

## Shards of Glass

Eden stood in front of the mirror that hung in its silver gilded frame over the wooden mantle in the living room, poking at the leaf-sized piece of glass protruding from her cheek. She wiggled and pulled but succeeded only in further butchering the scarred flesh of her face. Hot blood pooled in her mouth and dripped down her neck in ribbons. When her fingers became too slick to get a proper hold of the glass, she halted her efforts to wash the blood from her hands.

The pain throbbed dully in the back of Eden's mind, her thoughts otherwise occupied by the encounter she had had at the market that morning. There had been a new booth there today, a foreign woman selling imported goods. Eden had wanted to buy sugar from her, so she approached the stand prepared for the usual looks of pity and annoyance she received when people tried to understand her miming. This woman had not seemed to mind though—she spoke with a heavy accent and had difficulty making herself understood, so she enthusiastically participated in the game of charades they had to play for Eden to acquire the sugar. The woman even snuck a little chocolate into Eden's bag without charging her, a small kindness Eden knew she would never be able to repay, as the import booths were constantly changing.

Eden plunged her hands into the crystal basin she had inherited with the creaky old house and everything in it when her mother died seven years ago. It had been a painful battle with some debilitating illness no one could identify. Though Eden missed her desperately, she was glad that the disease had taken her quickly, as she would not have wanted to watch her suffer for longer. Her mother used to make rose water in this same basin before she became ill, and as Eden watched the water turn pink with swirling blood, she was reminded of how the color was leached from the petals so they could flavor their tea.

For a moment, she sat in the memory: her mother's soft brown curls, the scent of her lemon perfume, the glint of the glass shard in her left forearm as she plucked petals from their stems. Eden did not bother to make tea anymore. Even with the roses, hers had always tasted of blood.

Eden dipped a towel into the blush-colored water and wiped the blood from her face. After taking a deep breath, she once again began to pull at the glass. Her mother had warned her about removing it when she caught eight-year-old Eden attempting to rip it out when it first developed. She had heard rumors that when the town baker's daughter pulled her glass shard out, her veins had snaked out of her skin, writhing in an unholy mass until the girl had collapsed dead to the floor. "It would be like pulling off your ear, darling. The glass is just as much a part of you." But Eden had ignored her mother's instructions—there were other rumors, incredible rumors, about how removing the glass would lead to a remarkable transformation. One man had supposedly grown wings, and a sickly little clover had turned into an enormous blooming cherry tree. Eden, ever the optimist and fascinated by these tales, was desperate to discover what she could become.

Now, she held her tongue behind her teeth as she pulled at the glass. Her left hand jerked slightly, and Eden gasped as she stumbled backwards. Her vision blurred and she nearly retched but, dizzy and gripping the mantle for support, her eyes widened in the mirror as she realized what had happened. It wasn't a lot, it was maybe a centimeter—but the glass shard had moved. As she wiped the blood away, she saw where the newly exposed glass had left a small hole in her cheek.

She shakily made her way to the soft green couch, where she sat with her eyes closed as she pushed the feelings of illness down. Eden was so shocked by the experience that at first she did not register the change in lighting in the living room. When she finally opened her eyes, the usual dim grey light filtering in from the evening sky felt warmer, softer somehow.

The house stood in the middle of a meadow in which flowers never grew. The grass was always brown and brittle, and in the distance it melted into a dark, barren forest. There was a small dirt road that led away from the house, and a little town about an hour's walk away. Eden did not make the trip to the town very often, only when she needed something that she could not make herself, which was not a lot—she prided herself on her self-sufficiency.

Her mother used to cluck her tongue at her, encouraging her to make friends with the village children. “One day you won’t want to do everything on your own, Eden. You’ll want some company.”

“But you do everything on your own.”

“Of course I don’t. I have you, and I’d lose my mind if I didn’t.” At the time Eden had laughed, but after so many years alone in the house she felt the regret and urgency in her mother’s warning.

Outside Eden’s window now was not the bleak landscape she was accustomed to. The grass, lush and green, stretched on for miles under a starless sky. It had just been evening, she was sure of it, and yet the sky was black as oil and slick like it too: ripples of pastel colors shone above like a celestial lake. Eden wondered, is this how other people saw the world? Had the glass been blocking her vision, and dislodging it allowed her to properly see for the first time? Or had she succumbed to her mother’s fear of loneliness and gone mad?

