

Victory  
Storm

LOVE  
HURRICANE



Victory Storm  
**Love Hurricane**

«Tektime S.r.l.s.»

**Storm V.**

Love Hurricane / V. Storm — «Tektime S.r.l.s.»,

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## **Victory Storm**

# LOVE HURRICANE LOVE STORM SERIES

## LOVE HURRICANE LOVE STORM SERIES by Victory Storm

After four years of separation, Kira comes back to his best friend in Princeton, but the one she will find there isn't that sweet and frail boy, submitted to his father's violence, anymore, but a seventeen-year-old guy, angry with the whole world and with himself. Will Kira be able to wipe that hatred away and to teach him how to love?

LUCAS. Kira went away four years ago, leaving me alone at the worst time in my life. I will never forgive her for that. She has come back now and all the hatred I feel, makes me stay away from her. However, every time she looks at me, I feel bewildered, lost and scared, but I can't forget who I am: I'm just a rotten stock and nobody could ever love a guy like me. KIRA. After four years of distance and despair for that forced leaving, I've come back to Lucas at last. But things have changed now and I've become a victim of his bullying. Who is that boy who only knows violence and who uses girls just to lay them? I don't know what has happened, but I'll do anything I can to wipe away the hatred I can see in his eyes and which is keeping him away from me.

Other books by the Author:

- The Sweet Poison of Revenge
- In Love With A Star
- A Star in My Life

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## LUCAS

*Princeton, Kentucky, September 28 th 2010*

*A hurricane.*

That was what Lucas had thought before the braveness of the unknown girl interposing between him and his father.

“Try to hit him again and I'll report it to the police!” that furious tornado shouted, making even Lucas jump; the boy was still pressing his hand on his cheek, made swollen and red by the latest smack he had got. The man laughed soundly, facing that silly threat. That hoarse and biting sound made Lucas feel thrills down his back, pushing him to hide cowardly behind his tall rescuer, who didn't look at all scared by his father's falsely amused behavior. However, Lucas knew him very well and he perfectly understood what would come after that baritone laughter and even more after such unveiled threats. In a rush of courage, he picked up his rescuer's rucksack and tried to throw it away, before his father lost his temper once more and lifted his hands, or worse his belt, also on her.

“Be careful of what you're saying, brat!” the man warned her, turning suddenly serious and moving still closer to her.

“You're the one who must be careful of what you do, or I'll tell mum and she'll send you to prison, together with all the violent parents who beat their children,” she challenged him again in a tender but at the same time fierce voice, decided not to let herself be scared by that scrounger.

“What did you say?” the man burst out angrily, bending on that small creature who turned her nose up at the alcohol-smelling breath coming out of his mouth. And then his father's sigh came. The sigh Lucas knew very well: that vibrant and stiff hiss which always ended up in a violent gesture against anything around him. He cast a furtive glance at the proud and perfect face of the girl, who hadn't even moved an inch back, going on to protect him and to keep him safe behind her back, which was slightly bending under the weight of the books in the rucksack. His eyes lingered on her pink and perfect lips, her small and heart-shaped mouth, without any scar or marks of violence. Her features were a bit strange, according to Lucas, but at the same time curious, and he wished he could see her face better, but his father's panting and trembling breathing had the better on him. Holding back his fear and the moans of pain which kept coming out of his mouth, he took courage and, by a force he had never felt, he was able to push his rescuer aside just in time, before his father's hand flew merciless to the girl's cheek.

“Let her go!” his son screamed, gathering his strength in a desperate cry. He knew he couldn't do anything against his father, but he swore to himself he would do anything he could to protect that innocent girl, who had proved silly enough to face hot-tempered and powerful Daren Scott.

“You can't give me any order, do you understand it? You are just a silly boy who will end up like his bust mother!” his father said angrily, seizing him by the snap of his neck. Just a few months had gone since they had found his mother sleeping in the water tub full of water. He had been taken aback at first, when he had seen his mother completely dressed in the tub, but everything had taken a different meaning later, after his father had come in. He still found it difficult to give order to his memories. He could just remember his father's painful and raging screams, while he took his wife out of the water and called Rosalinda, the waitress, who was crying and shouting that the house was cursed, while running to call the ambulance. Then everything had turned hazy till his mother's funeral.

He didn't know whether he had cried or not, but he could remember that, when they had come back from the cemetery that night, his father had got drunk more than he usually did and had started shouting at him, telling him he was a loser just like his mother, who had been such a coward as to make suicide, leaving him alone to look after a son he had never wanted and who could even be a bastard in his opinion, considering the shameful and rakish past of the snake he had married ten years before.

That night, shut in his bedroom and hiding under the sheets, he had started trembling and calling his mother helplessly, hoping she would come and rescue him.

Unfortunately, his dream hadn't come true, as it had never done also when she was alive, so he could just go on crying till he felt his stomach and his head ache.

Now, his father's words were striking him as violently as that night.

He bit his lower lip to avoid crying, but tears started flowing abundantly at last.

"Dad, don't hurt her. Please" he begged him, sobbing and hiding his face by the sleeve of his jacket, to prevent that girl who was braver than him from seeing him.

"My son is crying for a female! This is real news! You're spineless. Guess what? You'll get back home on your own, so you'll learn not to disobey me and not to stand against me!" the man decided, turning on his heels and walking to his car with unsteady steps because he had been drinking too much that afternoon.

"Wait, dad!" Lucas tried to stop him, scared at the thought of going back home alone, but his father had already walked to the car door and got into the car, without even looking at him and leaving his nine-year-old son trembling and crying at the side of the road.

"Don't worry. My mum is taking you home by car" the young girl tried to calm him down. She had stood apart, watching the whole scene.

Her sweet and kind voice was able to smooth Lucas's suffering, so he stopped crying.

Without uttering any word, he felt the girl's hot and soft hand take his cold and trembling one.

With his eyes still blurred with tears, he let her drag him to the fountain in the school's empty playground. He saw her taking a *Hello Kitty* handkerchief out of her pink smock and dampen it under the small fountain's spout.

Then, with a sweetness unknown to him, she rubbed the wet and fresh tissue on his cheeks and eyes.

