

The Gifted Ones:

The Fairytale

P.G. Shriver

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In memory of our Guardian Angels, Mom, Candy and Jennelle.

Acknowledgement

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Chapter 1

Screams... were they part of the dream? A tiny wet caress on her bare shin, her elbow, and then her chin, attempted to revive her.

Trying to shake off both, she rolled over to get away, to stay asleep in hopes of finally seeing him this time, the faceless man. She needed to see him, though she wasn't sure why. Somehow she felt, in her semi awakened state, that he connected to her life and the tragedies that had occurred, the loneliness, but there was no factual assurance, just intuition, just the dream.

More screams pierced her sleeping eardrums, distant, torturous screaming that had never presented itself in the dream before.

She rolled away from the constant moist tickle, the dampness running over her arm, and in her sudden urge to get away, to remain asleep, she fell off the hard metal advertising bench and onto the dew soaked grass beneath it.

No staying asleep now. She raised up on her elbows, frowning at the little mutt, her companion in hiding for the past few days. He shook the dew out of his multicolored coat, spraying her with light drops of wet dog water.

Not fully awake, she stood, wiped fruitlessly at dampened skin, and rubbed her chilly, bare arms.

"Thanks, buddy!" she scoffed at the dog. Glancing around in the early dawn, darkness still surrounding the park, street lights sparkling the dense fog, circular areas of grass glistening with moisture, she stretched her cold, stiff muscles. The chill of the morning seeped under her skin, causing tiny tremors throughout her body.

Damp to her sheer soul, she looked down at the pitiful dog. Screams echoed through the dark background. Her vision tunneled, blackening around the edges.

"Not again." The screams, the moans of pain, the weak cry for help, called to her, chose her course, started her in motion, running, building speed, though she didn't realize it; she was already gone, drawn within herself into the darkness.

It was happening more and more frequently, the screaming, the blackouts, the memory loss. Physically, she ran; mentally, she stood silent, in that all too familiar ebony place.

Led without control to an unknown destination as always, she followed.

Returning to the early morning light of the world her body had never left and to the sounds of the city around her, she blinked repeatedly, focusing her eyes to the dim alleyway where she stood. Cramped and filthy, homeless people slept about her in cardboard boxes, under newspapers and holey, worn coats; rats scurried over motionless bodies; the sound of sirens

echoed in the distance, police sirens.

She shook her head, regaining some of the lost clarity. Her vision sharpened. A hand held her own cold, damp one; a rough, old, dry, callused hand, reminding her of someone. Sadie?

Her last safe place, her last foster mother, the cook from the Home who took her away from that cramped, depressing, acrimonious place, gave her a real home, the first she had known in some time.

Sadie? She dared hope in her semi-conscious state. Even knowing the risks, knowing her life's story, Sadie had taken her in; in spite of the dangerous truths that came with the young girl, she dared to love her.

A smile grew within the girl's heart; a buoyant bubble burst by a moment of memory. This was not the hand of Sadie holding hers. It couldn't be Sadie's hand, because Sadie was dead.

Guilt flooded through her, chasing out the smile of hope, spreading to every chilly limb, tiny bottle rockets exploding beneath her skin, bringing back the trembling, returning it to her body after the darkness had left it warm and forgotten.

Flashes of Sadie, the short time they spent together as a family, replayed in her mind in various miniscule moments.

Sirens in the background reminded her of the little apartment they had shared. Six months of memories replayed like old movie scenes, short clips leading to the last time she saw Sadie, lying on the kitchen floor, coffee cup shattered, shards spread atop dark spots that speckled the linoleum, as if the older woman's own skin had been cast in various sized pieces among the kitchen. The woman's death was the young girl's fault, just like all the others who had tried to love her.

The camera of her mind replayed the image of her own body running out the front door, away from the scene of death, death she caused, wearing only the pajamas in which she had awakened that morning, a budding actress fleeing the suspense thriller that was her life.

Presently, her head shook the memories away; her burning eyes blinked to check the tears that always followed; her body racked with shivers.

Someone sitting before her repeated the same words over and over; the dry, croaking voice barely reached the depths of her inner ear; someone else unashamedly dripped their own hot tears on her big toe, its hiding place given away by a holey, trash can, cross trainer.

She let her eyes move up from the hands joined before her, over the arms, to the face of the older woman standing there, to rest upon the young, rough looking boy. She took in the toboggan fitted over the crown of his head, the unwashed golden spikes that poked out over his too large ears, the baggy, ripped and tattered clothes that hung on his body. His dry, cracked lips were moving; tiny streams followed two freckled white lines down a dirt-encrusted face, drip... drip...

drip.