Hesitantly, Eden stood and made her way to the back door. She pushed it open slowly, fearing the dreamscape she saw through the window would vanish the moment she tried to enter it. But when her slipped feet touched the grass, it did not disappear, and she sank softly into the green blades. She had never seen such vibrant vegetation, and when she stooped down to run her fingers through it the grass was cool and wet to the touch. A small laugh escaped her lips, and her joy and confusion were almost enough to mask the pain she felt as the muscles in her cheek shifted.

The air was warm, and even in her thin nightdress, the soft breeze that rustled Eden’s chestnut hair was not enough to chill her. She craned her neck to look at the sky, at the glimmering lights above. Echoes of the lights landed on her, casting her skin in quiet blue and purple hues. She took another step and continued walking away from the house and its dull interior, and with each passing moment she felt more wonder at the solidity of this world.

In the distance, Eden could see lights in the grass. She could not tell what they were from—lanterns, perhaps? Small fires? The thought of there being other people here both frightened and thrilled her. She

had not had a proper conversation with anyone since her mother died. Speaking pained her, so she had preferred to listen or write notes, but the townspeople thought her rude when she did not return their greetings and so she mostly avoided them. Sometimes she would see another person with the misfortune of having the glass in their face dripping blood as they passed her in the street, the price they paid for a strained smile or a careful thank you, but this was a pain Eden refused to endure for the comfort of other people.

Eden's mother had never required her to speak; when the glass first poked from her cheek and Eden stopped talking, the two developed their own sign language to communicate. Her mother had thought the glass exciting, a sign of growing up. She shared stories about her first experience with the glass as a child, about how she and her classmates at school compared the sizes and locations of their glass and argued about whose was best. For a while she hadn't been able to write because of the pain in her arm, but eventually she became accustomed to it and the sharp pain faded to a dull numbness. She had promised Eden that the same thing would happen to her and that soon she would be able to speak again, but that day never came.

Eventually Eden's curiosity won out, and she began walking toward the lights. Each step she took was careful, measured, and she paid close attention to the way the ground felt beneath her feet. As she got closer, she realized that the lights were coming from a patch of wildflowers. She closed the distance between herself and the flowers and knelt to examine them closer.

The light was coming from within the plants themselves. The flowers' petals looked to be made of stained glass or carefully carved jewels, and they emanated a soft glow as if they each contained a tiny heatless fire. Eden brushed her fingertips against one.

The glass flowers stretched ahead of her as far as she could see, hundreds of beautiful plants lighting the meadow. Some were tiny, the size of buttercups or lily-of-the-valleys, while others grew almost as large as sapling trees. Eden stood and walked among them, their lights glinting in her eyes, and as the breeze ambled through them, they chimed like bells.

One patch of flowers was dimmer than the rest. The lights faded in a concentric circle around a

single plant in the middle, which gave no light at all. This plant's petals were pure white, and from its center jutted a jagged piece of glass. A flash of pity struck Eden as she felt her own shard of glass scraping against her teeth. She did not know if flowers felt pain, but on the chance that they did, she thought it was cruel that this little plant should suffer so. Even if her mother's warnings had merit, it was a flower—what was the worst that could happen? Eden reached out and pulled the glass out of the flower, and it instantly turned to dandelion seeds in her hand.

Eden gasped as the glass flowers around her transformed, their petals softening into ordinary plants as the light was expelled from within them. The light hung in the air several feet above the flowers, creating an artificial day over them that spread as far as the plants did. This was the proof she needed to convince herself that her new sight was because of the shift in the glass, that such an extraordinary transformation was possible. Eden turned to see the full extent of the haze, but instead of the sweeping plain she was expecting she was greeted by a forest that had not been there a minute ago. Eden turned around again and saw the spread of wildflowers. Frantically, she turned until she was dizzy and sick with dread. There was no sign of the house, only a vast expanse of empty field to one side and an inscrutable forest to the other.

The wildflower haze continued into the forest, lighting a path of dark soil that cut through a floor of moss and stones and toadstools. Seeing no better option than to aimlessly wander the field, Eden stepped into the woods. Perhaps the forest had somehow sprung up between her and the house, and she merely had to cross through it to return home. She clung to that hope, not knowing what she would do without it.