"My mum always makes me wash my eyes after I have cried, to prevent them from getting swollen and red" she explained sweetly to him, while she kept wetting his eyes by the drenched cloth.

When the young girl judged the cleaning satisfying, she took another clean and ironed handkerchief out of her rucksack. She unfolded it and used it to wipe his face kindly.

Stupefied and glad for those unexpected and relaxing cuddles, he let himself be washed and wiped, standing still like a doll.

The biting autumn wind was blowing hard that afternoon, but Lucas found himself smiling happy for that new caress that also the sky had wanted to give him.

Peaceful as he hadn't felt for months, he opened his eyes and he was able to look into his rescuer's ones, at that hurricane that had turned into a fresh spring breeze at that moment, with her kind and gentle gestures.

He stared at her for a long time, till his memory could remember that girl's name: Kira. She was the new girl and she sat in the third row behind him in the classroom.

"Your face is strange" Lucas stated, letting his eyes slip on that girl who was more than ten centimeters taller than him. Even if she was thin and very tall, her face was large and round and it stood out on that slim and small body bending under the rucksack's weight.

Her skin was very fair, but her cheeks were reddened by the cold and her small, heart-shaped mouth was tight and stiff while she was focusing on folding the two handkerchiefs.

Lucas lingered curiously on those small and full lips, wondering whether she could eat anything bigger than a crumb.

But the feature which charmed him the most were his slightly half-open eyes, with their strange almond shape. Even if they were hidden by a straight, slightly too long, black fringe, he could make out two very bright brown eyes with dark green shades, reminding him the woods at Westurian lake, where his father owned a house they had used to spend the summer till two years before.

With an angry gesture and a snort which threw her fringe back, the girl looked at him, slightly hurt.

“And you’re short for being a boy” the young girl replied, crossing her arms.

“You don’t look American” Lucas tried to explain, stumbling while he spoke.

“Sorry, where were you this morning, when our teacher introduced me to the class?”

Lucas didn’t dare tell her he had fallen asleep, because his father had kept him awake all night with his drunkard grumbling.

Placing her hands on her hips in a defiant gesture and filling her lungs by a deep breath, the girl summarized her morning speech, hoping that it would get fixed into her new classmate’s mind this time.

“My name is Kira Yoshida. I’m nine years old. My father is Japanese and works for the army, while my mother is American and she is a social worker.”

“That’s why your face looks strange. You’re Japanese” Lucas exclaimed happily.

“My face isn’t strange! Mum says I took after my father in my features, but the color of my eyes and my character are hers. By the way, I was saying I’m half Japanese and half American. I can speak both Japanese and English well and I attended the International School in Tokyo, till my father was moved her for the next four years, to train the new recruits keeping guard at American embassies in the world. Mum didn’t want to stay alone in Tokyo, so we moved here with my dad, even if he is hardly ever at home. I’m good at school, even if I’m better at writing Japanese ideograms than your alphabet, but mum says I usually learn very fast and I’ve already decided that I’ll be a social worker too when I grow up. I joined the basketball club in Tokyo, even if I never really liked that sport. I hate sports and I love watching cartoons and reading mangas.”

“What are mangas?”

“Comic strips” Kira explained, annoyed by Lucas’s ignorance.

“I like comic strips too!” the child said cheerfully.

“So I’ll lend you some.”

“Really?” Lucas was surprised, because nobody in town wanted to deal with him and even less with his father.

“Of course! We’re friends, aren’t we?”

*Friends.*

That word made Lucas’s heart miss a beat.

He had no friends.

No child had ever approached him for fear of running into the powerful and wicked Darren Scott. Also all the parents and teachers were afraid of his father’s presence and he had quickly understood that nobody would be his friend. Neither now nor ever.

But that day instead, hurricane Kira had got into his life. He couldn’t remember her family name anymore. It was too difficult to spell.

“Oh, my God! Kira, here I am! Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry!” a woman fidgeted, running breathlessly in their direction.

“Mum!” Kira exclaimed happily, running to her and hugging her.

Watching that scene made Lucas feel tears in his eyes again, because he had never enjoyed his mother’s love. When she was alive, she divided her time between a cocktail and a sleeping pill, when she wasn’t struck by her husband’s crazy jealous frenzies.

“Darling, I’m sorry I was late on your first school day, but I’ve been taken on this morning, so I immediately had to deal with some matter and take it to the Juvenile Court, before I could come to you. I found a lot of traffic but I came as soon as possible. Sorry.”

“No problem, but we have to take Lucas home. His father hit him and then he left him here” her daughter answered with her usual naïve but merciless frankness, which was a slap both on Lucas’s and on her mother’s face.

“Kira, these are serious charges” her mother warned her, as she spent all her working time fighting against abuses or family problems which were difficult to overcome without a social worker’s help.

“You must report it to authorities, make an injunction and send him behind bars” the young girl got excited, repeating in detail the words she had heard on TV the night before.

“Forget about watching *Law&Order* with me next time” her mother guessed, before moving closer to the boy. “You must be Lucas, mustn’t you? My name is Elizabeth Madis and I’m Kira’s mother.”

Lucas nodded shyly before that smiling woman, whose green eyes were sweet and brave. Kira was right: she had the same eyes as her mother, but they didn’t look like each other in anything else. Kira’s straight, jet black hair where in contrast with her mother’s caramel and wavy ones.

“Kira says that your dad hit you. Is it true?” she asked him gently.

“Yes, it’s true. His cheek was all red” Kira intruded, getting a dirty look from her mother.

“It happens” Lucas whispered uneasy. He couldn’t even think about what his father would say if he got to know about that conversation.

“I understand. Where is he now?”

“At home. He was angry.”

“What about your mother?”

Lucas took several moments before answering. “She isn’t here anymore.”

“I’m so sorry, darling” the woman immediately comforted him, caressing his face. “Can you remember your home address? If you want, we’ll take you there. My car is parked outside the gate.”

Lucas smiled grateful. Someone had come to rescue him.

He stared at that woman again: she looked like an angel to him.

“Your rucksack must be very heavy, Lucas. Give it to me, so I’ll put it on the back seat” the woman offered.

The young boy turned and Elisabeth made the rucksack slip down his shoulders, but in so doing, she also pulled his jacket and t-shirt up.