"Thank you!" his thin arms reached out to her; his dry hands, palms concealed by time worn gloves, rested on her boney shoulders, as if to pull her into a hug.

She tried to shrug away, but his hands gripped her shoulders firmly while tears continually splattered her toe. "Thank you for bringing him to me, my little brother..." his voice broke with emotion.

Cheater searched about her, about the old woman, the boy, her eyes questioning. Him who? What brother? Without success, her eyes sought for another boy, the one he mentioned.

Why this tobogganed boy was so grateful she didn't understand; she never understood.

She or something changed people this way every time she blacked out. No memories of seemingly heroic acts remained.

Although no visible reuniting of family members ever presented itself, each spoke of another family member, as if she had pulled them from the depths of Hell and returned them to their long lost brother, mother, sister, aunt, uncle, spouse, but all she knew, all she remembered, was the darkness; all she ever remembered was the darkness.

From a pool of Sunday School memories, she did know that Hell was a dark place, but it was also filled with flames, so Hell couldn't possibly compare to the total darkness she encountered, no matter how warm she felt when stashed away there; it was a different type of warmth, a safe warmth, an infant swaddled in blankets and loving arms warmth. And the people, the admiration, the changes, the after effects of the darkness, she remembered those. Not knowing what happened or where she went during these mindless times scared her as much as the faceless man dream ever did.

Sirens ripped the morning air! Closer! Louder! They shrieked through her thoughts. The dog yipped. He understood.

She looked down at the homeless woman, her gray hair sticking up about her drawn face, a bruise darkening her left cheek, one hand held a dented, half full can of black label green beans.

Standing beside the old woman, the young man, his face frozen in that look of awe, still spoke, "Thank you." Every blackout left her in the same scene, different people, and different places. Every time she blacked out the same ending, changes for the better.

"I'll make it up to you. I promise," she heard as she tore herself from them. "I'm going to get a job, somehow, somewhere, take care of both of us. I don't have anyone e..." Cheater fled; she couldn't listen; she had to run. The sirens were too close. She couldn't chance the police catching her; they continued to search for her, missing person posters up on every corner, on every wooden pole, some now only corners of paper stuck to staples, ones she had ripped from their perches.

They'd take her away if they caught her, take her back; she couldn't go back, because this time they would send her to a worse place.

She had a mission to accomplish first. She had to find him, the faceless man, and she couldn't do it locked up in a youth home or a correctional facility.

She ran, an out of place gazelle bounding down the dirty city sidewalk, wiry frame hopping tumbled trash cans, fire hydrants, small animals, the sirens closer, the little dog padding behind.

She leaped past a restaurant with the King's face in neon sticking out over the roof of the building, soles slapping the cracked concrete.

The King smiled down at her, mocking her from above the outdoor tables where half eaten food littered two or three of the bolted down rot iron surfaces, the aroma calling her stomach to breakfast.

Cheater grabbed hopefully at a slightly crumpled bag left behind, the newspaper stand worker just rising from the table and walking back to his job, his disgust for the cheap meal apparent.

As she ran by him, she prayed he would ignore her, that she wouldn't be caught, the soles of her old sneakers gaping, slap... slap... slap against the hard surface below. The little dog ran at her heels, tongue bouncing, ears flipping about, and tail curling.

Chapter 2

Huddled beneath a sprawling, almost bare pecan tree, behind green shrubbery and fallen logs, early morning sun speckling knobby knees that rested her chin, mouth dry from the crumbly half eaten biscuit sandwich she now shared with the small dog, who didn't mind eating the already bitten parts, Cheater listened intently, barely breathing as the police officer talked into his radio.

She didn't think the officer had seen her, but the car rounded the corner, red and blue lights flashing, shortly after she had, chasing her until the road no longer led her.

Now, while the sun rose, peeking through the only bit of clear horizon in the city, two cops searched.

Probably someone she breezed past had identified her from the poster and called the police; perhaps the newspaper hawker, or some other stranger that she couldn't be warned of while nestled safely in her dark place, saw her last school picture in black and white, plastered on a pole or in a nearby window, glanced her face as she passed, assumed she had assailed another.

There was the reward of a thousand dollars that she couldn't understand. She may as well have made the FBI's most wanted list. A thousand dollars would go a long way in helping most people today, which meant more chance of getting caught.

