

# Cassidy

Cassidy finds herself engulfed in an overwhelming wave of emotions, running blindly through the dense forest, seeking an escape from the burdens weighing on her heart. The night air is crisp, and each breath she takes is shallow as if she is struggling to fill her lungs with something other than the fear and betrayal threatening to consume her. Her feet stumble over uneven terrain, but she doesn't stop, not until she finds herself in an open meadow, bathed in the soft glow of the moon. Exhausted, she collapses onto the cool grass, her mind racing with thoughts of the past and the uncertain future looming ahead. She closes her eyes for a moment, trying to ground herself, but the weight of her emotions is too much to bear. Just as she begins to surrender to the heaviness within her, a sound reaches her ears—a violin, its notes sharp and discordant, yet oddly mesmerizing.

At first, the music is harsh, the notes clashing together in a chaotic and unpolished melody, mirroring the storm within Cassidy's heart. But as she listens more intently, something changes—the rhythm softens, the notes flow together, and suddenly, the music becomes beautiful, raw, and deeply moving. Curious, she lifts her head and sees the source of the sound: a boy, thin and delicate-looking, with an intense expression on his face as he plays. His body sways slightly with each movement of the bow, his entire being seemingly lost in the music he creates. There is something about him that draws her in, something about the way he plays that makes her forget, if only for a moment, why she was running in the first place. The violinist, unaware of her presence, continues playing, pouring his soul into every note, and Cassidy remains frozen, mesmerized by the unexpected beauty unfolding before her.

As the last note lingers in the air, the boy finally notices her, his eyes widening slightly in surprise. Cassidy watches him closely, taking in his delicate features and the faint glow of moonlight reflecting off his violin. He introduces himself as Wynton, his voice

soft yet steady, carrying the same melody as the music he just played. There is an immediate connection between them, an unspoken understanding forged in the silence that follows his performance. Wynton's presence is both comforting and unfamiliar, his music a reminder of something Cassidy can't quite name. Without fully understanding why, she opens up to him, telling him about the memories of her father's death and the growing distance between her and her mother.

Wynton listens intently, his gaze unwavering as Cassidy speaks, his own emotions reflected in the words she struggles to form. He reveals that he too has experienced loss, sharing how he often hears the distant echo of his father's trumpet, a sound that lingers like a ghost in the wind. The two find solace in their shared grief, their conversation weaving between pain and understanding, as though their sorrow has found harmony in the form of words. Wynton invites her to try a soufflé his mother made, a small yet meaningful gesture that makes Cassidy smile for the first time in what feels like an eternity. The warmth of the moment contrasts with the cold air around them, a flicker of hope amidst their respective loneliness.

Just as Cassidy begins to believe that, perhaps, she has stumbled upon something pure, reality comes crashing back into focus. In the distance, she spots her mother speaking with police officers, the sight jolting her back to the life she was momentarily escaping. The serenity she found with Wynton dissipates as panic sets in—her mother's presence is a reminder of the instability that follows her like a shadow. She glances at Wynton, his expression unreadable, and she suddenly feels torn between the peace she has found in his company and the obligations tethering her to her mother. Without thinking, she murmurs a quick goodbye and rushes toward her mother, leaving Wynton and his music behind, uncertain if she will ever find her way back to this moment again.

As she reaches her mother, Cassidy is overwhelmed with a conflicting sense of relief and despair. Her mother promises change, speaking of leaving the past behind, but Cassidy has heard these words before, and doubt lingers beneath the surface of her hope. Even as she holds onto her mother, her thoughts drift back to Wynton—the boy

with the violin, the music that soothed her soul, and the fleeting sense of belonging she had felt in his presence. The night air feels heavier now, filled with the weight of unspoken words and unfinished melodies. Deep down, Cassidy knows that the encounter with Wynton was not just a passing moment but a turning point, an intersection between the past she is trying to escape and the future she has yet to embrace.