“Oh, your rucksack is caught in your clothes. Wait, I’ll set you free” Elisabeth lied and bent to the boy, who was unaware of having just uncovered a long violet mark, running from one hip to the other. The mark of the lash he had got three days before.

Elisabeth’s narrow eyes and her tightened and white lips made Kira draw back, since she knew that look usually foretold some terrible scolding, but when her mother got up, she was smiling again unexpectedly, making her daughter feel bewildered.

“Let’s go home, but what about having a good ice-cream or a slice of cake at *Chocoly’s* first?” the woman exclaimed cheerfully, making Kira jump with joy, because she had got to know that place on the day of their arrival, when her mother had bought her the biggest ice-cream in the world, full of candies and biscuits.

Lucas knew that place too, but he had never got inside.

When they got to the car, Elisabeth immediately drove to that place, where she let the two children throw themselves on the sweets, getting drunk of candies, biscuits, muffins and cream, while she withdrew in the most secluded place in the café, to make some urgent calls about what she had just seen on the boy’s back.

Lucas ate like a horse under the careful and happy eyes of the woman, who accused him of being too short and thin for his age.

When the time to go home came, Lucas got into the car reluctantly and gave his address to Elisabeth, who immediately set the navigator up, because she couldn’t master Princeton’s streets very well yet.

“Did your father want you to walk eight kilometers?” Elisabeth burst out nervously when she looked at the navigator’s directions.

Lucas kept silent, wondering if eight kilometers were a long way.

Luckily Kira was able to entertain him, so their trip home passed by cheerfully.

Unfortunately, however, as soon as his father's huge villa turned out outside the car window, every sign of smile disappeared from Lucas's face.

When the gate got opened, the child started trembling, wondering how his father would react if he knew what he had done.

"Children, wait for me here!" Elizabeth ordered, getting out of the car and walking to the front door which had just been thrown open, to let Darren Scott's powerful shape come out.

"Mr. Scott, I suppose."

"I am. Who are you?"

"My name is Elizabeth Madis. I found your son alone at school, at the end of lessons. I caught Lucas and brought him home."

"Well, now just go away."

"No, I'm not!"

"You aren't? What do you want? Money? I haven't asked you to bring him home! He could walk here, as far as I'm concerned!"

"Don't you feel ashamed? It's almost eight kilometers! How could you force him to walk such a long way and what's more, all alone!"

"And who are you to tell me what I can or can't do to my son?"

"I'm a social worker and I'll warn you, there are sufficient grounds to take your son's custody away from you once and for all: child neglect, physical and probably psychological violence, besides, the child looks undernourished...even if you don't seem to live poorly!"

"How can you dare come to my house and abuse me?" the man burst out, pouncing on the woman and stopping a few inches from her face.

"You're drunk" the woman guessed from the stinking breathing getting to her face.

"Go away or I'll call the police and make you lose your job. I'll have you banished from this town forever," he threatened her.

"You can't frighten me. Just know that I'm going to send the health service to you in a few days and also one of my colleagues to check that there aren't any more marks of violence on Lucas, or I'll have you thrown in jail. Is it clear?" she went on undeterred and decided to get her way.

"Get out of my house!" he shouted at her, frightening Lucas too, who caught his rucksack quickly and rushed out of the car, to run home and make that quarrel end.

"See you soon, Mr. Scott" Elizabeth told him with a veiled threat, then she got back into the car and drove away.

When the car drove out of the huge estate, Darren walked back home, where he found his son scared and sobbing.

"You've brought home a social worker, silly bastard!" the man thundered furiously against his son.

"I didn't know it" the child could just whisper, ready to pay the consequences.

"Does that bitch really think she can challenge and threaten me...in my town? She'll pay dearly for that! And as far as you are concerned, I won't be able to beat you in the next days, but be sure you're going to pay too for what you have done! Clear off to your bedroom now! Forget dinner tonight, so you'll learn not to bring that dregs to my house."

Lucas didn't let him say it twice.

He rushed to his bedroom like a shot, grateful to Kira and her mother, who had offered him that special and gluttony snack. His stomach was still full, so he plunged under the sheets, praying that the morning would come soon.

He wished to meet Kira again, his special friend, that hurricane with a heart-shaped mouth and wood-green eyes, who had turned his day upside down and who would change his life soon, as he knew in the bottom of his heart.

## KIRA

*Princeton, Kentucky, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014*

“I can't stand this situation any more! I don't care at all whether Darren Scott is the city boss! Yes, I understood...Yes...yes...Absolutely not! I'm not absolutely going to give up...I don't care if this war has gone on for four years! I'm tired of letting that monster spoil a young boy's childhood! I know he has already threatened to have me fired...He has been trying for ages, but luckily I'm too good at my job, so he couldn't get the Major's authorization...I understand...Yes...Okay, but I can't stand this state of things any more! Lucas is once more in my kitchen, he's hurt and my daughter is treating him! He had a wound on his lip last month, while he has a deep cut in his left eyebrow today!” Elizabeth Madis kept shouting on the phone. She was locked into her study, sure that the two young people in her kitchen couldn't hear her, but unfortunately her anger and her frustration seemed ready to break down the walls. She had been discussing with her boss for some years, about the measures they could take towards the powerful Darren Scott, but it seemed that all the people living in Princeton had family members working for him or renting a house in one of his crumbling blocks of flats. Everybody owed Darren Scott something, so they all feared consequences. Even the head of the Police.

In spite of that, Elizabeth had never given up: she was famous because she always got the best results in her job and for her incredible sixth sense which made her discover what was rotten in every family in town. After four years, she was still trying to obtain justice for that miserable child that she often had to put up and heal, together with her daughter Kira, who had never left Lucas alone since she met him.

Even if Kira was still very young, she had taken her best friend's troubles upon herself and she was very busy in looking for a plaster at that moment, so she wasn't listening to her mother's phone call, which she already knew by heart.

“You'll probably get a scar. Just sit down and go on pressing the gauze,” she ordered Lucas, feeling annoyed and nervous inside because she hadn't been able to prevent that new violence on the boy.

“It's hurting!” Lucas moaned, sitting on the stool in front of the kitchen counter, where all kinds of medicine, gauze, cotton and plaster were spread.

