

Rose With No Name

The message that had been ruminating in her mind for seven years straight had finally appeared at the top of her inbox in her email after refreshing her computer screen repeatedly for the last half hour. After a click, spin and a ding, it reads:

*Dear Miss Parker,*

*We are pleased and honored to inform you that we have decided to promote you to the position of Assistant Director of Marketing and Communications here at Eisenburg Communications!*

*If you accept this position, you will receive an annual salary of \$40,000, as well as partial health care coverage for yourself, your spouse, and the maximum of two dependents.*

*This new position will put you under the direct supervision of Thomas Anderly, Director of Marketing and Communications. Your new responsibilities will include managing the marketing budget and leading the marketing and communications staff in creating marketing plans.*

*We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your consistent performance and dedication to the success of our company, and we look forward to seeing you thrive in this new role!*

*Sincerely,*

*Brian Jameson*

*Managing Director*

*Eisenburg Communications*

Katsura reads over the email for what seems like the same amount of time she spent waiting for it. *Assistant? \$40,000?* She was already making a little bit less than that, for the same amount of responsibility. She slumps back into her plush office chair. Her back was killing her from being hunched over for so long. And she was going to be under the supervision of Thomas? As in Infamous Office Bully Thomas? Her heart begins to feel a bit weary, as if it had been building up excitement so it could explode into a great big firework display. But the explosion was snuffed before it could see its grand release. She feels dizzy with emotional disarray.

Katsura stands from her chair, trying to build up optimism in her spirit.

“I should be proud of this,” she commands to herself, pacing around her office room. “I put in the work for seven years of my life, risking everything for this job so I could finally be where I am right *now*. I did this. I *fucking* did this.”

She starts to pace faster around the room, putting a little dance into her step as she repeats everything she’s said out loud. After a few minutes, her pace slows and the other side of her conflict begins to make way in her brain.

“Seven years,” she mumbles, slumping in her chair once more. “And just *Assistant?* With everything I’ve done? *My consistent performance and dedication?*”

Katsura pushes away from her desk and spins around in her chair, looking straight up at the fan above her. She finds that it’s spinning faster than her, so she tries to propel herself faster, spinning faster and faster until she makes herself sick with defeat. She sinks below into her faux fur rug, watching the day unfold from her single-pane window, and then turning to night with storm clouds rolling over, bringing the thunder and rain with them. As she watches her office room fan rotate with an unflinching rhythm, she hears a rustling, crinkling sound, as if someone was playing with paper. She props up her upper body to look around the room, yet nobody appears to confirm her fear. Until she sees paper from her desk float gently into the air and swirl around with the rhythm of the fan. At first, she dismisses it, because maybe the fan is just a little too strong, but she notices the papers start to fold meticulously as if they have a mind of their own. They fold

themselves into little origami cranes, a dozen of which swarm her like hungry predators approaching prey. They fly all around her, swirling above and below her as if they were preparing to attack. Katsura tries to swat them away, but they evade her touch with precision. They continue to dart here and there as anxiety starts to creep into her brain and how are they even doing this since they're just paper so why are they so threatening and she begins to feel even dizzy than before so she lays back down and watches the birds fly above her like warplanes in a clear blue sky until she defiantly shuts her eyes and ends the chaotic madness unfolding before her, she's not present anymore as her rug becomes quicksand and engulfs her in its safety.

Rain thrashes against the window as it wakes Katsura up from the nap she unexpectedly took on her unexpectedly comfortable rug. Her face contorts with confusion as she pulls herself up to an upright position. She scooches herself to lean against the side of her desk, pulling out her phone from her pajama pocket. With a long breath and a huff, she goes to her contact list, finds "Carina", and brings her phone to her ear. After a few rings, a sweet, candy-coated voice speaks.

"Kitty Kat!"

"Carina," Katsura immediately starts, voice choking up a bit. She thought she had calmed herself down enough to talk to her best friend/coworker, but the emotions come running back to her like they were always meant to stay. She shoves them back down into the dark abyss they came from. "I got the promotion."

"Holy shit, Kat," Carina yelps. "Finally! I mean, you deserve it so much! How does it feel to be Director?"