The air was cooler in the forest, and Eden shivered slightly. She had only been in a forest once before, when she was ten and had ignored her mother's instructions to stay out of the dead one that bordered the house. The trees had been black and leafless, the ground covered in snarled roots and sharp stones that cut through her shoes. It had taken less than a minute for her to be plunged into darkness, and she had immediately run home and vowed never to return.

This forest did not grow dark, but as Eden moved further and further in, the vegetation around her grew larger. Slim trees still flexible with youth gave way to massive, ancient things that grew miles into the sky like towers. Mountain laurel bushes the size of houses loomed above her, and the dainty little violet and daisy heads grew larger than her own. The mushrooms were large enough to sleep on and glistened with dew in the most vibrant reds and oranges.

Eden felt increasingly tiny, and though she had seen no sign of danger yet, she began to worry about what creatures may live here. Were the wolves and foxes of this forest proportional to the foliage? Would she be trampled to death by a monstrous deer? The path she walked remained properly sized for a human, so she thought there must be something her size that lived here—though the thought of a mouse or a snake of her size was almost enough to make her turn back.

Almost, but not quite. Eden pushed all thoughts of teeth and tongues and claws down as she continued onward. What would she do if she went back, walk through an unending field until her legs gave out beneath her? Certainly no one would come to look for her, or even realize she was gone. Or maybe some other more dangerous landscape would pop up, and she would have to cross that instead. No, it was safer to stick to the forest path.

A pungent smell, sick and rotten, hit Eden's nose. Her steps slowed as it became stronger, until she finally saw its source: a giant mushroom with a thick white stem and a brown-and-white polka dot top, oozing something like pus. In the mushroom's spongy top was lodged a particularly large piece of glass, and the pus-like fluid dripped from the places where the glass and mushroom met. The ground beneath it was black with rot that was spreading to the mushroom itself. It was only a matter of time before it died.

Eden gagged but pushed closer to the mushroom anyway. She held her breath as she grabbed hold of the glass. She couldn't bear the thought of just leaving the fungus to die. The glass held firm and little streams of ooze squeezed out as the wound moved. With all her strength, Eden took hold of the glass and pulled. It shattered in a puff of spores as both the glass and the mushroom exploded into dust.

Coughing and struggling to wipe the spores from her eyes, Eden sat down hard on the ground as she fought to regain her senses. Had she just killed the mushroom? Or worse, disperse it into a million little pieces, doomed to spend eternity apart from the rest of their whole? Panicked, she thought that perhaps it would have been better for her to have left it alone.

“Are you all right?”

Eden jumped. Her vision was blurry from the tears streaming down her face, but she could just make out the vague shape of a person sitting where the mushroom had been.

In response to the question, Eden’s breath shuddered and she continued coughing. She was sticky from the blood that poured from her cheek. A hand, cool and slightly damp, grazed her arm, but she smacked it away and saw in her blurred half-vision the person next to her jump back.

Wiping away tears and blood, Eden squinted to get a look at her new companion. They had a mess of tangled brown hair and a dusting of freckles across their face. An enormous scar, shockingly white and raised slightly above their skin, ran through their face and down both of their arms. They knelt in the dirt, staring at Eden with wide eyes, and their clothes seemed to be stitched together from enormous leaves.

“Are you all right?” They repeated, and this time, Eden nodded.

They visibly relaxed. “I’m glad. But you look hurt—” They gestured toward the glass in Eden’s face. “I could try to help you, if you want.”

Eden scooted further away and protectively cradled her hands to her cheek. Only her mother had ever touched it, and she certainly wasn’t about to trust a total stranger with such a vulnerable part of her.

“Or not, if you like it like that. I found the glass to be painful. Thank you for taking it out, I really appreciate it. I was getting tired of being a mushroom. It was rather boring, you know.”

Eden nodded her head in acknowledgement. She did not know that being a mushroom was boring. In fact, she had never thought of how it would feel to be one, though it made sense that it would be tedious.

She supposed she should be very grateful the glass shard only seemed to affect her vision, if an alternative was being a mushroom.

“I’m Karmel, by the way. What should I call you?” Karmel looked at Eden expectantly, and she looked back silently.

After a few moments, Karmel let out a soft “oh!” of understanding. “Can you speak with that in your mouth?” Eden shook her head. “Well, that’s all right. I can talk, and you can listen if you want. I like talking. It’s lonely, being a mushroom, so I’m glad to have someone else here.”