“Just hang on and sit comfortably! I can't get there,” Kira went on, snorting and trying to put the largest plaster she had been able to find on the boy's eyebrow.

“It's not my fault if you're small,” Lucas teased her as he found Kira's threatening look funny: when she screwed up her eyes, she looked like a character of Japanese mangas.

“You're just three inches taller than me and by the way, I wish to remind you that you were a real shorty last year,” Kira immediately underlined. She had realized lately that all her class mates had grown a lot and she was the shortest one now, while she used to be the tallest one in the past. Even her best friends Jane and Roxanne were a few inches taller than her by then.

“I'd better take up basket once more,” she thought, feeling vexed because she hadn't grown at all in the last two years.

“Take off your t-shirt now. It's stained with blood,” she ordered him soon after, thinking about the great amount of blood pouring out of his wound when she had gone and visited him that holiday afternoon. She had had to hold herself back and avoid feeling sick, after she had flung at Lucas's father, calling him “alcohol-addicted butcher” and “Jack the Ripper.” Just her mother's arrival had been able to save them from the furious anger of that man, who was in an alcoholic haze.

“But what shall I wear then?” Lucas got nervous and felt uneasy for being half naked, especially because the marks of his father's violence were still clearly visible on his shoulder blades.

“My mum and I bought a t-shirt for you at the market yesterday. Mum wanted to give it to you for your new school term, but I'm going to do it now! I chose it myself!” Kira exclaimed enthusiastically, making Lucas blush to his ears, but she simply ignored him and, taking him by his arm as she always did, she took him to her parents' bedroom, where her mother had hidden the present in her husband's socks drawer.

When they got into the room, Kira and Lucas locked themselves inside.

“Here you are!”

“Thanks” he muttered feeling moved and unwrapping it.

There was a blue t-shirt inside, with *Super Mario's* mushroom in its centre, like in Kira's Nintendo, and his name, Lucas, was printed under it.

“As soon as I saw it, I thought about you, because we always play Nintendo when we spend a Sunday together. You really love *Super Mario Bros* and jumping on the mushrooms in the game.”

“I usually jump on them, while you crash into them and are killed,” Lucas reminded her: he considered Kira like a genius at school, but an absolute duffer at video-games.

As an answer, Kira stuck out her tongue at him and Lucas smiled happily.

“So, how does it fit me?” he asked her, changing subject of conversation before Kira started listing the fields where she had no trouble in beating him.

She hated judging carelessly and not judiciously, so she placed her hands on her hips with her usual lofty air and started looking at him attentively.

The t-shirt fitted him wonderfully and Kira couldn't avoid noticing his muscles, which weren't there some time before. She had always kept silent about that, but she had realized that she was always the looser when they wrestled with their pillows now, or when they pushed each other on the sofa or played basketball in the courtyard. Even if Lucas was always quite thin, there wasn't much left of the nine-year-old boy that Kira had met four years before.

Time had gone by and Lucas was getting stronger, he was growing and becoming more and more defiant and brave. He didn't fear his father's blows any more, he had learnt how to take them without shedding any tear.

Kira stared at him for a long while and was spellbound by his face as it always happened. She had got to love it, even if his look was often different because of his father's blows.

His hazel eyes were always bright under his heap of messy, brown hair, in spite of a melancholic shadow which Kira had seen too often in his gaze.

Knowing that her friend was suffering made her feel very miserable, so she always tried to make him feel better and happy when they spent some time together.

She had even burst out crying in her mother's arms one night, thinking about Lucas.

“You're still too young to carry such a burden, but as you are considerate enough as to realize it, so just try to make him smile as much as possible! Kira, if you wish to help Lucas, you mustn't cry, you have to be strong for him!” her mother had told her that day. She hadn't understood very well what her mother meant by her words then, but she had been trying hard to be always cheerful and caring towards her best friend since that moment.

And now, after some years, she could see a very different Lucas in front of herself: much taller, stronger and very good looking.

“So?” Lucas spurred her, feeling nervous. He wasn't absolutely used to Kira's silence, she was the most biting pontificating girl in their school.

Thanks to her, nobody had ever dared teasing him, even when they had discovered that he found school hard because of slight dyslexia, which the school speech therapist and psychologist hadn't been able to certificate because the boy's father had hushed it up, as soon as they had started talking about back-up teachers and facilitated tests to help his son face his handicap in a better way.

That word, handicap, was exactly the one which had stirred up a mess, sending the speech therapist to hospital with a broken nose.

That day the powerful Darren Scott hadn't been able to get off very easily and had been forced to pay a lot of money in order to avoid being formally denounced

"You're very handsome," Kira stated keeping her eyes on the t-shirt.

"Handsome?" the boy repeated amused and uneasy, as he wasn't used to such compliments.

Kira immediately regretted using that word.

"Jane says you are handsome," she underlined, very ashamed since she had just revealed her friend's secret.

"Jane? Jane Hartwood?"

"Yes. I believe she would like to pair off with you," Kira whispered, keeping cursing herself and wondering how the hell she could have told Lucas those things.

"Really?" Lucas asked her, turning suddenly serious.

That change in his voice deeply annoyed Kira, who felt suddenly very irritated and angry.

"You don't like her, do you? Lucas, don't tell me you want to pair off with her too! You want to kiss her and..." she squealed in a shrill and raving voice.

"No, I don't! I'm just curious. I didn't think Jane liked me," Lucas stopped her.

"If that's the question, Roxy is crazy for you too," Kira was going to reply, but a poisonous feeling of jealousy shut her lips.

"What's the problem now?" Lucas immediately got worried as he knew what that small, heart-shaped mouth could hide when it turned still smaller and thinner.

"Nothing."

"You're angry," Lucas could understand since he knew her very well.

"I'm not angry at all!"

"Is it for Jane's fault? I think she is nice, but she isn't the one for me."

Of all his words, Kira could just hear "nice."

"So, you like her!"

"I just said she's nice, not that I like her!"

"Well, so just get you next *Super Mario's* t-shirt from her!" Kira burst out furiously; her mind was hazy and she went out of the room slamming the door.

