

Emiko's Story

L M Whitaker

Emiko Mori couldn't concentrate on the music. She rose from her practice chair and dropped her violin onto her bed. Feeling guilty about treating the prized instrument in such a callous manner, she snatched it up, gave it a once over, and then placed it gently on its stand. She paced back and forth across the patterned carpet, taking care to avoid the white lines and step only on the green background.

“Step on a crack,” she whispered.

Emiko's doorway opened out to an upstairs loft. With each back and forth, she could see down the staircase to the living area and its white furnishings. Her mother, Saki, was sitting on the sofa, staring through sliding-glass doors into the back yard. The view was deserving of the attention. Their home on the Erie Canal was filled with mature maples and oaks, their colored tips just a preview of the fall show coming soon to upstate New York. But the Japanese-style garden beneath the trees, once the recipient of so much attention, sat wilted and withered, mimicking its creator. Emiko studied her mother's sad but still lovely face.

Saki Mori would never have been called a normal mom. She was a brilliant physicist, researching and teaching at Cornell. Emiko smiled as she thought about her mom, the one that she used to have. She wondered if any other children's bedtime stories included string theory.

After Emiko's brother died, her mom rarely went out of the house, choosing to live in near isolation. But she still seemed happy enough, between gardening, playing music, and actively

pursuing the world of theoretical physics.

But that was the past. Emiko returned to her room and turned her attention to her laptop computer. As it came to life, she stared at the last page searched on her browser. She visited this, or similar pages most every night before bed. She couldn't say why. She was as broken as her mother.

“Local Man Dies on Same Road as Son” — the headline topped two pictures--that of a young boy and an older man, both Japanese. “In a tragic coincidence, Hiroshi Mori was killed in a car accident on the same stretch of road that killed his son ten years earlier....”

Oh Dad, why did you leave us? Since Emiko's father died four months prior, their lives had all but fallen apart. Her mother had completely receded into herself and rarely spoke. Emiko was supposed to have returned to school last month, but she had postponed for a semester so she could be with her mother. Instead she felt totally alone.

To the casual observer, Emiko seemed to have inherited all of her mother's brilliance and none of her social misgivings or severe depression. Emiko was outgoing, vivacious, and becoming a very beautiful young woman. But it was not her mother's intelligence she had inherited. Not this mother, at least. Emiko's mother, like her father and brother, were full Japanese. Emiko was not. She was tall, at 5'6" she was taller than her father and towered over her mother. Her skin was too dark, face too narrow, and her eyes highly unusual— amber with flecks of gold. She liked her eyes.

Emiko closed the browser window and checked her email. Nothing. She switched to her sent email, opened up the last entry, and reread it.

Dr. Frank,

Hi again. Yes, Mother is still the same. She just sits there and stares out the window, all day long. I have to do everything around here.

Please re-consider my side of this and my feelings. My dad promised me that when I was 16 he would tell me everything about my biological parents. As you know, I'll be 16 in 2 months. It's only fair that you tell me

everything that you know. I know that you know because, duh, need I say anything more?

I have been researching what happened to you, and I still believe that you are innocent. You are too smart to have done those stupid things they said.

I miss you. Please call me.

Your goddaughter,

Emiko

She knew the letter sounded pathetic and whiny, but she felt desperate. With her brother gone, her father gone, her mother practically gone, and her godfather gone, she had no family. She had a few distant relatives in Japan, but a few short and poorly translated emails were all the interaction she had ever had with them. And really they were not true relatives, not blood relatives.

Well, she obviously had some family, somewhere. Frank Anderson — not only her godfather by also her IVF doctor — was her best way to find them, if they could be found.



Emiko was downstairs getting a soda when she heard the Skype call coming into her computer.

She ran upstairs and answered the call. It was Frank Anderson.

Her godfather came into view on her screen, and she quickly activated her video feed. She'd not seen him in person since last summer, when Emiko had guest roles with several European symphonies. Her parents had come with her, and they made it into a family vacation. Frank met them in Amsterdam, when she played with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. That was then.