Eden did not want to admit it, but she was glad to have another person there as well. She figured Karmel knew the woods better than she did, and it would be safer with two of them.

“Do you mind walking? I’ve been here for ages, and I’d like to see more of the forest. It feels different than I remember. A bit bigger, I think. Maybe we’ll run into my family! I hope they’re not still mushrooms.”

Eden was anxious to continue walking anyway, so she shrugged and stood up. The path was barely wide enough for her and Karmel to walk next to each other, so Karmel walked slightly ahead, jabbering away about nothing in particular and occasionally asking Eden questions she usually couldn’t answer, at least not to the extent that Karmel seemed to want.

“It feels good to have legs. I’ve always wondered what it would be like. You don’t really think about walking, but it’s really such an amazing thing. And dancing! I can’t wait to dance.” Karmel did a little leap in the air. “Everyone in my family loves it—every month they get together to eat and sing and dance. Or at least, that’s what my cousins said. They haven’t come to visit in a while, so I hope they still do it. Maybe you could come the next time! Do you like to dance?” Eden shook her head, and Karmel deflated slightly. “Oh. Well, I guess you must like doing other things. Are you from around here?” Once again Eden shook her head, and Karmel lit up again. “That’s exciting! I’ve never met anyone not from



around here before. What's it like where you're from?" Eden just looked at them, and they quickly added, "Oh! Right, sorry. I'll stick to yes or no questions. Do you have a family?"

Eden hesitated, then shook her head. Karmel was already exhausting her. Though the company was nice, she was unused to such a demanding level of interaction with another person.

"Well, that must make it easier to be away from home, then. Do you miss it there?"

Eden didn't respond. She didn't know how to. Certainly she wanted to get back to the house, but did she really miss it? It was comfortable. It was home. It was what she was used to. But she wasn't particularly happy there. She was, she realized, incredibly, unbearably lonely. Tiring as Karmel may be, they reminded Eden how nice it could be to have someone else around.

"I guess that's a difficult question. I've never been anywhere else, so I don't know how I'd answer it. But it would be nice to see another part of the world. I'd want my cousins to come with me. I think it would be better to take a little piece of home with you when you travel, and to have someone with you in case you get lost or stuck as an oversized fungus."

Karmel's musings were interrupted by a little group of frogs who jumped in front of their path.

"Excuse us," piped up the biggest frog, who was a lovely shade of green with brown speckles. "But the forest has been whispering, and it says you've been removing the glass?"

"That would be her," Karmel said, pointing to Eden. "She doesn't speak, though."

The frogs bowed reverently to Eden before the largest one continued, "We were wondering if you would help us? Our Queen is sick, and we can't remove the glass from her stomach."

Everyone looked expectantly at Eden, who simply nodded. "Would you like her to remove your glass as well?" Karmel asked the frogs.

"Oh no," they said with grave seriousness. "The last frog who removed their glass turned into a stone. It's only that the Queen is so ill that we ask you to remove it. We're afraid it may kill her."

"Well, all right then." Karmel shot Eden a look of alarm. "Lead the way!" she said to the frogs.

The Frog Queen lived in a system of underground caves. They had turned off the path and down into a narrow opening, so small that she and Karmel had to stoop and walk single file to fit. The wildflower light did not extend into the caves, but once they entered the darkness the little frogs began to glow a vivid shade of green, and this became their guiding light. The ground was slick and muddy and squelched beneath their feet as they walked.

Eventually they entered what the largest frog announced as the throne room. The ceiling was taller here, so Eden and Karmel were able to more fully stand up. It smelled of damp and dirt and mildew, and a glowing pile of frogs huddled on one side of the room. In the center was a wooden throne covered in moss on which the Frog Queen lay supine, surrounded by her attendants. Two pieces of glass protruded from her belly, one of which was larger than the Queen herself.

Eden was led to the Frog Queen's side, where her attendants leapt out of the way to give her room. The Queen's eyes were closed and she was breathing rapidly. Gingerly, Eden took hold of the larger piece of glass and pulled. It did not come loose; instead, it seemed to pull the other piece of glass deeper into her stomach. The Queen let out a pained croak, and Eden quickly released the glass. There was a concerned muttering amongst the attendant frogs.

Eden tried again with the smaller piece of glass, only for the same problem to occur: as she tried to remove one, the other was pulled deeper into the Queen, who was trembling with pain.