"Kira!" Lucas called her, upset. Kira had never left him alone in all those years they had spent together, so he was feeling deeply guilty at that moment, as if he was responsible for her reaction.

Kira couldn't understand her own behaviour, but she felt shuttered while her chest was hurting.

When she got to her bedroom, she started crying.

She let herself fall onto the bed, feeling miserable and lost because of her deep emotions.

Someone knocked at the door soon after.

She didn't answer, but the door opened anyway.

Her mother was there.

"Can you tell me what happened, darling? Lucas was crying when he walked away! I hadn't seen him crying for such a long time...Kira, you too! Are you crying?" Elizabeth immediately got worried, because she wasn't used at all to seeing her daughter shedding tears. Kira had always been very Zen and not very emotional, excepted before some injustice.

"I'm not crying!" she sobbed, her face drenched with tears.

"Kira, darling, what happened to you? Did you and Lucas quarrel?"

"I don't know...I...I don't know what seized me" Kira tried to explain and kept whining. "I gave him the t-shirt we bought at the market and then...he said that he finds Jane nice and I...I..."

"Are you jealous of Jane?" her mother suggested, trying to hold back an amused smile in front of what seemed to be quite a jealousy scene. She had been wondering in the bottom of her heart what that very particular friendship between Kira and Lucas would turn into, when the two of them left puberty to enter teenage. Could her daughter's fondness towards him accept the presence of another girl next to Lucas? Would he ever be able to part from his best friend?

She had gotten more and more certain in the last years that the tie between those two children could never break up and that sooner or later she would find them petting behind the garden hedge.

And now, seeing that her daughter had fallen victim to jealousy and was suffering for her first love pain, she couldn't avoid smiling and feeling pleased with her excellent intuition which had never disappointed her.

"I'm not jealous!" Kira got into a huff.

"So, why are you crying? Tell me the truth, are you falling in love with Lucas?" Elizabeth supposed, pretending to be indifferent to the evident blush on her daughter's pale face.

"No, I'm not! What are you saying, mum?"

"I'm just saying that getting so angry because Lucas likes another girl is very strange... By the way, you've grown up now and it had to happen sooner or later. To him or to you..." she teased her.

"Lucas is mine!" Kira got dejected and started crying her eyes out again. "I'm not going to share him with anybody!"

"Kira," her mother whispered, getting moved and troubled.

"I don't want to lose him! I love him, mum."

"I know, sweetheart," Elizabeth sighed and hugged her daughter to comfort her.

They kept hugging each other for a long time, till the girl stopped crying.

"Was Lucas really crying?" Kira asked after a while.

"Yes, he was. I hadn't seen him crying for ages" her mother told her with sorrow, making her daughter feel terribly guilty. "You should apologize to him."

"Yes, you're right. I didn't mean to make him cry" she just mumbled as she felt very ashamed of her behaviour.

"What about making banana biscuits with chocolate drops and bringing them to him?" her mother suggested, trying to cheer her up.

"Lucas loves those biscuits!"

Wiping away sadness, Kira and her mother started making a large baking tray full of flower-shaped biscuits. Being busy in making perfect biscuits, Kira forgot her conversation with Lucas and just focused on making peace with him.

The biscuits were almost perfectly baked in the oven one hour later and Kira was really looking forward to taking them out and bringing them immediately to her friend. She couldn't wait clearing her conscience which was weighing on her.

"What a sweet smell of biscuits!" a male voice burst out behind them.

They suddenly turned and saw Kenzo Yoshida's imposing and decorated figure.

"Daddy!" Kira shouted in the seventh heaven and rushed to hug her father. She hadn't seen him for almost a month. Even if it took just an hour by car to get to the base, Kenzo could go back to his family just a few times a month or even less.

"Darling!" Elizabeth followed her, running into her husband's arms. "Why are you already back? You said you wouldn't come home before August."

"I'm on leave and I've got great news for us all!" the man answered smiling.

"Tell us everything, please."

"We're moving back to Tokyo!" Kira's father exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" his wife asked puzzled.

"I've understood me, Ely. They have moved me again, they are sending me back to the American Embassy in Tokyo. Kira, are you happy? You're going to see granny again. I'm sure she is looking forward to hugging you again."

"I don't want to go back to Japan!" his daughter burst out, as soon as she realized what that news meant.

"Kenzo, I've got a job here and I didn't think..."

“Ely, you haven't understood how the matter stands. This is not something negotiable, it's orders from above and you can say thanks to your *dear friend* Darren Scott,” the man explained in an icy voice.

“What a bast...”

“Don't speak like that in front of the child,” her husband stopped her, as he didn't want his daughter to listen to swearwords.

“I'm not a child any more and I don't want to go back to Tokyo!” Kira meddled again, on the verge of tears.

“I want to leave before the new school term begins. I'm going to share my time between home and the embassy, while you can stay at my mother's, like before. I've already contacted Kira's old school and they have place for her! She will just have to pass an exam and she will be able to attend intermediate school” her father went on carelessly, making his daughter get very anxious: she looked on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

“No, no, no, no, no!” the young girl kept shouting, shutting her ears.

“Kira, you knew we were going to stay here just for four years!” her father tried to make her use her head, grasping her shoulders, but she started squirming and crying desperately.

“No, no, no! I don't want to leave! I want to stay here! In Princeton! With Lucas!”

“I'm sorry, child. But that's impossible!”

“No, I don't want” Kira shouted her heart out, pushing her father violently away, rushing out of the back door and to the garage to take her bike.

Her father's reproaching shouts and her mother's desperate ones were completely useless.

Panting breathlessly and with terror deep inside her heart for what was going on, the girl took her bike and, before her father could get to her, she rushed into the street and started riding it with all her strength: she knew the boy's home was five long kilometers far.

When she got to the Scott family's sumptuous and majestic villa, all the muscles in her legs were burning and she felt pain in her throat because of the strain.

Luckily there was a light wind that day, so each tear which had tried to streak down her face, was almost dry before coming out.

Using the small passage Lucas had made three years before by breaking some part of the fencing, Kira was able to walk stealthily into the villa and ran breathlessly into the house.

She knew that Lucas' father would never allow her in, as it had always happened in those four years, but she could identify the window of her friend's bedroom, so she ran underneath and called him, with the little breath that was left to her.