“Dr. Frank!”

Frank sat in a small dark room, blank walls, no windows. Depressing.

“Hi there, Emiko.”

“How are you?”

Frank smiled, “Sure honey, I’m fine. You look beautiful by the way. Stand back and let me see you.”

Emiko complied, backing up a few steps.

“You are more grown up every day. Happy early birthday. Any big plans for the day?”

“No. Well, I am going to take my driver’s test. Mom doesn’t know, of course, but then again...” her voice trailed off.

“You’re still at Juilliard, right?”

“Yeah, they let me out of summer school and the fall semester. I’ll start back in January; they were cool about it.” Emiko knew Juilliard would have done just about anything to keep her.

“Of course they were, you’re a rock star, in the most classical sense of the word.” They both laughed.

For one brief moment it was as if nothing had happened, and the observation of that jerked Emiko back to reality.

“Frank, I miss you. Are you ever coming back?”

“I’m so sorry, but I can’t. After all these years, you would think — the government still has me on their watch list. It’s crazy.”

“But I’m all alone,” she whined. “Will you at least tell me what you know about my real parents? Was I adopted? Are either of my parents my real parents?”

“Emiko, we’ve had this conversation many times. I promised your family and I am not going to break my confidence with them.”

“But they’re dead!” She said, much louder than she meant.

“Emiko!”

“You know what I mean. She may as well be dead.”

“Look, I know you’re upset.”

At that moment, Frank's phone rang. Emiko saw shock on his face. She guessed he did not get many actual phone calls.

"Just a sec, hang on." He walked across the room and picked up a phone. She could hear his voice, but not see him.

"Hello? Yes, this is Frank Anderson, who is this? Alistair? Hi, how are you? Are you still at NOVA?" A few minutes of silence passed. "Um, sure, just give me a minute."

He came back to the screen, standing with his phone to his ear. "Hey Emiko, I have to run. I love you. You know that, right?"

"Yes."

"We'll talk again soon, okay? Bye." He hung up the call.

Emiko was fuming. How was she ever going to find out anything? She started to close her Skype window and leave, when she noticed Frank was still on line. He never stayed on line, at least not in a visible way. He was a pretty paranoid old guy, obviously. But this call had distracted him.

She may have a chance. She checked her TCP connections and found Frank's IP address. They were still connected. Thank God she was a pretty good hacker. Frank had actually introduced her to this when she was very young, but she surpassed his skills long ago. In fact, she had hidden remote access software in an email she sent him several years ago. Frank had scolded her, half-heartedly, when she informed him — she knew he was more proud than mad. If the hidden software still existed she would be able to access his computer as if it were her own.

YES! It was there.

She quickly established the link with Frank's computer. From the last time, she knew he used a service that changed his IP intermittently, so she would have little time.

At first glance, she was surprised at the lack of information on his computer. Very few files. She skimmed over these and saw some recent activity around medical terms she did not know. No

surprise there, Frank was a pioneer of IVF and still researched infertility. She went to a pictures folder. Less to find here. Only a few pictures at all. She saw one of her and her parents, some of Frank and a beautiful woman, taken a long time ago, then another of her and a couple. Strange, she did not recognize them. She zoomed the picture in closer. In fact, it was not her, but someone who looked very much like her. She took a screen print of the page, careful not to actually copy files from his computer. She started back to the searching, and then, gone, that was it. His security had kicked in and she lost the connection.

She went to the screen capture. It was still there. She blew up the picture. It was taken on the campus of the Harmony School. She recognized the dormitories. The girl in the picture looked like her, albeit a few years younger. How could that be? Is this what she had been looking for? It could not be coincidence. Did she have a sister out there?



"I'm home," Emiko called out. She placed the bags of groceries on the kitchen counter. Riding the bus to the grocery store was not her idea of fun, and the closest Asian market still required a transfer. "Mom?"

She found her mother sitting at the dining room table, reading a physics journal and drinking a cup of tea. Emiko walked up and peered over the bar that separated kitchen from dining and living room. Scratch that. It was an empty cup.