At first she hadn't noticed any of her posters in this large city where so many other long since missing or desperately wanted people more important than her must be harbored. That's why she'd made the decision to stay around for a while.

Of course, there was the instinctive compulsion and desire to stay. Something was happening here that required her to be present. She hoped it had something to do with the faceless man. A shudder crept up her spine at the thought of him, his horrible laugh, his unbeknownst terrible acts implied in the dream.

He appeared evil; her intuition hinted at that, the tingling, but she didn't know who he was or why she should care so deeply about it. Evil was everywhere, and she was no heroic vampire or machine-like mutant.

She remained under the pecan tree until the warming sun pressed through the scantily clothed arms in the little wooded area and suffocated her chill. No noise from police cars or police radios met her ears, only the noise of the city awakening, those who held occupations racing to be the first on the bus, in the taxi, on the sidewalk.

She tossed pieces of biscuit to the little dog, stealing bites for herself in between. One for you, two for me played in her head, with the memory of a little boy from her past, hand reaching into an off limits cookie jar.

The dog sat on his haunches smiling, half a lip baring small teeth, and waited for his next bite until the biscuit was gone, along with the busy city commotion. Cheater watched as her four

legged friend stood and trotted toward a small stream winding through the wooded area.

"Good idea," She praised the wanderer, rising from the safety of her log to follow him for a drink.

Creek water left a bitter taste in her mouth, but she had become less picky about drinking water the past several weeks, as she had no money for any other choices in water. In her jumbled years of schooling, she did remember that a body needed water to survive, and as much as she wanted to give up, she needed to survive, find the faceless man.

Dipping her hands into the stream, she brought the water to her nose and sniffed it first, a lesson she had learned in the first week of being on the run. The water was cold from the extremely chilly nights.

She didn't know if the little dog sniffed the water, because when thirsty, he seemed to drink from the most stagnant of puddles, and she couldn't understand why animals didn't get sick, as she had.

"You really should smell that first," she reprimanded. "What if it's polluted?" The little dog cocked his head at her, then returned to the stream. After drinking, she splashed the cold water on her face, rubbing it around to free the grime of the city night, the park bench, the homeless lifestyle that chose her, still cringing from her near fatal experience with bad water.

Again and again, she listened to drawn out stories from elderly homeless people about how good the natural waters used to be. People had ruined them, ruined everything, with this, they would tell her, their arms passing over the recycled trash that was now their safety, their homes, their beds, their livelihood.

After walking through garbage-lined ditches and alleys for the past two months, hearing the stories, she made a vow never to throw away another bottle, cup, or wrapper that would add to the already polluted waterways. She looked down at the greasy yellow wrapper under her knee, crumpled it and stuffed it in the bag, and then bag and all went into a back pocket, from there it would find its future home in a dumpster.

Leaving the creek, she picked up fallen pecans and filled the front pockets of her ragged and worn cut offs. The pecans would fill a hunger later. She followed the bank of the small creek, her eyes constantly on the lookout, scanning the area, her ears tuned toward any disturbance in the ordinary crunch, crack or pant of her small friend or the natural sounds surrounding her.

Being on her own had stimulated her intuition, too. She had always had good intuition, but lately she trusted it more and more.

The whole pecans scattered about, so plentiful after the wet summer, untrammelled by pedestrian traffic, yet often stolen quickly by fat little squirrels that now drew her canine companion's attention, pecans floating above and below fallen leaves, rich, brown shells gleaming, brought to surface a memory of Sadie's pecan pies that Cheater had loved so much.

Sadie used to make one every month on the anniversary of the day Cheater had moved into the tiny apartment with the lonely old woman.

The young girl's mouth watered, thinking about the firm texture and incredibly sweet taste of the flaky crusted treat. Sadie would have been thrilled at the plentiful crop of pecans this fall. Cheater grabbed another handful, knowing the pecans alone weren't a substitute for the last pie that she had never gotten to taste.

The bulges of pecans tightened up the too loose, worn hips of her ragged denim shorts, while the added weight of the nuts struggled to tug the shorts downward at the waist. In one motion, she looped her index fingers into the belt loops on each side and lifted the shorts.

She'd have to find some winter clothes in the next few weeks, but that was just one of many fleeting concerns that constantly demanded her attention. Solutions for those types of problems always seemed to fall into her hands from the sky above, so she learned not to dwell too long on them.

The faceless man, however, that was something to dwell on. The blackouts, the people whose lives differed from just moments earlier, that, too, was worth dwelling on. She dwelt on both of them now as her slightly crunchy steps followed the small stream further from her hiding spot beneath the log.