After shouting Lucas's name seven times, she was shaken by tears and fell on her knees on the gravel, praying that it was just an awful nightmare.

She jumped and suddenly stood up scared when she felt a light touch on her shoulder.

She feared it might be Darren Scott or her own mother, but luckily, as soon as she turned, she could see Lucas's drawn and sad face.

She looked at him, trying to wipe away those irritating tears which made the real world around her flickering.

Lucas had taken the plaster away, so Kira could see his wound among the hair on his eyebrow. However, she was still more shattered by his swollen and red eyes, since she wasn't used to them any more.

She instinctively looked for a handkerchief in her pocket, so she could wipe away his scared air, but she had forgotten everything when she had run away from home.

“Kira,” the boy whispered. He felt devastated when he saw his friend crying. That was something unexpected and it made him feel very bad again.

“Lucas,” Kira burst out, flinging herself into his arms. She held him tight with all her strength, as if she feared the wind could take him away from her.

She felt Lucas's arms returning her hug and completely embracing her.

"I'm sorry, Kira," the boy mumbled dejected, smothering his words through her long and silky hair.

"Oh, Lucas! Please, forgive me. I don't want to lose you," Kira sobbed, holding him still tighter.

"Neither do I," Lucas was shaken.

Kira could hear his friend's heart beating faster and faster, while his breathing turned irregular. She knew he was crying and that made her broken down.

She had been looking after him for years and she had got to know him, to love him and support him. So at that moment she couldn't believe what she was going to tell him soon after.

"My father has been transferred back to Tokyo. He wants my mother and I to go back to Japan with him," she could say without parting from Lucas, but he suddenly took a step back, as soon as he realized what she meant.

Kira shivered because of that sudden separation. Then she saw Lucas looking at her with a shattered look.

"I don't want, but..." Kira tried to explain to him.

"So don't do it! Don't go. Don't leave me alone...you too. I'm begging you," Lucas stammered terrified and started shaking. He had already lost his mother and he was going to lose his best friend soon.

Why were all the women he loved going to leave him sooner or later?

"I don't want to leave you alone," Kira stated seriously, trying to recover a bit of clearness.

"So don't go back to Japan!" Lucas begged her in such a painful voice that it sounded like a stab in Kira's heart.

Her answer slipped out of her lips before she could even think about it.

"All right," she answered, starting brooding over it to find a solution.

The smile which finally spread on Lucas's face was worthier than a thousand Christmas presents.

"Will you promise?"

Elizabeth usually told her daughter to avoid making promises she couldn't keep, but Kira had no doubts about what was going to happen: she was going to stay in Princeton with Lucas, by hook or by crook.

"I promise" she said, making a cross on her heart.

The happiness rising on Lucas's face became immediately infectious; as they hugged each other once more, Kira swore to herself that she would do anything to stay close to her best friend.

Unfortunately, her mother hooted her car, which was parked outside the estate gate, interrupting them, so Kira had to go back home.

"Put on your plaster again, or you'll get a scar" she worried, brushing her forefinger on his wounded eyebrow. See you tomorrow. At home."

"Let's have a great *Super Mario* match, shall we?" Lucas suggested feeling more serene, before his friend went out from the secret passage she had used to get in.

"I'm going to hammer you!" Kira challenged him cheerfully before getting into the car, but as soon as Lucas disappeared from her sight, she felt something breaking inside herself, just in the middle of her chest.

Would she be able to keep her promise to Lucas?

## ADAM

*Tokyo, Japan, November 11th 2015*

When he reached the old wing of the building, his heart was beating fast.

He looked around with caution, making sure that he had left behind all the horny girls who were always following him, craving to become his girlfriend.

Being the most handsome boy in the school had turned into a curse for him, especially after what had happened with Arashi.

If he only thought about what had just happened to him, he could feel some more fuel in his legs.

“Is there a place far enough to run away from what I'm feeling?” Adam's mind was shouting, when he got to the broken door leading into a room which was once the school library, before the last earthquake had made that side of the building unfit for use two years before.

The headmaster had finally found cheaper building a new library in the east wing, than reinforcing the north wing and making it safe, so that place was always deserted now.

Still shaken for Youra's kiss and Arashi's hug, Adam started pushing open the door of his secret shelter...almost secret, since he had had to share it with a fresher in the last year.

Only when he got inside, he flopped down on the floor, holding his head between his legs and hoping he could forget what had been whirling in his mind for a long time.

He recollected Youra's image. Gorgeous Youra. Every single boy in his school would go to any lengths in order to go out with her, but every single girl in his school would sell her soul to the devil in order to go out with him.

Youra hadn't taken a long time before looking for him and asking him to be her boyfriend, and he had agreed just because that was what all his friends expected from him.

Even his father had shaken hands with him at that moment, happy and proud of him.

But when she had tried to kiss him, he had felt nervous and had got in a cold sweat, while his head and his heart kept reminding him Arashi's smile.

“Why Arashi? Youra is the right one for me! I love Youra!” he had been telling himself for more than two months, but Arashi's smile, his hugs or his slap on the back were enough to turn Youra into impalpable air if compared to Arashi's sunny brightness.

He had been wondering till he got exhausted about the reasons of his behaviour but with no results, till that day at least.

It was just something silly: someone had tripped Arashi up and he had fallen into Adam's arms, even if just for a few moments.

Just a few moments...but they were enough to make him rush into the toilette to hide the evident erection which was pushing against his school uniform trousers.

“What a shame!”

He had run like a crazy to wipe that blameworthy and out of place instinct away from his mind. Even the memory of Youra's naked body hadn't been able to turn his attention from that.

“Why is all this happening to me? What's wrong with me?” Adam was dejected and tried to hold back those feelings which seemed to choke him.

He was going to break down once more and give vent to frustrated and shameful tears, when he heard someone else moaning painfully in the room.

He had already heard it several times in the last days, but it sounded much more desperate this time.

Feeling curious and worried at the same time, he got up and moved slowly to the bookshelf where fantasy novels used to lie.

Without making any sound, he cast a glance between the aisles, till he could see the whining girl. She was sitting on the floor as usual, her arms around her knees curled up on her breast and her legs left completely naked by her crumpled skirt. She was crying her heart out.

