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THE FRAGRANCE OF TRUTH
by Virginia G. McMorrow

"Are you going to stand around while I work?" Taller, with short curly dark hair, blue eyes, Jenny looked nothing like my long, blonde hair and gray eyes.

"The realtor is showing the house next week since your city job won't pay my bills," Jenny snorted.

"I couldn't turn down the job." I wandered toward mom's bedroom, the scent of lilacs growing stronger.

"Odd how I can still smell her perfume."

"What?"

"Maybe it's my imagination." I inhaled the rich, comforting smell. "Too much work, too little sleep."

"Too much guilt."

Staring in shock as Jenny tracked the hurt cross my face with satisfaction, I caught up with her in the bedroom, the scent of lilacs overpowering. "I don't have anything to be guilty about."

She yanked open the top drawer of the pine dresser and threw faded nightgowns on the stripped mattress. "She never forgave you for moving, and when she was sick~"

"I offered to help."

"Mom knew your job meant more than she did."

Mom told me not to come out because of you. The scent of lilacs drifted beneath my nostrils, almost a caress, and I relaxed. "That's not true."

"She knew from the day they adopted you that you'd be ungrateful."

Suddenly I laughed. "We're fighting like kids. We've got work to do." I opened the closet door, another wave of lilacs wafting over me. With care, I started removing clothes from their crocheted hangers. "She always bought good quality on sale."

"To put you through college."

I bit back my anger, not bothering to remind her about my scholarship, that I'd worked after class and lived at home.

"Only to have you break their hearts when you moved."

Unwilling to get into a shouting match, I was distracted by the scent that urged me closer to the drawer Jenny was emptying. I stared at the jumble of hairclips and buttons, compelled to look closer, and plucked out a miniature skeleton key.

"How did you know it was there?"

"The perfume."

She snatched the key. "When did mom tell you about this?"

"Never."

"Don't lie. They used to keep a lockbox but I don't know where."

Oddly, I did. I followed the lilac scent to dad's armoire. Confident, I pulled firmly on the bottom drawer as Jenny peered hungrily into the clutter where a small box lay hidden. She opened the lock, disappointed at the mementos covering one document, yellowed with age. Jenny unfolded the paper carelessly as I watched, curious, then alarmed, as her expression changed.

"Did you ever see the adoption papers?"

"No," I said quietly. "But you always reminded me that I could never take Sean's place." The fragrance of lilacs gently drifted across my skin. I glanced at the lockbox. Beneath a faded wedding invitation was a black and white photo of a couple, their five-year-old daughter held warmly in their embrace, their two-year-old adopted daughter held even closer. A heady fragrance of lilacs enveloped my senses and caressed my soul.

Virginia G. McMorrow is the author of three fantasy novels, *Mage Confusion*, *Mage Resolution*, and *Firewing's Journey*(Archebooks) and several mystery short stories that have been published in various magazines. Visit www.virginiamcmorrow.com or [contact Virginia.](mailto:contact@virginiamcmorrow.com)