The faceless man had become a constant mystery in her life the past few months, since Sadie's death. Waking, she could not hold on to details of the dream, but she remembered the strange feelings the dream left behind.

Who could he be? Her father's brother? Her mother's brother? She hadn't known of any uncles before. She couldn't draw a conclusion based on the little information she learned in her dream state. Perhaps he was just somebody she struggled to remember from her past, somebody with a lot of power. Whoever he was, she awoke with the sense of an inner struggle between good and evil. It seemed as though he was struggling to do the right thing. Or maybe, it was her struggle. She just didn't know.

She looked beyond the little wooded area now, the creek leading her to the opposite end of the small-forested sanctuary, searching out resources.

She'd entered the city from a back road, which didn't provide a great amount of details, no city signs with population postings announced locations on windy dirt roads.

She spoke as little as possible to the homeless people, only overhearing their rants and ravings about the change in times.

She lost herself among them, and they, being of the same mindset, accepted her without conversation, but she easily deduced, by the large population of poverty driven people, this city was much larger than she normally liked to be in for any period of time. Although larger populations afforded some positives, such as getting lost in the crowd, it also had

negatives—more people, more need of money, more chance of getting caught.

When she had arrived the night before, her only concern had been finding a safe, dark place to rest that stood above the humidity soaked ground.

She looked about her at the small woods, back toward the area she burst through early that morning. It was filled with distant daily noises of cars, buses, trains and busily smoking buildings.

She wondered about its solitary existence in such a largely populated place; belonging seeped through her immediately, as if their single natures blended and became one. She could hide away in its heart, safe from the world, forever, if a force stronger than her safety weren't pulling at her to leave it.

The gentle breeze brought to her nasal passages the aroma of exhaust and pollution, mingled with cinnamon buns and bacon, topped with oak and pecan trees. Glancing beyond the edge of the trees, memories of her small hometown of Eden inundated her thoughts.

At the small forest's horizon, far on the other side of the creek, she could make out the backs of several buildings through the almost leafless trees and evergreen shrubs. The row of buildings appeared to be one of those little strip malls Sadie had liked to shop in.

Cheater scanned the buildings as she moved toward them, noting the huge dumpsters behind them, considering the possibility of restaurants, always thinking about her next meal, her next minute, hour, and day, while wandering toward a destination her life and instincts led her to, an unknown place where she sensed great danger, where evil awaited her, a place her curiosity wouldn't allow her to ignore.

As her gaze moved from building to building, she noted a very nicely dressed, slender, blonde woman in a dark business suit, carrying a briefcase, exiting one door of a section of the buildings, heels clicking to an expensive car. The tall woman reminded Cheater of Mrs. Barston, one of many foster mothers from her past.

Two other people, employees, casually dressed in jeans and business logo tee shirts, stood behind another building, smoking. Cheater wrinkled her nose, remembering another from long ago who smoked, an elderly family member, now passed on, whom she had dreaded visiting, hugging, because her house and breath always smelled of musty, old cigarettes.

A man dressed in white, with a tall, fluffy, white hat bouncing on his too round head, matching the bouncing rhythm of his too round belly as he walked, carried out a big silver pan and dumped the contents into a dumpster.

She could only think of two professions identified by white coats; a doctor, or a chef, and the doctors of her mind didn't wear a fluffy white hat or carry a large silver pan full of food.

"Well, fella', looks like we found the perfect place for lunch later," she whispered, her

stomach momentarily satisfied, yet unfilled from the leftover biscuit.

The one adjustment she'd had to make that really took some time was dumpster diving.

She preferred to make money for her meals, and offered to work, many times, for the cafes, restaurants, and small grocers she traveled near, risking recognition, but she found that not many people today were interested in helping others out, even fewer cared to notice posters stuck to poles.

Poor people, now the majority in everyday life, and missing people were long forgotten, without compassion. Nobody really seemed to care anymore about anyone other than themselves and their own survival.

Restaurant managers and their assistants shook their disapproving heads at her and sarcastically told her to go back to her cardboard box, realizing that was exactly where she had come from; lost in the oceans of homeless people keeping her safe and hidden, she was free to fulfill the mystery mission of finding the faceless man whom she was certain held answers.

She had almost starved after the first three days on her own with no food before finally deciding to tame her pride and take matters into her own hands, and feet, and knees, literally.