"Assistant," Katsura mumbles. "I'm the fucking *assistant* Director. Thomas was promoted to Director."

Carina loudly gasps. “No way. That’s absolutely crazy. You put in more work than he does, and you have more experience, plus he’s known for being a complete d-hole around work.”

“He’s got his daddy’s connections, I guess,” Katsura sighs. “I don’t know why I expected anything different.”

“Baby,” Carina croons. “Please don’t take this as something that reflects your work ethic or who you are as a person. Eisenburg is a shitty company. Always been a shitty company. You deserve so much better than them.”

“Yeah well, I don’t know what I’m going to do now.” She runs her hand through a couple of strands of hair dangling in her face. “I’m tired of feeling all of this dread. I suppressed everything, all my thoughts and innovative ideas that didn’t fit their vision. I shut up when I was told to and did everything, *everything* they wanted me to do. They promised...they promised me over and over that my hard work would be worth it. That I’d eventually make a name for myself there. And now I’m still here,” Katsura sighs deeply.

“Still waiting at the same place I’ve always been.”

“I’m so sorry, Kat.” Carina says. “Do you need me to come over? I want to be there for you right now.”

“No. I’ll be okay,” Katsura starts to pick herself off of the floor, brushing off anything that might have stuck to her from the floor. “I’m fine.”

“If I’m being honest, you don’t sound fine,” Carina says skeptically. “Please let me be there for you.”

“I’m *fine*, Carina.” Katsura feels a sudden burst of anger. The other end of the phone goes silent. Katsura calms herself down before she speaks again.

“I’ll talk to you soon, okay?”

“All right,” Carina says softly. “Be safe, okay? I love you.”

Katsura presses the off button on her phone and tosses her phone onto her desk. She angrily shouts to her fullest capacity, then looks at the time on her computer screen.

“11:35 PM. They’re not going to appreciate that.” She watches as the rain patters against her single pane window. She feels glad that the weather matches her mood and has a great desire to get outside and soak in the sadness of the night. This desire seems to overcome her rational mind, so she grabs her everyday backpack, keys, umbrella, and raincoat and slides into her rain boots. She trudges outside, finding herself shocked by the intensity of the downpour. With the swift motion of the opening of her umbrella, she begins walking, not really having a set destination, just drawn forward by a longing to be somewhere, anywhere but there.

After passing many closed, dark businesses and 24-hour restaurants with hungry night-shift workers, she finds that she’s made her way to the only train station in town. She pulls her umbrella together and walks into the small brick building, greeted by lowlights and a houseless person slumped over on a small bench. A ticking wall clock fills the void of silence in the room. A waft of old paper and gravel washes over her. She approaches the only stall with a worker, an elderly woman with a taut grey-haired bun and a deep wrinkled frown. The woman is flipping through the local newspaper with caution, as if missing a single word meant losing out on the whole story. She does not look up to greet Katsura as she approaches the stall. She notices that the name on the clerk’s name tag is Camellia, an aged off-white label on a jade green cardigan layered over a white Peter Pan-collared shirt. A pendant dangles next to her name tag, a locket with an old, faded picture of a young woman with short, 20’s-era finger waves. It rests off-center, where her heart sits.

“Last train of the night comes in five minutes,” the woman croaks, still paging through the paper. “It’s a northbound train to Cloudflower Town. Arrives at five-thirty in the morning.”

“Cloudflower Town,” Katsura thinks to herself. “Is that the town by the huge forest?”

The clerk nods slowly, keeping her eyes trained on the paper before her.

“Twenty bucks.”

*This is crazy. I'm buying a train ticket to go to God knows where.* Katsura digs through her wallet and slides the bill over to the clerk through a slot underneath the window. The clerk takes the bill, puts it into a drawer and slides a green ticket and a brochure through the slot. She thanks the clerk and steps to the side to observe the items she's received. The green ticket reads, “Wrightwood City to Cloudflower Town, 12:00 AM” with what Katsura believes, an iris flower at the corner of the ticket. She opens the brochure to find pictures of the Meadowlands State Forest, as well as a section about the founders of the town. She sees a dated picture of a nice-looking nuclear family: An older gentleman in a top hat and tailored suit linked arm-in-arm with a mature woman with long, curly locks and a floral-patterned floor length dress. Gazing at each other with loving fondness. A young boy sits legs-crossed below the father in a chair, hair slicked back and eyes sparkling. Katsura chuckles at the cheeky look of the boy. The young woman sitting poised underneath the older woman, however, feels familiar to Katsura. She's just as beautiful as the rest of her family, yet has this glow to her, as if she's filled with so much love and happiness that it seeps out of her pores. Katsura looks over at the elderly woman and notices her locket once more. The women share the same finger-waved hair, the same radiant aura. Katsura decides to investigate this matter as she waits for the train.