"Mama." She walked around and kissed her mother's forehead. "Let me get you a cup of tea."

"Victor has been recognized for his magnetic monopoles. A basic principle, really," Saki Mori said, motioning to an article in the journal.

Emiko nearly dropped the teacup she had taken from the table. "Mama?" Her mother had

barely spoken in weeks. "Mama, what did you say?"

But there was no more.

Emiko looked at the article. "String Theorist Wins \$3 Million Physics Prize." She tried to pull her mother along. "Oh, right, I think I remember, didn't I meet him somewhere? I think you were on a panel with him at a conference here a few years ago."

But Saki just went back to her journal saying nothing more. Emiko finished putting away the groceries and made them a lunch of leftover rice and tempura. Before eating, she went upstairs and retrieved the picture of the girl and several of her high school yearbooks, and she started looking for a match. As they ate in silence, she looked at the picture again. The girl seemed to be around ten years old. If the picture were recent, she would be about five years younger than Emiko, but she was sure she had never seen her. However, Emiko had graduated a year ago, and they kept the younger children separate from the upper grades.

There was no match. Emiko found the additional yearbooks from her eight years at Harmony School, and she did not see the girl anywhere. She felt certain that if this picture were older, and the girl was close to her age, she would know her. But the resolution wasn't great. Could it have been taken with a film camera and scanned? Could it be older than she thought?

She looked across at her mother, who was now staring out into the back yard. "Mama, do you know this little girl? She looks a little like me."

Saki glanced at the picture and if she saw any resemblance, she did not show it. "She's older than you."

"What?"

"The picture is approximately twenty years old. That's the Bing cherry tree you climbed on your first day of school. Cherries grow quite fast you know, but they are weak and do not live very long."

"Thanks." She smiled, and gave her mother a big hug. "Mama, I love you." She did a quick

calculation. That would mean her potential sister was about, oh thirty years old. She looked at the time. She could just make it to the school library before it closed.

"I'll be back in a few hours, okay?" She waited, hopeful, but got the normal response. Silence.



Both the man at the security gate and the teacher at the library remembered Emiko. They believed her stories; the first that she needed a copy of a transcript and was stopping by the office to pick it up, and the latter that she had lost her senior yearbook somehow and wanted to copy some pictures for a biography that was to appear in a PBS special on gifted children.

She was not a practiced liar, yet this seemed to come easy. She did feel a bit guilty. That was some consolation. Emiko located her senior yearbook, then pulled the 1996 through 2004 yearbooks. She started with 1996. She found what she was looking for quickly, though she had to go through several hundred students. There were not many Asian – even partly Asian – students back then. Georgia Steele was a lower grade student, who liked math and computer science. They did not give her age. Harmony was a non-grade school and always had been.

Students were organized by name only. They kept that designation until their final year, when they were labeled “seniors” and had their own section in the yearbook. That was about the only difference in age recognition. Harmony pushed students to work at their own top pace. That, combined with the fact that they started with many protégées and savants, yielded an atmosphere where sixteen-year-old graduates were common. She skipped to the 2004 yearbook but did not find Georgia. She checked the 2003. Not there either, unless – was she a senior?

Emiko sucked in a breath. “Oh my God.” She was staring at her near twin, in the senior picture of Georgia Steele, who still liked math and computer science and who was going to MIT.



It was so easy. Once she had Georgia's name, it took less than an hour to find her.

Emiko found Georgia Steele in Atlanta, where she had lived for about ten years and made a small name for herself. She received her degree at MIT in three years, and then a Ph.D. from Georgia Tech in Applied Mathematics in 2009 and a second in Computer Science just two years later. Her Ph.D. dissertations looked interesting to Emiko: one was in stochastic processes, and the other in pattern recognition.

She kept scrolling through the Google search results. There were multiple mentions of Georgia from the local paper, the Atlanta Journal and Constitution. The earliest was from three years prior. Georgia helped prove conspiracy in a cheating scandal in the Atlanta school system.