Extreme hunger and thirst had reduced her to little more than a rat, making it much easier to lower her standards, expectations, and take food and water from sources never before explored. That was when she had learned about the water.

She grimaced at the thought of that first time she climbed into the smelly, fly infested dumpster, searching for freshly added edibles that contained no maggots. Having survived that first trip in, she found subsequent trips less gross.

She silently wished, before every dumpster, her stomach roaring, that there were more people in the world who cared, who could help, but most people seemed to have little compassion at all, too busy keeping up with their own lives, their own problems, to care about others who were less fortunate.

When had the world become so self absorbed? She remembered times when she was younger when people helped each other, telethons, fake Santas, food drives, soup kitchens. What had happened to stop all of that?

She remembered Sadie complaining about some higher ups that were making changes, changes for the worst, but she hadn't really listened at that time.

She had been too busy being a twelve-year-old girl. When she asked Sadie later what she meant, Sadie had told her not to worry about it. She said it would be over soon. They would be fine, the two of them, with or without a job. Those kids at the Home would be fine, too. Sadie had told Cheater she wouldn't have to worry about that guy because Cheater had Sadie, and Sadie had her! Cheater's future was sound, nothing to worry herself about.

The young girl wished now she had listened, asked more questions, because that guy seemed to be affecting her now.

At the end building on the corner, a group of kids tussling in a skirmish of some sort drew Cheater's attention.

She moved closer, peering around the now sparse trees, her eyes taking in three bigger, older, tougher looking boys; Cheater guessed they were about sixteen years old. The three boys tormented a younger, smaller boy. Forming the points of a human triangle, they shoved the younger boy back and forth between them, ignoring his pleas to stop, pleas soon becoming painful screams as the older boys shoved him to the ground, laughing.

A small, shiny device fell from the smaller boy's hand. Wires flew from his ears to the ground, a treasure stolen with his pride.

She watched curiously, noting the baggy, sagging jeans of the dark-skinned boy who appeared to be the leader. As she watched, the boy stopped and made a futile attempt to hike up his jeans, which immediately slipped back into place when he bent to pick up the gadget that had fallen to the ground. His sleeveless, dingy white muscle shirt revealed lean, wiry muscles, and dark, bare skin glinting in the morning sun.

His choice of clothing labeled him as one Sadie used to call a 'wannabe gangsta boy.' The label she reserved for one of the boys similarly dressed in the Home; a boy who always wound up in trouble because of his choice of style and attitude, which usually confined him to a solitary room during most of his stay. Sadie would roll her eyes every time the boy came through the food line.

Cheater knew kids like this tall, dark boy before her were pretty street tough, or at least they acted like it.

She also knew from experience that they had no respect for other people or their property. In this current time of apathy boys like this took full advantage of others.

As the human triangle scene played out before her, Cheater found she had wandered to within twenty feet of the mugging, the darkness beginning, the view getting smaller and smaller, leading her.

"What else ya' got?" a shorter, lighter skinned boy with a shaved-head asked, kicking the little boy in his side.

"See 'f he got some money!" the dark-skinned boy ordered. The injured boy's cries grew more pitiful as he rolled away from the kick. He tried to control his sobs, show that he wasn't afraid.

Nobody walking about behind the buildings stopped or called for help. The business woman drove away, eyes focused on the road before her; the two smokers quickly closed the back door

behind them; the chef took his silver pan and quietly slipped back into the restaurant, unwilling to become a target, a hero.

Cheater was used to seeing that response from people. Their apathy towards the rest of the world didn't startle her anymore.

No real heroes existed in places such as this, only people struggling to survive. This was the way of her world, and the mugging was the last thing she noted before near darkness descended upon her, moving her to action.

Physically she moved to within five feet of the scene, appearing to watch as the older boys took out their anger and pain on the younger boy, but the scene through her eyes had faded away, the bodies wavering from feet to head as if each one stood on hot pavement in the July heat of Texas.

Staring at the taller boy, the leader, as he disappeared from her view, the only one of the three facing her, her eyebrows drawn down into a puzzled, sympathetic look, she felt no fear for herself. She was in the darkness. The ending would be the same as always, as every other time she returned from that safe place that swallowed her up.

The first time that she blacked out was at the age of twelve, right after she had moved in with Sadie. It scared her then, but not anymore, even though she still didn't know exactly what happened to her, what she was doing that caused the sudden changes in people.

She discussed it with Sadie, who told her it was a gift from God himself, yet neither of them knew anything about that gift. Sadie just knew that if it made people better for having experienced it, then it was a gift.