He wiped away from his mind his classmates' motto, saying that nobody could give up a chance of seeing a girl's panties, and he moved closer to her.

As soon as the girl realized he was there, she stopped crying and suddenly jumped up, wiping her face with her school uniform sleeve.

“Use this one,” Adam told her, handing her his handkerchief.

The girl grasped the white tissue with shaking and fearful hands and wiped her face carefully.

“Thanks...You're Adam Gramell, aren't you?”

“Yes, and you're Kira Yoshida, aren't you?” he guessed, pretending being uncertain of her answer, when he perfectly knew who that girl was. Even if she was two years younger than him and she always looked so miserable, that girl hadn't actually been able to escape any male radars since she had stepped into their school one year before. Her only slightly prominent eastern features had immediately attracted everybody's attention. Her parents came from two different ethnic groups like his, but Adam's father was American and he had taken his blue eyes, which made him so terribly charming, after him, besides his stately and muscular body. Kira instead had her mother's unusual dark green eyes, while her long and straight hair was like Japanese ones. However, there was something awfully charming in her and her mysterious, discreet and sad look had always made her the object of some boy's attention, even if she surely got rid of them all very quickly.

“Do you know me?”

“Half-blood people like us never go unnoticed.”

That statement seemed to strike her, since he could see her smile for the first time.

“But I'm not the nicest boy in the school like you: the famous Youra Lee-Kuro's boyfriend, a basketball champion, school *idol* and *Lovely's* cover boy.”

“Wow! I hadn't realized I was so famous!” Adam stopped her, feeling uneasy.

“You can't avoid it, if you appear on the cover of the most famous magazine for girls. You have a future as an *idol*” Kira replied. She had always read *Lovely*, since her classmate M *isaki* had lent it to her.

“That was three months ago.”

“Do you mean that you aren't going to become an *idol*?”

“Exactly! Neither now nor ever,” Adam stated with a very broad smile which was trying to hide his pain and sorrow for having been forced to give up his dream. He had always been charmed by the fashion world and the idea of becoming a model had prodded him from the start.

His interview for *Lovely* should have been the best launching pad...at least till his father had accused the magazine of “having tricked his son with gay-like nonsense and trifles.” He had shouted to him that he'd rather die than see his own son walking like a “freak” dressed in “freak” clothes in the middle of “freak” fashion designers.

“There's a place at the Military Academy waiting for you, my son,” his father had told him proudly, since he loathed the possibility that Adam could do something else with his life, maybe something not very “heterosexual.”

He never knew whether it was those words' fault or his terror of being marked as homosexual by his father, but he had started going out with Youra the day after and they had paired off three days later.

He didn't feel happy though, but he was too scared to look for a different solution.

“It's a pity. I don't know why, but I've always thought you would become a model when you grew up...That's probably because I always see you modelling along the school corridors,” Kira said, bringing him back into the real world.

“Thank you for your kind words, but I've already decided to follow in my father's steps and become a soldier like him.”

Suddenly the girl burst out crying again and fell at his feet.

“Hey, are you okay? Have I said anything wrong?” Adam got immediately scared and leant down in front of her.

“I hate soldiers,” Kira could hardly sob.

“I thought you father was a soldier like mine.”

“He is actually... and I hate him too. I had to leave Princeton for his fault.”

Adam tried to speak again, but he was frozen by the girl's gloomy despair.

He could understand her so well: she was confined in a world she didn't want.

“So, is that the reason why you often come here and cry?” Adam whispered softly, trying to hold back the emotion that scene was stirring inside himself.

Unlike all the other girls in their school, Kira wasn't crying for a bad mark, for a love disappointment or for any other girlish foolishness. He was very struck by her.

“Would you like to go back to Princeton? To your friends?” he guessed again.

“To Lucas,” Kira moaned and sniffed her nose.

“Lucas? Is he your boyfriend?”

“No, he is my best friend. He is in danger and I'm not there with him any more, to protect him... I don't even know where he is at the moment and what's happening to him” the girl sobbed, showing Adam the sealed envelop she was holding in her hand.

Adam turned it upside down in his hands. The letter was addressed to a Lucas Scott from Kira Yoshida, but it had been sent back to her with the words “unknown addressee,” written by the post office with a big red stamp.

“Your friend might have moved home. Did your Lucas ever tell you anything?”

Kira stopped crying with a superhuman effort and she tried to focus on the explanation she should give him. She had never been in confidence with anyone in the last year, not even with her school mate Misaki, but at the moment she was feeling like offloading the burden she was carrying inside onto someone else.

She had never spoken to Adam before actually, but his eyes made her understand she could trust him.

“My father was moved to the USA five years ago, so we went to live in Princeton, next to Davenport...I met Lucas there. He is as old as me and went to my same school. I'm very fond of him and I've always tried to protect him from that alcohol addicted butcher, but...”

“Alcohol addicted butcher?”

“His father,” Kira explained and started crying again. “He beat him... Lots of times and I couldn't stop him. My mother tried too, but with no effect... however, we helped Lucas a lot by our presence and the violent scenes became less frequent, but I'm not with him any more now, I...I...”

A new burst of weeping.

“He is alone at the moment and there is nobody ready to protect him,” Adam guessed, feeling sorry for him. “What about his mother?”

“She died some years ago and left Lucas alone with his father” Kira answered in a very scornful and resentful voice towards that woman who should have looked after her own son instead of running away to the after-world, in her opinion. “I'm the only one who cares about Lucas in this world and I left him.”

That guilty feeling and her pain for that state of things struck Adam like a punch in his stomach, leaving him absolutely breathless.

“What will he do without me? I'm sure is father will beat him again and I won't be there. I'm not there with him any more, can you understand me?” Kira went on giving vent to her deep frustration. “My mother keeps saying that Lucas never answered my letters for his father's fault and

that he probably never gives them to him... but after this last one, I don't know what I should think. Could anything serious have happened to him?"

"Can't you hear from him anyway?"

"Thanks to her previous job, my mum was able to learn that Lucas is well, even if his father has a lot of money in the last year because of some wrong investment. But that's not enough for me! I want to go back to Princeton! I should never have gone away! It's all my father's fault."