Recently, she helped to uncover a multi-state drug running operation that included an organized crime ring, individuals at a logistics company, and a few employees at one of Atlanta's largest manufacturing companies, Atlantic-Pacific. It ended up a nasty affair and Georgia was almost killed. She was saved by her friend, Marcus West, the owner of a local entertainment and security company.

Though her name was often referenced in the case, Georgia seemed to keep a low profile. She had no website, no Facebook page, no Twitter account, and no listed phone numbers. The only public reference Emiko could find was that she was listed as an advisor to West Security, Inc.

Then how should she go about contacting Georgia? She couldn't call Dr. Frank and ask him; obviously he did not want her to know about Georgia. If she called her directly Georgia might refuse to see her, she might call her godfather, and there could even be a chance Georgia and she were not related.

Emiko went back to the Internet. She searched for Steeles in the Ithaca area. Since Georgia went

to the Harmony School, maybe she still had relatives here.

It was a matter of a few clicks to find that Georgia was an orphan. Her parents died in a house fire before Emiko was born. The obituary listed no other relatives. She sighed. They were both alone in the world. She could not take the chance of losing her...what... *sister*? She would go to see Georgia Steele herself.



The rest of it was a whirlwind. Emiko had already planned a few guest appearances during the summer with symphonies in her area, and she was even invited to play with the Boston Pops in October. She made one call to her agent to ask about adding a few more cities and specifically mentioned that she had always wanted to go to Atlanta.

Only a few days later, her agent called her back. Atlanta had a last minute cancellation just that day. A special guest flutist due to play that weekend had broken her arm. They would be overjoyed to have Emiko play this weekend. Could she make it? They would pay for airfare, hotel, assign a chaperone, and give her a nice stipend. Her agent could help her schedule a nurse to come in and stay with her mother for the one night she would be gone.

Emiko had not planned for this. She thought she'd have plenty of time, several months perhaps, to plan the best way to contact Georgia. But she could not pass up this opportunity. What to do? She'd never been to Atlanta before; it all seemed so daunting. How would she find her way around the large city when she could not even drive? And how could she make sure she could meet Georgia?

Then it came to her. She looked up a number and picked up the phone. "Hi, is this West Security?"



The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra was true to its word. As soon as Emiko exited the terminal in the Atlanta Hartsfield Airport, she saw a woman holding a hand drawn sign bearing her name. The protective matron whisked Emiko off to her car, and they headed directly for the Woodruff Arts center, so Emiko could meet the conductor and rest for a short while.

While they drove from the airport, Emiko ignored Mrs. Wilson's blathering about Atlanta traffic, her schedule, and where they could eat. She had finally received an email address for Georgia Steele just that morning — West Security would not release her phone number. Emiko had dashed off a quick note to her before the flight. Now she willed her phone to power up and her emails to download.

“Wooo!” Emiko shrieked in delight at the return message.

Mrs. Wilson jerked in her seat. “What is it? Are you okay?”

“A friend is coming to see me tonight. I've got to make sure the tickets get left for her at will call.”

“You nearly scared me to death. She must be a good friend.”

“I've been waiting to see her a long time.”



During the performance, Emiko would play only her solo. The Bach *Partita in D Minor* was a lengthy 30 minutes and usually only performed by top violists: Midori, Itzhak Perlman, Sati (her idol).

Emiko felt like a stranger in their ranks, but even at 15, she had been called one of the world's best. She had performed this partita several times before, and the ASO had made it their first choice.

She had to wait in the green room during the first half and all of intermission. She tried to sneak

out, but Mrs. Wilson had a close eye on her. Post intermission, she would join the symphony onstage after their second song and immediately perform her solo.

Emiko entered to the polite applause. She tried to look for Georgia, hoping to see her in the audience. But invariably, as always happened, once she started playing, she closed her eyes. She let the music call out to her instead. Her cousin. Sister. *Family*.

The first movement was the *Allemande*. Sad and sweet, through it she mourned her loneliness and her missing father and brother. It took her on a wandering journey through hills and country, looking here and there and never finding them. She imagined Georgia on her own journey and played to let her know she was not alone.

