

# Rosebuds and the Daughter of Vines

## *Cain*

### *Chapter 2*

Cain wished he was on the other side of the earth. He twirled his twice-emptied wine glass between his forefinger and thumb, engrossing himself in chasing the pink shadow across the white linen tablecloth. He resolutely swore he would not think of Lola. Nor would he think of her phone number. He wouldn't even think of the chance of seeing her again. He was determined... and failed spectacularly. His mind continued to drift back to her, the noise of the restaurant and his current dinner date fading into static.

“So, I just told Cori that she should buy the Klee. He’s not very fashionable, but he does have a unique style. And, of course, she’ll never really entertain anyone in that little matchbox she calls an apartment. It’s only when you’re important that you have to worry about actual artwork. And you know I...” Her voice droned on about her friend, and Cain stopped worrying about whether she’d notice his inattention. All that mattered was ignoring the mindless prattle of the woman sitting before him.

He thought about the scrap of paper deep in his pocket, the clear and direct script that invited his attentions.

“Cain, I don’t know why I even bother with you. Imagine: coming here dressed like some... blue collar worker. If someone saw you...” she shook her head in exasperation.

“Monica, if you don’t want to be seen with me...” Cain trailed off, eyes never straying from the pink stain that swirled with the dregs of the wine. His voice was flat, soft in the too-loud room.

Monica pressed one perfectly manicured hand to her chest. “Cain, do you know what you’re saying? What you’d be throwing away? You don’t mean that.” She waved off his disconcerting comment with a dismissive shake of her perfectly manicured hand.

Languidly, Cain took a deep breath and looked at his dining partner. He could not summon up enough energy to play this game again. His mind was far away and the thought of soothing her ruffled feathers and inflating her ego made him sick. Lola would not be like this, he told himself. Lola would draw him out in some topic of real interest; she would not have to resort to petty whining or inane ramblings.

He opened his mouth to speak to her when an older Chinese gentleman in a Buddhist monk’s robes came up to their table. Bemused, Cain let his mouth close and listened close to the old man. It was unlike this restaurant to resort to a gimmick, but anything was possible.

His bright and beady black eyes bored holes into Monica, making her shift uncomfortably on her chair. His voice came out, clear in the din of the room: “Never marry a Korean

boy!” Monica, losing her cool a moment, grasped failingly at words. Her perfectly rouged lips worked back and forth, kissing the air with intent, and coming up lacking.

As the senile gentleman shuffled slowly away, Cain could not hold back a chuckle. As if the old man’s comment was not random enough for his evening, he could not get past the picture of Monica as a fish, mouth opening and closing as if the air were water. If only she could see herself, to know that the way she looked made a mockery of everything she sought to be. He chuckled again, letting go of the still-empty wineglass to smother the hysterical laughter behind his napkin.

Her eyes flashed censoriously at him, her breath making her tiny chest rise and fall in indignance. “Do you have any idea of what you’re doing?”

Cain set down his napkin gently, his eyes never leaving her face. “Monica, I’ll understand entirely if you don’t want to be with me anymore.” His voice was quiet, but firm. He really was tiring of her, of her insecurities and her manipulations.

Monica’s face contorted with spite as she threw her napkin down and stood at the table, drawing many eyes their way. Whether it was planned or not was of no consequence. “Don’t wait for me to come home, Cain Everson. I’ll send for my things later.” She whirled, unwittingly giving Cain both a sense of relief at not having to deal with her any longer, and amusement as she sashayed determinedly through the crowded room and out into the dark night outside.

Cain smiled, tipped a sip more of wine into his glass and down his throat and summoned the waiter. There was, after all, much more he could be doing at the moment than waiting on his bill to arrive.

Cain had to assume that technology was his friend. With only a series of clicks and a little data entry, in a few minutes he had found Lola’s full name and address. Lola Wheeler, of Paradise Hills, Apartment 2B. Cain found himself wandering towards her apartment, the crisp sound of leaves crushing beneath his feet a counterpoint to his thoughts. He was sure he would be considered a fool for searching her out so soon. He remembered the man, the one who had taken her hand and taken her away. He paused a moment, the air whipping into his sweater and chilling him as he thought to call Monica, to apologize for whatever he had done to set her off this time.

He started his feet moving again, contemplating the futility of a long-term relationship with Monica. As conventionally pretty as she was, the superficiality of her personality, the very way she rode through life as if it were all champagne, socials and shopping disgusted him. So lost in his thoughts, Cain did not realize he was standing in front of Lola’s austere building until he nearly passed it by.

The hour was early enough that lights still shone in many of the windows, causing Cain to sigh deeply. It was a long shot, hoping to catch her standing at her window. He was

not even sure he wanted to see her, so jumbled and confused as he was. His hands jammed deep in the well worn pockets of his corduroys, he shivered and cast his eye along the shaded and illuminated windows of the apartment building.

“She’s not up there, you know,” a soft voice came from off to his side.

Cain jumped, inordinately guilty for having been caught staring up at windows. He whirled to the general direction of the voice, the source obscured by the darkness. “She who?”

“Lola. You’re looking for her, aren’t you?” The voice sounded faintly amused, as if it was the holder of some joke he did not quite get yet.

Cain, against his better judgment, stepped closer, finally making out a figure lying in a vine-covered bower of sorts, curled in a circle. “How would you know?”

She, for it was a she, smiled brightly as she stood and came into a shaft of light beside him. “I am, after all, Lola.”

Flushing brightly at being caught out; Cain wished he was on the other side of the world.