



Orchid Blooming: A Novel

Carol Van Den Hende

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(195pp)

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Two wounded people learn to accommodate each other in Orchid Blooming, a romance novel about building love and trust despite one's past traumas.

A tragedy-stricken woman's search for her mother's heritage permeates Carol Van Den Hende's tender romance novel *Orchid Blooming*.

When Orchid was young, she watched her parents die following a car accident. As an adult, she works at Estée Lauder. But despite her outward composure, she is besieged by nightmares of her past.

At work, Orchid yearns for advancement. When the opportunity to join a campaign in Beijing arises, she is determined to win the position, which could also give her the opportunity to reconnect with her mother's roots. Securing her goal will require her to bolster her advertising experience, though.

Then Orchid meets Phoenix, a handsome entrepreneur whose project with a nonprofit centers on public service ads for the benefit of injured veterans. When he offers to help Orchid for reasons unknown, she accepts. She is attracted to Phoenix, but she has difficulty trusting him, and her unresolved traumas impact their burgeoning relationship.

Orchid's vulnerability is affecting. She is reluctant to divulge too much about herself to others, and she deflects with humor. Though she is talented, her fierce desire to prove herself reflects her fears and insecurity. But her efforts at self-improvement are thin and sentimentalized, as with her counselor's dropped encouragement that she journal about her past. At her opposite, Phoenix is more resolute. He's an altruistic hero who deals with his own losses, and he is moved toward compassion for Orchid. However, his suppositions about Orchid's resilience are abstracted from his presumptions rather than growing from details that she shares with him.

Orchid and Phoenix are drawn into romance at a gradual rate, meeting at an advertising awards event and a triathlon before they travel together. They have misunderstandings, but these are resolved with speed. The narration alternates between their viewpoints, giving each an opportunity to delineate their thoughts. As detailed gestures on Phoenix's part highlight his attentive nature, Orchid warms to him. Their relationship progresses with hopeful ease, though light tensions surrounding the balance between professionalism and love prevent them from being fully open with each other. Other people, including an upstart at Orchid's workplace and her friends, fill in the book's background, but in a sketched-in manner.

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KAREN RIGBY (September 13, 2022)

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