"Let me help," said Karmel, who had been watching with a deep frown. "I have an idea." Karmel knelt next to Eden and took hold of the larger piece of glass but made no attempt to remove it. "You pull the smaller one, and I'll hold this." Eden wasn't sure this would work—it seemed as if this were a singular large piece of glass jutting out from two exit wounds, but she did what Karmel said .

At first nothing happened and the two played a dangerous game of tug-of-war through the Queen's belly. But then, very slowly, each shard of glass began to give way. Eden watched Karmel's hands, steady and gentle, as they soothed the Queen. Karmel's glass completely dislodged first, and once it was gone, the

piece in Eden's fingers came out much more smoothly. The Queen was left with two gaping holes in her abdomen from which flowed streams of water, which her attendants quickly attended to. A cheer for Eden and Karmel went up among the onlooking frogs.

"Our kingdom will never forget what you two have done for us today. To thank you, we would like to offer each of you a gift." Speaking clearly pained the Queen, and she closed her eyes once more. Her leading attendant stepped forward with two tiny wooden swords, which she presented to Eden and Karmel.

"Thank you," Karmel held the needle-sized weapon reverently in their hand and said solemnly, "I will cherish it for the rest of my life." Eden nodded in agreement, and the frogs led them back to the surface.

The frogs returned them to a different part of the forest than they had entered from. Here, there was a small clearing in which apple trees and warm, smooth stones offered the perfect places to rest. Above them, the sun beat down in a blinding light. Through a gap in the trees, Eden saw that they were at the forest's edge, and a golden meadow sprawled beyond the tree line.

"Is there anywhere in particular you're off to, or should we just pick a direction and explore?" Karmel asked. Eden ignored them, sitting down on a rock.

"Or we could just sit for a while. That's nice, too." Karmel plopped down next to her, and they sat in silence for a moment. A tinkling music filled the air, and Karmel went still.

"That sound...I think I recognize it." They jumped up, grabbing Eden by the hand and pulling her back towards the forest. "Come on! Hurry, before it goes away!"

Eden, confused and curious, obediently stumbled along as Karmel raced to the source of the sound. The forest was more normal-sized here than it was where she had found Karmel, though they were moving far too quickly for Eden to properly examine the plants.

The music led them to a circle of mushrooms, which were taller than a sheep but not quite as large as Karmel had been. Within the circle, a group of people were dancing to the music of a small band whose

instruments were carved from bright blond wood. Flutes, guitars, fiddles, and a drum; the instruments were exquisitely crafted and the music they produced was light and merry.

“Karmel!” Someone shouted, and Karmel was swallowed by hugs. Eden hung awkwardly to the side, examining the people’s faces. They all bore a resemblance to Karmel, with dark curly hair and dustings of freckles. Karmel gleefully embraced each member of what Eden assumed was their family one by one.

“What happened to you?” An older looking woman asked, clutching Karmel’s hand. “You didn’t turn when your siblings did, and then we had to move to a new ring.”

“There was a piece of glass in me that was keeping me a mushroom, but it’s gone now!”

“You took out the glass?” asked a smaller boy with a horrified look on his face.

“Well, she did.” Karmel gestured to Eden, who gave a little wave. “And then I turned, and now I’m healthy and I’m here!” They tried to jump into someone else’s arms, but a solemn air of mourning had descended on the group. “What’s wrong?”

“Aile accidentally removed Reva’s glass,” the older woman said. “It was awful. She began to grow eyes, everywhere. All over her body, eyes replaced her skin, her nails, her hair. Within a week she was nothing but eyes, and she died soon after.”

“Oh.” For the first time since Karmel had turned, their face was devoid of any joy. “I had always liked Reva. She used to sing to me, while you were still at my ring.”

“I’m sorry, dear. I suppose you’re lucky nothing like that happened to you.”

Karmel’s eyes glistened with tears. Eden’s stomach was in knots. Perhaps her mother’s story about that baker’s daughter was true after all. What if something like that had happened to her? To Karmel? She wouldn’t be able to live with herself after causing such pain.

Karmel’s family invited Eden to stay with them at their new ring. There did not seem to be a regular schedule of night and day there; the suns and moons floated through the sky at their own discretion. Karmel mourned the loss of Reva, and they spent plenty of time reminiscing about her with their cousins, who

stressed to Karmel that Reva had led a good life before she had passed. Karmel slowly began to join in their family's merriment, the cheerful melodies being too powerful for them to stay in a foul mood. They encouraged Eden to join in their dancing and feasting; the former she hesitantly indulged them, the latter she steadfastly refused.