“Excuse me, miss,” Katsura strides up to the clerk once more, who still has yet to make eye contact. She points to the young woman in the photograph. “Is this the woman in your locket?”

The clerk's eyes still rest on the paper below her for a moment, until she looks up at Katsura with fond, slightly teary eyes. Katsura feels like she can feel all of the woman's memories through looking at her faded, sunken ocean eyes. She clutches the locket within one of her weary palms, a slight shake in her movements.

“Yes,” she says faintly, looking down at her locket. “Her name was Iris. She was the daughter of the founder of Cloudflower.” She takes a deep breath, as if to settle the rising emotions in her heart.

“She was my everything, she taught me so much about myself. We used to escape to the forest and play in the fields, secret fields hidden between trees,” She holds her breath for a moment. “Where no one could find us.”

Katsura feels her heart ache for the elderly woman. “I’m sorry you had to hide. You deserved to love in peace just like any other couple in the world.”

The clerk ponders on her sentiment, then continues. “It felt like we had that peace for a while. Until she became ill with pneumonia. But she was convinced it was just a cold. It was a Saturday, sunny and bright, when we went to the forest for the last time. She told me she had discovered something new, something out of this world. A field full of every flower imaginable. She took me there and we rolled in the open grass and sniffed every flower we could find. At least, to the extent that she could, since her sense of smell was failing her. She said she didn’t want to kiss me, so she couldn’t contaminate me. She was always putting people above herself, always wanting to help everyone she came across. It’s what I loved most about her. Part of me didn’t care, part of me wanted to protect my family’s health. But I respected her wishes. And then,” The clerk pauses for a moment, bringing her palm to her mouth.

“She started coughing. Violently. Coughing up blood. Her eyes bulged with pain. I didn’t know what to do. I just put her head on my lap, wailing, as if my voice could put an end to her suffering. And maybe it did. Because after I stopped crying, she stopped coughing. And the blood and her tears stopped. And her eyes fixed straight to the clear blue sky.”

Katsura stays silent with pity. A single tear falls into the clerk’s lap. She takes a deep breath, wipes away the tear trail, and dries her eyes.

“Her spirit still resides in that field,” she says, faintly. “I believe it. Every time I step foot in that area, all I feel is...” She leaves that thought to trail off into oblivion and sees the stranger before her; broken, sullen eyes, a washed-out face, attire thrown together without a care for aesthetics, and a disheveled wispy ponytail. Subtle beauty marks dotted around her face. A face full of youthful beauty and pain.

“I can tell you’re looking to be found. You remind me so much of her,” she says, a ghost of smile appearing on her face. Katsura sadly smiles at the woman’s sentiment.

“I don’t even know who I am anymore, so I guess that wouldn’t be a far off assumption.”

The clerk reaches under her desk and pulls out an old-looking map, a map of the forest. She takes a pen from her pencil cup with a rattle and draws a path from a Point A to a Point B, then slides the map over through the slot. Katsura takes the map and observes her markings.

“I can’t give you what you’re looking for,” the clerk remarks. “But maybe she can.”

*She?* Katsura hears a train roar from the south side of the building. She folds the map into a neat square and tucks it into her raincoat pocket.

“Better get going,” the clerk says, once again focusing on her paper. “Nature awaits.”

Katsura faintly smiles and puts her hand on the desk of the stall.

“Thank you.” Katsura starts walking toward the entrance to the platform, stops after a second, and turns toward the clerk.

“I’m sure Iris is incredibly proud of the woman you are today, Camellia.” She turns again to walk toward the platform. Camellia feels a slight smile creep up on her face, and she decides not to fight this one while watching the young woman trot away to her destiny.

