

*This is an exclusive excerpt from Orchid in Bloom. You are about to dive into an unexpected encounter—where everything she experienced matters, and now she has to prove it...*



It was still early afternoon. The day slowly unfolded before their last evening.

They were going to pick up a few snacks at the market and find a bench near the beach before dinner at the Sand Bar.

As she was picking up some chips, she noticed him.

He was older now, but with a youthful glow. She had a hard time placing him. But she couldn't let it go.

*Is he a classmate, an old neighbor? Someone from Harvest Springs or Saugford Falls?*

Her mind wouldn't let it go. She forced herself to ignore it and focused on the groceries. Not paying attention, she bumped the gentleman by accident, and he dropped his candy bar.

"Oh, I am sorry, sir. Clumsy me, not watching where I was going." Orchid said.

"No worries at all — maybe it's a sign my wife was right. This candy bar and I need to go our separate ways." They both laughed, facing each other now.

He looked at her, head bent slightly, perplexed. "Do I know you?"

"I was just thinking the same thing. You look so familiar."

She studied him for a moment. Something in the way he carried himself.

*The gala.*

*The elegant elder brother. His beautiful, poised date sitting next to him at the table.*

"Is your name Amir? Amir Sinclair?"

“Yes?” he said, surprised.

“We met a long time ago. I’m from Saugford Falls.” She paused. “I was Malik’s date. At your family’s gala.”

“Orchid?” His face opened completely. “Oh, my goodness.”

He hugged her before she could say another word.

“Wait here. Honey, come here.”

His wife appeared from the next aisle — older, still beautiful, still his. He leaned in and filled her in quietly. She looked at Orchid and laughed in warm disbelief.

“Small world.”

“Very small.” Orchid replied with a smile, still trying to figure out if this was happening.

Corinne appeared at her side.

“This is my best friend, Corinne,” Orchid said. “And this is Amir Sinclair and his wife, Cordelia — Malik’s older brother.”

She glanced at Corinne — a comical “blink twice” moment. Not panic. Just — *are you seeing this?*

Corinne looked directly into Orchid’s eyes. Wide. Barely contained.

“Oh, wow.” A beat. “Um — nice to meet you both.” She smiled, collecting herself beautifully.

“Hey Amir, I got the libations for the bonfire. Let’s get this party started!”

His voice entered before he did — still distracted, scanning the shelves for more party food as he moved toward them.

The group went quiet.

Orchid felt it move through her, something old and electric. She let it pass. Shoulders back. Grounded. Still.

Malik looked up.

His smile froze.

He nearly stumbled.

“Orchid?” Almost silent.

“Hello Malik.”

“Hey Malik,” Corinne said, sounding nice but serious.

“What? What are you doing here?” he said, staring at her as if no one else was in the market.

Amir eased his way out of the aisle. “Alright, Malik, we’re going to head back to the bungalow.” He turned to Orchid sincerely. “So good to see you again. Corinne, nice to meet you. Take care.”

“Yes, you too,” said Orchid.

Malik and Orchid stood face to face in the candy aisle.

“O, I’ll meet you at the beach?” Corinne asked, saying a lot without saying too much.

Orchid understood. She was going to be okay. She had done the work; now she had to put it into practice.

Corinne left; she nodded at Malik as she walked out. Orchid watched her every step until the market door closed.

“Orchid Everly.” “Wow, I thought I’d never see you again.”

“Orchid Calloway, now,” she said with a slight smile, correcting him. Her ring caught the light in that moment.

“Oh, okay. Well, congratulations.”

They stood there in silence.

“It was nice seeing you Malik, take care.”

She walked past him, observing his features. A black beanie, slightly pulled back — curly tufts of gray peeking at the hairline. Face fuller, more worn. A full beard with grays coming through.

Still those eyes.

The Polo Ralph Lauren Oak Bluffs sweatshirt — she recognized it immediately. One of her favorite campaigns. She didn't mention it.

He smelled of bergamot, sandalwood, and warm vanilla. She noticed that, too.

He was put together in that particular way he always was — like someone who wanted you to notice without appearing to try. The labels were quieter now. Some things don't change.

He was still handsome. For someone else.

“Orchid, can we walk for a moment?” he said, his voice deeper now, raspier.

The crowds were filling Circuit Avenue now.

Orchid thought about it. “Sure.”

They left the market with bags in hand. There was no roadmap for this moment. She had done the work. Now she was simply in it.

She remained quiet. She let him do the work.

As they walked, she distracted herself by people-watching and window shopping.

“So, what brings you to Martha's Vineyard?”

“Oh, I come here often. It's a home away from home,” she said with ease.

“Okay, cool. My first time. Amir dragged the family here for some fun and relaxation.”

He paused.

“My parents. My son. Amir's family,” he said watching her.

Her eyebrows went up before she could help it.

She remembered. Shut it down. Tucked it away.

All these years and he never married. She wasn't surprised.

Malik always needed to be the prize — chosen, admired. What he never understood was that she was never competing for him; she was just being herself.

And that was the part he couldn't accept.

And somehow, without meaning to, she had become exactly the kind of woman he would spend his whole life measuring others against. Not because she was unattainable. Because she was real. And real was the thing he never learned to appreciate.

"Well," she said, finding her voice again. "It's a great place for families."

"I hear you are doing well, Orchid. I'm happy for you."

"Thank you. Malik, I need to go."

"No, please." He stopped himself. "I'm sorry, O. Not like before. I mean it this time." He looked at her. "You were just being you, and I didn't know how to respect that. I mistreated you and you didn't deserve it."

She studied him for a long moment. She saw the young Malik, the one her younger self had loved. Everything she could have said just sat there between them.

"That apology never expired," she said finally.

She stopped and looked at him.

"Thank you."

"I forgive you."

"Take care, Malik."

She walked away and didn't look back.

He stood there. Until she disappeared into the crowd.

Orchid walked until she spotted Corinne on the beach.

The snacks were already out. Corinne handed her a glass-bottled root beer.

Orchid smiled.

“You okay?”

“Yes, I am just fine.”

“Unbelievable.”

“Yeah, God definitely has a sense of humor.”

“Ha! He sure does!”

Corinne held out an open bag of chips. Orchid took a handful, and the two of them ate quietly while enjoying the ocean view.

That evening they had dinner at the Sand Bar. They were right near the water — sun on the horizon, a slight breeze, salt in the air. Their last night at their favorite place.

They both ordered the hot lobster roll with extra butter — one with fries, the other with tater tots, so they could trade — plus a side salad.

After dinner they walked by the water, then stopped at Mad Martha’s. Orchid got her pistachio cone. Corinne, the MV Sea Salt Caramel. They made their way back through the Campground eating their ice cream slowly.

Feeling accomplished. An unforgettable summer at the Vineyard.



*Thank you for reading! Now that you’ve witnessed the last encounter, are you ready to find out how they got here? **Let’s go back to the beginning—pre-order your copy today.***