; You left me boundaries of pain capacious as the sea, between eternity and time, your consciousness and me.”*

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He trudged passed the front desk slowly.

Abigail perked up. “How did it go?” she asked eagerly.

He shook his head. “She didn't even wake up,” he mumbled. “I'm not sure my plan was as genius as I may have thought.”

Abigail gave him a sympathetic smile. “I'm sorry, Mistuh Edward. All ya can do is try.”

He nodded and continued walking.

All of a sudden, the front desk's phone began to ring. Abigail answered it.

“Um, Mistuh Edward!” she hollered. “It's for you!”

“For me?”

Edward retreated back to the desk and took the phone from her unsurely. “Um, hello?”

“Mr. Carmichael, it’s Dr. Fitzgerald,” the man on the other line spoke.

“Oh. Hello, Doctor,” Edward spoke unsurely.

“You might want to come back to the hospital, sir. Ms. Williamson is awake. She’s been asking for you.”

“Asking for me?” he perked up.

“Yes, sir! Asking for you by name, sir!”

Edward hung up the phone immediately and raced as fast as he could towards the home’s main entrance door.

“Mistuh Edward! Where are you goin’?” Abigail called after him.

“Lucy remembers me!” he called back. “I have to go, she remembers!”

Edward drove as fast as the law allowed down the street to the hospital. Not even bothering to check in at the front desk, he bounded up the stairs so fast, his knees ached and creaked afterwards.

He threw open the door to Lucy’s room to see her sitting on the edge of her bed, her eyes shining and her beautiful smile spread across her face.

“Edward!” she exclaimed.

Edward rushed towards her, and it was as if the moment were being captured in slow motion. He swung her around the room, embraced in his arms, terrible for his bad back, but the way her sweet, golden laugh echoed around the room made him not have a single care in the entire world.

“I remember you,” she whispered into his shoulder in awe. “Edward, you were reading, and I could hear you and the poem! It was the same one you first said to me, and I just-” she pulled away, cupping the sides of his face in both of her hands, and he could see the little crinkles by her beautiful eyes as she smiled. “I remember you.”

As Lucy’s memories returned, being with Edward broke through the depressed phase she had been trapped in. With the healing of her heart, her tumor also began to shrink, and she never had to enter the hospital again.

The doctor told Edward that if he were a Christian man, he would have called it a miracle. He also claimed that if angels were real, Edward must have been Lucy’s, but Edward laughed off the comment. If anything, he said, Lucy was his own angel, though he doubted that even angels were a match for her.