The train settles into the station with chugging engines reducing to a halt and billowing steam blowing from the steam pipes. As she walks along the brick path, she notices that she’s the only one on the platform. No one gets off the train to greet her, yet the doors slide open as if expecting her presence. She climbs the steep stairs to get onto the train and takes a seat by the window in a lifeless car, breathing in the smell of leather seats and coal. She places her backpack on the empty seat next to her, puts her raincoat over her seat, and rests her head by the window as the train horn blows thrice. The engine begins to chug once more as the train accelerates and Katsura watches familiarity fade through her window.

A couple of hours pass as the train rides along the tracks and passes many prairies and woodlands. Katsura feels a jolt wake her out of her slumber, prompting her to rub her tired eyes. She looks out the window to see the sun peaking above the horizon line, as if you could run across the grasslands and jump into it. She stretches each limb out in front of her, feeling soreness from the uncomfortable seating. As the train muscles on, Katsura watches it all unfold from her window, the silence of the train prompting her to think about everything that has led up to this moment. The emptiness of the train car allows her to divulge her thoughts into the open air.

“Now look what you’ve gotten yourself into, Kat.” She facepalms herself. “I’m in the middle of nowhere, headed to the middle of nowhere.” Idiot.”

This was something her therapist was training Katsura not to do—ever since Katsura was a child, her solution to seeing her parents fight consistently was to run away until someone found her. She thought she was getting better. Initially, her job frightened her; she had to step into a role she wasn’t comfortable with as a person who disliked communicating with people. Her first instinct was to run away. But running away meant not having a home or having food on the table. So she was forced to adapt. And that worked for a while. Until it didn’t. Until right now. *Idiot*. She thought she was done reverting back to old habits. She’s an adult now, she manages herself like the mature adult she is, she keeps her emotions in check, she’s an ambivert now. She kind of likes people now. She’s an adult now, which means structure like a well-balanced tower of cards.

She has friends she goes out with now, like Carina. Carina the hyper-extrovert. Someone she initially thought she’d *never* get along with, someone who was just a little too bubbly in the office for her comfort. Until she realized she had her walls up just like she did. And that maybe bubbles aren’t just for kids.

“Shit, Carina!” Katsura exclaims, realizing that she ended things on a sour note with her the night before. She takes out her phone to call her friend. It doesn’t even ring, it just

cuts to a message saying that Katsura's phone doesn't have service. She checks her cellular settings. No bars.

"Great," she sighs. She feels the train slowing down as a small town comes into view, a forest bordering the east side of it. It looks almost perfect, the sky a bright blue with a few clouds littered here and there, the grass green as green can be. The town is quaint but hilly, with lots of different colored brick homes and big yards for kids and pets to play in. The brakes kick in as the train comes to a screeching halt in the station. She looks out the window to read a sign that says, "Welcome to Cloudflower Town".

"I guess I made it," Katsura quips, gathering her stuff and pulling her backpack straps over her shoulders. She hops off the train and breathes in the warm summer air. Fresh grass, a subtle breeze passing through her hair. It all feels right to her.

She makes her way through the vacant train station, which is a little bit livelier in its appearance than the one she left from. A brochure display hangs by the front entrance, in which she takes a city map and a guide for aid. The door leads her out to the street where she is met by the downtown area. She sees businesses of all sorts line the streets, barbershops, community centers, flower shops, art galleries. String lights stretch from one side of the street to the other, creating a continuous web of string until she reaches the town square. The more she walks through it, the more she believes this is a town sustained by a loving community. After a while of exploring, she pulls out the map to find her way toward the forest.

"So, basically, I just head east until I reach the start of the trail to the forest. Seems easy enough." She affirms herself. She tucks her map into her pocket and walks east toward what she hopes to be the forest. On her walk, she encounters a business that is open at this time of day. She reads the banner above the shop. "Sanders' Bike Shop? Might be useful." She opens the door with the tinkle of a bell and catches a waft of rubber and leather. The shop is small and crowded, yet there's a homey vibe about it, cheery yellow walls inviting you to stay a little longer than you initially planned to.