Eden had claimed a patch of moss on the edge of the ring as a bed. She understood that the mushrooms were more of Karmel's cousins waiting to turn, and she didn't want to come between them and their family members who fawned over them, so she stayed at a distance from the rest of the group. Karmel would often come and sit with her, silent for the most part. Eden found herself missing their rambles.

Once when they were sitting together like this, Eden waved to catch Karmel's attention. She took a deep breath and pointed resolutely at her cheek.

Karmel looked at her curiously. "Do you want me to try to take that out?" Eden nodded. "Are you sure? After what happened to Reva..."

Eden nodded once more and grabbed Karmel's hand, pulling it to her cheek just next to the glass. She knew the risk. For the last time, she ignored her mother's warning.

She wasn't sure what she was expecting when Karmel touched her face. Their fingers were cold and soft, and the slightest brush sent shivers down Eden's spine. The glass did not resist when Karmel pulled. It slid cleanly out of her flesh and fell through Karmel's hand as a dozen rose petals, red as blood. Karmel flinched in alarm and caressed Eden's face, brushing aside more rose petals, and Eden was not sure if the dizziness she felt was from the relief of a glassless face or from Karmel's touch.

"Is that better?" Karmel's voice trembled.

"Much better." Eden's voice was raspy from lack of use and speaking caused her to cough. She ran her fingers over the place where the glass had been, but the wound had already closed. Only a scar remained.

Karmel melted in relaxation. "Just returning the favor."

Eden's hand fluttered to her face, feeling the slight bump of her new scar and wondering what it looked like to Karmel. "I'm not sure how long I've been here."

Karmel shrugged. "Long enough."

The two sat and smiled at each other, and Eden's face did not ache. Contentedly she looked around at Karmel's family but blinked in surprise when her eyes passed by a gap in the trees. They were somehow once again at the edge of the forest, though Eden was sure they had not moved since first arriving at the ring. Nonetheless, there was a meadow visible on the other side of the trees, and Eden thought she saw a familiar structure in the distance.

"That's my house," she said in a tone that implied she was not sure of that fact at all.

Karmel turned to look at it. "Do you want to go back?"

"Not alone."

"Do you want me to come with you?"

"I'd like that a lot."

Karmel explained to their family where they were going and promised to return soon. There was fear in everyone's eyes when they noticed Eden's newly healed cheek, but they settled once they saw her smiling, a new feature on her face. Eden felt a surge of affection for these strange forest people that had accepted her into their home. The older woman, who by now Eden had learned was named Willet, encouraged her to come back and visit them. Eden found that her cheeks were hurting again and she panicked, worried that the glass was growing back, before realizing the pain was from her grinning.

Wordlessly, the two began to walk toward what Eden thought was her house. It was the same general size and shape of it, but the house used to be a dull grey surrounded by wild overgrown gardens her mother had tended to and that Eden had never learned to tame. Now, she saw the house as a sage green, and the gardens bloomed in colors more vibrant than anything her mother had ever been able to produce.

Was this how her home had always looked, and she just hadn't been able to see it? Or had her house somehow been transported to Karmel's world and transformed into something more beautiful? Eden wasn't even entirely sure there was a difference between where she was from and where Karmel was from. Where does one world end and another begin?

"You have a beautiful home." Karmel was admiring a large rose bush with particularly fragrant flowers. "There's a lot of love here."

Eden thought of her mother, of how much she had cared for this property, for her plants, for Eden. Even though this place didn't look exactly like the one she had left behind, it felt so much like home she thought she might melt from the love it radiated. It felt like her family; her mother's concern was woven into the property.

"My name is Eden." The introduction was sudden, but Eden wanted to get it out there. Wanted to be known in her own home. The name felt strange on her tongue—she didn't think she'd ever said it aloud before. Her mother had always been the one to introduce her to people, but her mother wasn't here anymore.

And yet, Eden was not alone.

"It's nice to meet you, Eden. That's a pretty name."

"So is Karmel. It's nice to meet you, too." Eden plucked a flower from the bush and felt its soft red petals in her hands. "Would you like to come in for some tea?"

This time, she thought—this time she'd taste the roses.