Then the *Courante*, the court dance. Skipping notes in quick arpeggios, music tumbling down waterfalls and carried on light breezes. Light, jubilant, and over too quickly. Happy memories of old times.

The plaintive *Sarabande* was next. Two voices in sad harmony, one in mourning and the other trying to comfort the first, the minor key underscoring the comforter's grief, as deep as that of the mourner. Through the *Sarabande* she spoke to her mother, pulling her back to earth whenever Saki tried to lose herself. Guilt, was she keeping her mother close to help Saki or herself?

She threw herself into the *Gigue* – the frenetic call of fairies in the woods. Notes rarely allowed to rest, cutting the air as her bow blazed across the strings of the instrument. Multitudes of voices calling to her at the same time, each pulling her attention to it, each demanding its micro second. Each telling her to forget anything else and focus on her craft with all her skill and attention.

Then the final and longest movement, the *Chaconne*. This for Georgia. The interweaving of everything that made up Emiko's life, the happy, the loss and mourning, the past, present and future. Calling to her, giving her everything she had. Imploring her to listen, to judge Emiko as worthy, and to join her in a future together.

Emiko opened her eyes as she brought down her violin. The crowd didn't move for a moment. She saw wide, tearful eyes and open mouths. She looked again for Georgia, and thought she saw her in the middle, seated next to large dark man.

Then she was gone. The crowd was on its feet clapping and yelling "Bravo!" Bravissima!"



There were always crowds backstage after the performance, and Emiko could not see Georgia anywhere. *She'll be here.* She wanted to push past the well-wishers, but she forced herself to stay and greet each one. She half heard the compliments and nodded. Just nod and smile. And wait.

A flash of red caught her eye. And there she was, shiny mahogany hair falling over her shoulders, exotic and gorgeous in a red cocktail dress and black heels. Emiko was awed and thrilled by the sight. She now knew what she, herself, would look like in 15 years. She would never again feel like some weird concoction of the human race, a freak without a past, a man-made creature with no ancestral home.

She thanked the few remaining fans, hurried to Georgia, and embraced her. "Finally." She squeezed Georgia again before releasing her. "I am so happy to meet you."

Georgia Steele stared directly at Emiko with piercing eyes. Almond-shaped amber eyes flecked with gold, the same as hers. If Emiko had not known before, she knew now.

"Miss Mori, I am Marcus West and this is Georgia Steele." Marcus West had been the giant man she saw sitting next to Georgia in the audience. "You were wonderful and it is truly an honor to meet you."

Emiko barely registered the words. She stared intently at her older twin.

"You know my godfather, Frank Anderson?" Georgia asked.

“Yes, though not well. He moved away when I was very young. But my family kept in touch with him over the years.”

More silence. More staring.

Finally, Georgia said, “Did Frank tell you about me?”

“No, not exactly. He doesn’t know I’m here. He would not be pleased.”

“Why not?”

Emiko looked to see if they were alone. Silly really, but... “How much do you know about Frank?”

“More than enough.”

“Then you know he has his secrets. I think we’re two of them, and I don’t think he wanted us to meet.”

“Then why are you here?”

“Isn’t it obvious?”

Mrs. Wilson appeared from nowhere. She congratulated Emiko on her performance. Addressing Georgia, she said, “Are you Emiko's sister? I didn't know she had any family in Atlanta.”

Georgia smiled.

“Mrs. Wilson is my chaperone while I'm in Atlanta,” Emiko explained.

“Isn’t she wonderful?” the older woman asked.

Emiko knew the woman would not leave on her own. “Mrs. Wilson, can I talk to my cousin for a few minutes?”

Looking hurt, the chaperone finally retreated, finding a chair to sit on where she could still watch them.

“Can we go somewhere else?” Emiko whispered. “Is there somewhere we can meet in private?”

“Where are you staying?”

“The Georgian Terrace, but I don't want to meet there either.”