A scruffy, sunburnt man sits at the corner of the room, tuning a bike with various tools. He sees Katsura, which prompts his face to slightly twist with confusion.

“Hello there, stranger.” the man beams, his voice lined with a southern twang. “How can I be of service to you today?”

“Hi there,” Katsura says, eyes browsing the various types of bikes cluttered around her. “I guess I’m looking for a bike that’s ideal for riding in the forest.”

The man grins, his long hair flopping in front of his face. “Looking to explore Meadowlands, eh? You’ve come to the right spot. Let me show you what I’ve got for ya.”

About fifteen minutes later, Katsura comes out of the shop with a yellow mountain bike with a rattan basket attached to the front of it. She bids farewell to Sanders and pedals her way out of the town and onto the trail that leads to the forest. Her bike bounces as the tires encounter gravel and small rocks, but she manages to keep her balance as she arrives at the entrance of the forest. The trees split perfectly down the center to create an opening for its visitors. Elongated trees in all shades of green fill the forest with life. Birds of all breeds flutter about from tree to tree. The warm breeze encircles the trees and the animals with so much harmony it’s as if Katsura is watching a concerto unfold. She lets the music surround her as she makes her way into the illuminated green abyss.

She gets to a point where the trail ends and she loses what she remembers from the map, so she pulls out the map Camellia gave her to put an end to her confusion. “Take a left at the wooden structure...I thought I did that?” She hops off her bike to walk with it to avoid pedaling herself into more confusion. She peers around to clue at what could be a secret entrance, a mysterious ensemble of brushes or shrubs or small trees, but she finds nothing out of the ordinary. After a good ten minutes of searching, frustration begins to black out any hopeful thoughts.

“I don’t think that Camellia would have fooled me like that...right?” She questions, taking a moment to put the kickstand down on her bike and lean against a tree with adequate shade, criss-crossing her legs once she reaches the itchy grass.. She sighs, letting her head

fall back a little too hard against the tree. She criss-crosses her legs once she reaches the ground.

“Ouch.” She rubs the sore spot at the back of her head. “*Man*, this was such a dumb idea. What the hell was I thinking, running away from home. I’ve never even stepped foot outside of town, still go to the same grocery store I’ve been going to since I was five, still order the same mac and cheese from Georgie’s *every time*. What am I doing? This was so *idiotic*.”

Katsura picks herself up from the ground, shaking her feet to bring feeling back into them when she sees a paper crane fly into her line of vision. She blinks twice, trying to make sure she isn’t hallucinating, until another one flies into the area, and another one, and dozens more start to file in and swarm her.

“Not this again,” She walks over to pick up her bike when she feels a sharp sensation on the back of her neck. She feels for the area of interest and feels liquid, which she discovers to be blood when she brings her hand back into view.

“What...” Katsura looks back at the cranes and suddenly they all fly toward her, jabbing any uncovered skin with the tips of their narrow beaks. She shrieks as she drops her bike and runs away from the chaos, hearing the cranes zip by her as they continue to strike her body. She clutches at her cuts as she finds a dark area full of trees with thick branches. *They can’t survive flying through these branches.*

She runs deeper into the shadowy area, looking behind her to see the cranes get caught between entangled branches. She breathes out a sigh of relief, until she sees some of them zip through small crevices. As she sprints away from the cranes, she reaches a point where bushes and shrubs and trees form a small arch, with just enough space for her to crawl through. With desperation, she bends down to crawl through the small hole to reach whatever lies on the other side, trying to avoid branches that threaten to exacerbate her wounds.

Upon exiting the darkness, Katsura is greeted with something she can only articulate as something solely seen in dreams or fantasy movies. A prairie full of flowers surrounds her, flowers of every caliber, flowers bright and big, flowers quaint and small. The sun casts a hazy morning glow on everything it touches, contributing to the dream-like quality of the environment. The scent is like nothing she's ever smelled before. You'd think all the flowers' scents would clash with each other, but they all seem to form a fresh, floral harmony. It all seems a little too perfect to be real, the cloudless blue of the sky, the sun sitting in it like it's happily bathing in clear ocean waters, how every color imaginable can be found in this very space. Katsura finds herself flabbergasted at the sheer beauty of it all. She walks over to the closest flower by her. She finds herself recalling some of the information she learned in her sophomore year botany class. She observes a white, five-petal flower with a little yellow bud in the center.

