

2

Forever Flowers
Washington, DC
November 5, 2013

Virginia Casey looked up from her iPhone as the tall man walked into Forever Flowers, thinking to herself: *He looks how I feel.* She'd been working in the shop for nearly six months. When she'd first taken the job, she'd thought working with flowers might be a good way to spend some time while contemplating what to do with her life. High School was behind her, the prospect of college loomed, and she had no idea what to do with herself. Her parents refused to allow her to leave town, afraid that something might happen to their precious daughter in the big, bad world. Dear God, she wished something *would* happen. Anything. It had to be better than the sweet, cloying odor of the flowers and the monotony of her existence.

She watched the tall man meander around the shop, stooping to look at various arrangements, examining them with an expression that reminded her of so many of the sad old men who visited the nearby cemetery. And that was the worst part of

ABE LINCOLN ON ACID

her job, all these downcast, miserable people coming in to buy flowers just to throw on a grave. It was a sorrowful waste, and it would be worse in a few days with Veteran's Day right around the corner.

The tall man finished his circuit of the shop and approached the counter.

"Excuse me, Miss. Do you have any roses? I didn't see any."

She looked up into the man's light blue eyes and saw more sadness than she'd ever seen in anyone's face. It made her want to cry.

"We keep those in the back," Virginia said. "How many did you want?"

"I expect a dozen would suffice, miss." He smiled then, and Virginia found herself returning the smile.

"You know, you remind me of someone, mister."

The tall man's smile widened. "I'm told I have that kind of face."

Virginia laughed. "Right. Red, white or yellow?"

The tall man frowned.

"The color, I mean," Virginia added, feeling a little foolish.

"Red would be about right, I think."

"Would you like some greens and Baby's Breath?"

The tall man looked thoughtful, stroking his beard. Virginia realized it made the man look Amish, though there were no Amish in DC and his Ralph Lauren clothes clashed with that image.

"Miss, I have full faith in your judgment," he said, making a slight bow.

Virginia nodded and went into the back, returning with one of the pre-made arrangements and handed it to the tall man.

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“Thank you, Miss. What do I owe you?”

“Forty-five dollars.”

The tall man’s thick eyebrows arched and he reached into the pocket of his khaki pants and pulled out a wad of bills, handing Virginia two twenties and a five.

“Are these for your wife?”

The tall man looked sad again. “For an old friend, though she was far younger than I when she passed.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, mister.”

“Quite all right. Thank you for your help, my dear, I’m much obliged.”

He turned and left the shop, leaving Virginia with her mind whirling. She’d wanted to say something more to the man, something that would lift his spirits. For some reason she felt an ardent need to do that and she had no idea why. She also couldn’t shake the feeling that he reminded her of someone she knew. She looked down at the money he’d handed her, two twenties and a five, and then it came to her: the gaunt face, the sad eyes, and the beard.

He looked just like Abraham Lincoln.