The older woman smiled, her electric features glowing, as she filled Cheater in about the report of that first dark time.

Sadie's great nephew had in part been the one to experience the change, the first incident in a now growing list, an incident lacking much detail.

Sadie retold the reaction of her nephew's childhood friend after he had cornered Cheater on her way to the market to get corn syrup for Sadie; she was making Cheater one of those special pecan pies, the first of five.

The older boy, the friend, drug riddled and withdrawal shaken, had tried to take Sadie's money from Cheater, but had received more than he ever imagined when he reached his quivering, desperate hands toward the preteen girl.

Sadie had listened intently to her nephew's account, interrupting him with, "M-hm," and "Oh, yes," leading to "I remember that" intertwined with several stories of times that he had tried to help his friend.

Excitedly, she retold how her nephew talked about rounding the corner where Cheater stood

facing the addict and noticed the trance-like state of the two, how immediately afterward, the change in his friend came, his friend who suddenly began to attend school regularly and held a steady job to help his mother pay bills, his friend who talked of college.

Sadie's great nephew called it a miracle, an idea Sadie agreed with, because his tenth grade pal no longer needed fixed. But nobody ever told Cheater exactly what or how it happened; nobody mentioned the details, especially not the friend. She wondered if they even knew or remembered.

In the here and now, the dark eyes of the present day abuser turned her way after catching a glimpse of her blank, sympathetic stare.

"What's wrong with you, you stupid little b...?" he started, but something about her felt familiar, halting his threat. He stared hard at her, giving her the look he used to buckle his victims, pushing away the rush of emotion inundating him, but, looking into her soulful eyes, he couldn't hold on to the buckling look, couldn't block the flood of emotions.

As he stared, for moments seeming like days, into those melancholy, deep browns, she seemed to draw him into her mind somehow; she seemed to see through his painful charade of Mr. Tough Guy, down to his very soul, his deepest secrets. He knew of only one other who looked at him that way, and she was dead. Had it not been for that simple fact, he might have believed this crazy, poor, homeless white girl was his sister, reincarnated.

His discomfort with her eyes, the depth of them, the sadness, the disappointment, the hurt, burned deeper into his soul than a warning from his boyhood minister.

He recognized it, the sensation, and wanted to turn away, but he couldn't. He wanted to run to her, kneel before her for absolution, but he couldn't; it wasn't right.

He wanted to hug her, but he couldn't. His silent behavior alerted his followers, and within moments, all was quiet, the girl before him no longer appearing herself.

"Jazz, man, what's up with her?" asked the shortest of the three, a handsome younger teen. "What she doin', man?" puzzled by no answer, the teen watched the facial transformation taking place in his leader's eyes, and the abnormal stare of the young girl.

Jazz, the apparent leader of this small band of brutal boys, who had been just as puzzled, took in the sight before him, a sight lasting only moments, and then he just nodded once at Cheater and turned away, trying not to let the shame filled tears burning in his own brown eyes come to fruition on his awe struck face.

"Come on, let's git outta here. It ain't worth it," he jerked his head, dropping the small wired item next to the small, pale hand of the abused boy.

Any other day, Jazz wouldn't have moved away slowly; he would have been running away from the crime.

Any other day, he wouldn't have looked back over his shoulder, for life had taught him not to look back.

Any other day, he wouldn't have believed what he had seen, for there wasn't much he believed in anymore.

But today was certainly not any other day; it was a day unlike any other he had encountered in his tragic life, and when he glanced back at the scrawny, stringy haired girl with burning brown eyes who had been there, staring him down, that's not what he saw, and a bittersweet smile softened his face of stone; for the first time in five months he felt like floating.

For once in his lifetime, he didn't even think about his stepfather, the Beast. What he saw that day was amazing, ethereal, a dream, yet not.

She was right there before him. He turned back to his confused friends and motioned them home, understanding he would see this girl again, soon. Suddenly unafraid of everything that had brought fear to his last few years, he felt the urge to go someplace he hadn't been in a long, long time.

Reviews

Heidi Grange, Blogger: "What an emotional ride this book is, full of sad and bittersweet moments, the story still manages to give a feeling of hope, mostly through the character of 13-year-old, Cheater."

Jill Marie, Blogger: "This story is so unique and keeps you enthralled the whole way through. It is imaginative, endearing, and down right intriguing."

The Cover (and Everything in Between) "creating yet another splendorifically (yes, that is MY word, and in this case it REALLY does fit!) wonderful tale that you just can't put down."

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