Marcus handed her a business card for The West End, jazz and nightclub. “We can go to my club, it's right down the street. I'm the owner. Trust me, it's packed. No one will notice you.”

Georgia said, “You can come with us.” She touched Emiko's arm, warming it on the spot.

“No. You go ahead. I have to pack up and talk to the conductor” — Emiko nodded to her chaperone — “and ditch Mrs. Wilson.”

“I can wait for you,” Georgia said.

“Really, it's okay. I'll probably be about thirty minutes.”

Marcus said, “Let me call my man, Ty, and he'll come and get you.”

“No, I'll call for a ride or catch a taxi. I saw a stand right out back.” She had to talk to the conductor before she could leave. “I gotta bounce.”



Emiko waited for her ride at the performer's entrance at the Woodruff Arts Center. The rain, which seemed like it was going to last all night, began to taper off. It seemed to be clearing up in fact.

A dark car with the pink Lyft sign entered the lot and stopped in front of her.

“Emiko Mori?” A cute guy of maybe thirty sat behind the wheel. Clean cut and clean shaven, he did not look like the drivers they had in New York.

“Yes. Hi.”

“Hi yourself,” he said with a smile.

He definitely did not act like a New York driver either. She returned the smile. Must be that Southern hospitality.

“Where to?”

“I'm going to The West End. It's on Peachtree.”

He looked confused.

“It’s a night club.”

“Ah, okay. No problem. You’re not from here are you?”

“No, how could you tell?”

“Just a guess. Most locals wouldn’t travel to a bar with their violin.” He pointed to the case she was gently laying down on the seat next to her.

“Lol. I guess not. I’m very attached to it. It’s pretty valuable.”

The driver started the cab and began toward the street. “Hmm.” He pulled out his phone and began to type into it.

“Is everything good?”

“Sorry, it’s just that I’m sort of new to this. Just trying to make some cash to get through grad school. There are so many Peachtree streets here, you think I’d know them all by now, but I still get a little confused.” He looked for a minute. “Oh yeah, I see it, it’s just down the street.”

They exited the parking lot and turned right into the busy street, heading south.

“What are you doing here in Atlanta?” the driver asked.

Emiko was distracted looking at the many condo and office buildings in Midtown. Everything seemed so new and shiny. “I’m here to see a friend you could say.”

“Were you in the Symphony? You look a little young if you don’t mind me saying.”

She felt herself blush. “Look, there it is.” Emiko’s excitement grew, and she was practically bouncing out of the seat. “This is it, across the street.”

“I’ll pull around and let you off in front.”

“No, just stop, this is fine.”

“Okay, but be careful getting out.”

Emiko thanked him. She saw Georgia Steele come out of the shadow of the club’s awning and

wave to her. She waved back. She grabbed her violin and got out of the car and stood on the sidewalk across the street, waiting for the traffic to clear. Her driver did not pull away; she guessed he was waiting for her.

She stepped in front of the car to get better visibility. She lifted up her hand holding the violin and gave a wave to Georgia. Seeing a gap in the traffic, she began to hurry across the street.

“Emiko, wait!” The shout came from behind, startling her. She whirled about, heard the squeal of a tire. She never saw who called her name.

A light shone in her face. It was the moon. Almost full, coming right through a gap in the clouds. She was back in New York. She was lying in the grass looking at the moon with her mother. It was summer, a clear night. On nights like these they would lie outside and look at the stars. Her mom would set the telescope to track the rings of Saturn or the moons of Jupiter, or any number of star clusters. The Moon was so bright it hurt your eyes to view through the telescope, but she liked that too. They would lie together and map out the constellations in the sky. Her mother taught her all about the universe, galaxies and stars, and even how to calculate the distance to the moon, and the expansion of the universe. She was eight years old. She was happy.



Message from the Author

Thank you so much for reading Emiko's Story. I would love to hear what you thought of it. You can email me at linda@lmwhitaker.com or contact me through my website (lmwhitaker.com) or Facebook page (@lm.whitaker.author).

Kind Regards,

Linda