"A primrose," she says, curiously reaching down to touch the flower. Upon touching the flower, she feels a rush of intense emotions and energy pulse through her until she blacks out.

*A young child, up to five years of age, sits at a table, scribbling away at a drawing she's working on. Another Star by Stevie Wonder is playing on the stereo. Her pigtails swing back and forth as she bounces to the music, using the tempo of the song to fuel her wild and rambunctious strokes of color. A woman walks into the room carrying a bowl of cut bananas, which she places to the side of the child's drawing.*

*"Excellent work, darling," The woman exclaims, kissing the top of the child's head. "You're a natural."*

*"Thanks, mommy," the child coos, and resumes simultaneously dancing in her seat and drawing. She plucks a banana slice from the bowl and chews it vigorously while continuing to complete the playful drawing below her.*

*Keys jangle as the front door swings open. A man in dirt-stained construction gear steps through with a huff. The woman comes over to embrace him.*

*“Hey, baby.” she says, brushing off the dust from his hair. “You look rough.”*

*“Work was rough today. Hell, it’s rough every day.” the man remarks, peeling off his work attire and leaving it on a coat rack. The two share a brief kiss, then walk over to the child at the table, who excites at the sight of the man.*

*“Daddy!” she cheers, hopping off from her chair and running to embrace the tired man. He chuckles lowly.*

*“Hey, baby girl.” He picks her up to bring her to his eye level, then spins her around as she giggles. “What are we working on today?”*

*“I’m creating a scene where the asteroid doesn’t actually kill the dinosaurs and we all live in peace together.”*

*“Sounds excellent,” The man walks them over to the table to peer at her creation. “Wow, this is amazing!” He sets the girl back down in her chair and rubs her hair. “You’ve got a real gift for this stuff, angel.”*

Katsura shakes her head as the vision fades. Her head feels disoriented, but it quickly fades as she feels fine after a minute of being still.

“That was so *vivid*,” she says, pushing stray hairs out of her view. “I totally forgot about that day.” There’s a lingering feeling of everything she felt at that moment; pure elation and gratitude. She feels the spirit of her younger self and how rambunctious she was, how unafraid she was to be her inhibited self.

Katsura picks herself up off the ground and walks around to find another flower to probe her curiosity. She spots a cluster of jasmine flowers in a corner, so she strides over to them and leans down.

“What if I was just momentarily going crazy? I’ll probably touch this one and end up just feeling the soft petals.” She leans forward to touch the jasmine flowers, and once again, she blacks out.

*Katsura and Carina are getting dressed in Carina's walk-in closet. Carina has her hair up in a tight bun and is wearing a velvet maroon floor-length gown. She looks into her vanity mirror as she carefully attaches gold jewelry to herself, then looks over toward her adjoining bathroom door.*

*"Kat! Come on now, we don't have time for this. I bet you look fine, there's no reason to hide, especially from me!"*

*"I look hideous," Katsura wails. "I don't know why I came over here, your dresses are so nice and I manage to make them look terrible."*

*Carina huffs in frustration. "You probably look amazing, you're just psyching yourself out! Please step out so I can appreciate your beautiful self."*

*Katsura sighs. No point in fighting someone who could do this all night. Especially in their own home. She straightens herself and opens the door to step into Carina's view.*

*"Wow," Carina gasps. "You look like the epitome of grace and elegance."*

*Katsura blushes. Carina had lent her a black tulle A-line gown that fit her as if it was molded to her body. Her hair delicately curled onto her shoulders, framing her face perfectly. Her makeup was just enough: enough to show effort, not too much to look cakey on camera. Carina walks over to add her finishing touches.*

*"You see," she smirks, fluffing her hair gently. "You look beautiful. And we're going to walk into that gala like the gorgeous, gorgeous women that we are and show all of our coworkers that we're the hottest broads in town."*

