

# **The Orchid Thief**

## **by Greta Chang**

My back was throbbing in pain— a self-devouring black hole consuming all rationality. The more I dwelled on the pain, the worse it became. Since our last spat, Mama had stopped massaging my back, and now the pain seemed to take a turn for the worse. What could possibly soothe this pain?

I stared out the window, lost in thought. Suddenly, I saw a portly man climb clumsily over our wall and take my mother's favorite orchid. I watched it all unfold, yet was too scared to stop him. When Mama returned home, she was mad. She asked me where the orchid had gone, but I didn't tell her the truth about the theft, partly not to worsen her mood, I understood her frustration. She had nursed the orchid through its existential crises with loving care and expertise, But surely, her happiness didn't hang on a potted plant.

Several months later, the orchid thief unexpectedly returned with the very same flower pot. This time, he hustled to the front door, set the pot down, and left a dirtied printed letter underneath. After he left, I opened the door and saw the orchid beaming cheerfully at me with its new flowers. I took it into my room and opened the letter immediately. Apparently, the man's name was Rakh. He noticed the orchid when our wall was taken down for rebuilding. He "borrowed" it because his desperately sick wife, an "orchid connoisseur," was dying to see a species that my mama happened to have. And he searched everywhere, online and offline, for that species, but couldn't find it anywhere. Out of desperation, he simply took ours. His wife was so happy to see the orchid he brought home that her sickness took a turn for the better, "miraculously." Rakh apologized for his unauthorized borrowing and thanked us for the magical orchid.

I put away the letter and looked at the wall outside. From a corner of my room, the orchid's long necks strained to look up at me. From that day on, I would talk to the orchid as if praying it would bestow its magical healing power on me. Oddly, the more I prayed, the more their heads bowed, as if tired of my attention. Unsurprisingly, my back pain was not getting any better, and the orchid's delicate petals became wrinkled for want of nutrients and Mama's attention.

One day, Mama found the orchid crouching in the corner. Perhaps she thought that I had been hiding her beloved orchid just to spite her. I had "stolen"— and almost killed— her happiness. Taking the orchid pot from me gingerly, she placed it back in its original spot,

Seeing Mama's happy smile, I was touched. Just then, the familiar back pain seemed to come back, but this time it didn't bother me. I ran out of my room and hugged Mama. "It's okay, Mama," I said. "Your orchid is back now."