*"Broad?" Katsura chuckles. Carina shrugs.*

*"I'm pretty sure all those old heads use that kind of lingo still. Anyway..." Carina walks over to her jewelry box to pull out a small silver rose pendant necklace. She brings it over to Katsura and gently pulls her hair away from her neck to lay the necklace on her frame and clasp it together.*

*“...and finished. Look at yourself.” Carina gestures to her full-length mirror. Katsura walks over to the mirror and is shellshocked by what she sees. She’s never seen herself this dolled up. She was used to only putting so much effort into dressing up. But now, she feels as if she was meant to wear this dress, meant to be seen in it. And that feeling feels good.*

Katsura’s hands slap at her cheeks to wake her out of the vision as she feels her sense of reality come back to her. That was another one of her favorite days of life so far. It made her realize that she deserves to feel good in her body. She smiles to herself.

“Ugh,” she says, picking herself up off the ground once more. “Are all the memories this cheery?”

She wanders again, trying to find a flower that sticks out to her. She passes by all sorts of flowers: orchids, marigolds, lavender, but now she’s trying to find one she hasn’t seen before. Until she comes across two flowers entwined with each other, as if someone tied them together while they were growing. A geranium and a hyacinth.

“Weird,” Katsura remarks, approaching the unique creation. She feels somewhat hesitant.

“The rest of them were good memories. Maybe since these two are meshed together, it’ll be one of my best memories.” She breathes in deeply and brings her finger to the flowers.

*Katsura is sitting in her office cubicle during another monotonous Wednesday morning. She’s preparing for her big presentation. She goes through all of her notecards once, twice and thrice until she feels somewhat confident, then recites them all a fourth time. She checks her watch. Five minutes ‘til. Better get going.*

*She pulls her file box together and heads off to the presentation room to set up. Upon entering, she finds all of her esteemed colleagues and superiors and Thomas. Wait, Thomas? He wasn’t supposed to be in this meeting. He smirks at Katsura as she makes her way to the front of the room. She finds her anxiety creeping up on her fast, feeling like she did in grade school when all eyes were on her and she stuttered her way through solo presentations. She gathers her notes in takes a deep breath. Taking hold of the projector’s remote control, she begins her presentation.*

*Her presentation continues just as she hoped it would, even with the shakiness in her voice and spirit, even with the glare plastered on Thomas' face searing through her false sense of confidence. Her audience claps at the end and praises her research and thorough presentation. She leaves the room with newfound confidence, taking off for her lunch break.*

*After using the bathroom, she grabs her sack lunch from her desk and makes her way to the breakroom. A moment before entering the break room, however, she stops at the notice of Thomas' shrill voice.*

*"Listen, I'm not saying she's incompetent, I'm saying that she isn't the right person for the job."*

*Katsura's ears pick up at the gossip. He has to be talking about her.*

*"Thomas, Kat's one of our best employees. She's been working hard to secure this new role we're opening up for her." She notices that it's the voice of Brian.*

*"Okay...but imagine how much this company would grow under my leadership. Plus..." he pauses and lowers his voice. "My father is considering investing in our competition. He believes that this company can't survive with the times. However, I--"*

*Thomas brings his hand to rest on Brian's shoulder blade.*

*"I know what it takes to convince him that we're a company worth investing in. And that all starts with my leadership."*

*Katsura finds herself shaking at this discovery. She quietly sneaks away and locks herself in one of the private bathrooms. Her emotions flood her brain like a tsunami and she cries, but not hard enough to alert someone passing by. He's stealing her opportunity. The opportunity she's been working for so many years of her life. Feelings of unworthiness and doubt begin to ruminate in her mind; maybe if she was a snake like Thomas, she'd be Director already, maybe if she climbed her way to the top while knocking everyone else down, she'd be the ruler of this shithole company, maybe if she was just a little bit meaner...she could get anything she wanted.*

Katsura finds herself recoiling at the memory she's been shown. "What the hell," she cries, scooting away from the flowers. "Why did it show me that?" She had blocked off that memory until this moment.

She pulls herself up and walks toward the exit of the prairie. "I knew this was a mistake," she utters, wiping angry tears from her face. "I should have just stayed home."

Angrily, she strides over to the exit, and she's three-fourths of the way when she feels this strange, cool breeze blow through her hair and ruffle at her clothes. It feels familiar, like soft wind blowing through her hair while driving. She doesn't know why, yet she wants to know more. The breeze is flowing a very specific way, as if it's guiding her toward something. She decides to follow it as it leads her further into the prairie, where the flowers are dwindling by every meter. She notices in the distance that there's a small hill with a big maple tree standing at the peak. The only tree in this entire prairie. The breeze encourages Katsura to go toward the tree. She listens.

She makes her way to the top of the hill and looks up into the grandness of the maple tree. She plucks a leaf to feel it within her palm. By the look of its lobed leaves, it's a Bigleaf maple tree. She looks down and sees an iris flower planted right next to the tree, its long, narrow leaves stretching outwardly toward her, violet petals spread as if it were putting on a show.

"An iris flower," she says, until the significance of the flower dawns on her. "Iris."

She leans down to the ground, still slightly scared. The cool breeze, however, encircles her and gives her a sense of safety. She feels encouraged to touch the flower, so she does.

*Katsura throws her briefcase and jacket onto the floor by her coat rack. She stumbles her way into her apartment, carelessly bumping into things in her staggered walking path. Her breath reeks of alcohol and melancholy. She had bought two bottles of wine from the grocery store on the way home and decided to indulge herself in her parked car as a solution to all of her problems. She tucks the other bottle into the fridge sideways and slams it shut. A belch makes its way up from her stomach, which she cracks up at. Her feet pull her*

toward her living room, where she tumbles her way onto her living room couch. Mail is strewn across her coffee table, unopened mail from weeks ago she had been too busy to tear open. She decides to pile through it. She finds bills, bills, more bills, insurance stuff, restaurant coupons, and--an envelope from her mother? They usually communicated over the phone. She tears the envelope open with her nail.

She unfolds the paper to find a drawing of colorful dinosaurs and stick people jumping under a rainbow. The drawing she had made when she was freshly five years old. Katsura grins at the artifact. She turns the paper over to find a note written in pretty, cursive font, her mom's signature handwriting.

*My Dear Katsura,*

*I know this is unusual for me. I could've just sent you a text with a picture of it. This feels a little more personal, though. I just wanted to write to you and tell you how proud I am of you. I know you've been working so hard lately. I'm worried about you. I don't want you to lose yourself in your work. I hope this can serve as a little reminder that the little girl who danced and drew wonderful pictures will always be inside of you, no matter how many walls you put up to hide her from the world. You deserve to express every part of yourself, no matter what anybody has to say about it. Not even me! Not even your dad. Please know that we love you no matter what. As long as you don't become a murderer. I don't think I'd be able to handle the press constantly outside our home.*

*With all the love in the world,*

*Your Mommy*

*Katsura finds herself full-on sobbing after finishing the letter. With the month she's had, witnessing her future basically stolen from her a couple weeks ago, this was the cherry on top of her awful month. But in a somewhat good way. A way that makes her walk over to*

*her desk, pull out paper and pencil, shuffle Stevie Wonder songs on her Spotify, and start drawing out all of her feelings, all of the ugly, all of the sad and all of the beautiful. It feels cathartic to her, the way she's drawing with reckless abandon, but it feels right. It feels like something she's needed for a long time.*

Katsura is sitting against the tree as the vision fades, a single tear rolling down her cheek. She breathes in the warm, summer air as her heart softens. She puts her face in her hands and laugh-cries, a kind of release that's unique to her mind. An inviting kind of unfamiliar. Her hand finds its way to rest on her heart, as if it was connecting with it through touch. She looks out at the vast prairie, feeling all the emotion come over her like waves persistently brushing against the shore.

"I've lost the fight, Iris," she sighs, leaning her head back against the tree, looking to the side where the iris flower sits.

The cool breeze swiftly lifts Katsura's hair into the sky along with the leaves of the tree and the petals and leaves of every flower. It chills the tear stain on her cheek. She looks up into the sky and sees a paper crane falling slowly to the ground as if it's lost consciousness. It unravels itself and falls into her palms as a square piece of off-white paper. Her eyes crinkle with her soft smile. Maybe she feels that losing feels good this time. Maybe, she feels, she didn't lose anything at all.