"Your father was moved back to the USA embassy in Tokyo a year ago, wasn't he?"

"Yes, I prayed and begged him to leave me in Princeton. I was ready to go to college, but he didn't let me do it. The worst thing is that I was really sure I would stay there with Lucas. I had sworn to him that I would never leave him, instead...I don't know if he will be able to forgive me. He'll think I'm treacherous like his mother."

"That's not your fault."

"It's all my fault: each time Lucas feels pain, it's my fault, my parents are always quarrelling for my fault..." Kira burst out because she had noticed her parents' never ending night quarrels, when they believed she was sleeping in her bedroom. Leaving Princeton had been difficult for her mother too, because she had had to leave her job and her daughter was dejected and unrecognisable, so that had been a very bad blow for Elizabeth too.

"I've never seen our daughter crying so much, not even when she was a baby! Kenzo, I've been trying to make her stop for months! I was wrong to agree with you and leave Princeton. And what for? To turn into your mother's carer? Oh, Kenzo, this isn't the kind of life I wished for," Elizabeth often complained.

"Tokyo is my home town and my wife should look after my mother which is a widower now and is alone. Besides, I've already told you to look for a part-time job, but only if you are able to look after our daughter. Being so often far away from you was a mistake. Kira clearly needs some discipline and moral rules" her husband kept telling her.

"What are you hinting at? Do you think I didn't match up my responsibilities towards her?"

"Should I remind you that our daughter hasn't spoken to me for months and is behaving very badly with everybody? Not to mention her bad marks at school! She didn't even pass her entrance examination at the International School and she is attending a very common Japanese school at the moment."

"Kira has always been the best in her class! What did you expect from her? You suddenly dragged her away from her school, her friends and above all from Lucas! You know how much she cares about him!"

"You should call him a scapegrace!"

"It's not his fault if he has a father like that."

"I don't care! Kira's life is here now and she must accept it!" her husband ended every time before leaving the house and slamming the door.

At the memory of those quarrels, Kira was carried away by a new torrent of tears.

Without uttering any other word, Adam made her sit down on a dusty chair and let her give vent to her feelings, till she stopped crying.

"I'm so sorry for what you are going through," Adam burst into her thoughts. "I don't know what's happening to your friend, but I can tell you that you should put more trust in him, in my opinion."

"I trust him!"

"So, stop considering him like the victim he used to be when you were children. He is growing up like you, so he will soon be able to protect himself from his father, you'll see."

"But Lucas is so small and thin if compared to his father."

"He probably used to be like that, but I'm sure he'll turn into a strong boy soon, capable of looking after himself."

Kira looked at him with wide- open eyes. She had never thought that Lucas could be able to protect himself from that monster. In her mind, Lucas was still a small and slim nine-year-old child, covered in bruises and scratches. However, Adam was right: Lucas had grown up and had become stronger, even if that wasn't enough. At the moment.

"Thanks," the girl mumbled softly, turning in her hands the handkerchief which was soaked with tears and mucus.

"No problem. I didn't feel like being lumbered with maths today," Adam laughed, trying to play it down.

"Oh my God, school! I had science today," Kira suddenly remembered when she looked at her watch. Almost an hour had gone by since she had run away to her secret shelter.

"I think you'd better wipe your face before going back to school, or your teacher will get worried."

Kira smiled at him gratefully.

They walked to the door together.

"You aren't telling anyone what I said, are you?"

"Of course not!" Adam comforted her. Seeing her crying had been a sort of catharsis for him too, as well as something relieving, even if he hadn't shed any tear...almost.

He liked that girl. He had been able to feel her sensitivity and her sweetness during that short time.

He hadn't seen anybody crying for a friend till then.

She wanted to protect Lucas and defend him from life's injustice.

He wished he could have someone like her standing on his side as well!

"Can I ask you a question?" Kira asked him after a short while.

"Of course."

"Why do you usually hide in the library too and sometimes cry?" she asked him with caution.

"What? I...?" Adam stammered uneasy.

"Yes, I saw you. But if you don't want to tell me, I'll understand."

Adam sighed dejected and all the thoughts which had been haunting him since he had run away cropped up again violently in his mind.

How should he answer her?

"I think there is something different inside myself," he said in a whisper, realizing the meaning of his own words for the first time.

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*Princeton, Kentucky, November 11th 2015*

"I'm sorry, Mr Lucas," Rosalinda, who had become the Scott family's ex- housekeeper, sighed sorrowfully.

"I'm sorry too," Lucas mumbled gloomily, without raising his eyes from his homework. He couldn't stand that woman's tears. False tears. Crocodile ones. Female ones.

"You cry at first, then you betray and leave," the boy wished he could shout at her, but he held back and grasped the pen violently, till he almost broke it.

"You don't need me any more here. Your house is small and your father doesn't want me" Rosalinda tried to justify herself.

"It's all right."

"I'm so sorry."

"What for? For seizing the opportunity and running away from a violent and drunkard master who often beats you too?" he wished he could answer.

"Enjoy my father's severance pay."

“Mr Lucas, I didn't want to leave. I've stayed here all these years just for you... Things got worse after your mum's death, but I stayed here in spite of it all, even if I was never brave enough to revolt against Mr Scott.”

“Goodbye, Rosy,” Lucas stopped her as he couldn't stand that woman's words any more. She should go and relieve her conscience with someone else! He had to study, as he was sick of being teased for the way he read in front of other people, or for his poor marks, even if he tried hard to do better.

Since Kira had left, “his clever and sagacious mind” as she used to call it, seemed to have retired! Kira...

If he just thought about her, he could feel his stomach churning till he had to bend down with spasms.

He didn't even notice the housekeeper who was still standing by his bedroom's door.

“Mr Lucas.”

“What else do you want from me? I told you to go away!” the boy suddenly burst out furiously.

“I've done a lot of mistakes with you, when I used to support your father... I was scared, but... No, I don't have any excuse, but I'm going to tell you something I always kept secret.”

“I don't care,” Lucas stopped her, getting more and more furious.

“It's about Kira, the girl who went back to Japan last year,” Rosalinda hinted, knowing that it was a delicate subject.

Kira. Once more.

A new spasm struck his stomach violently.

“I don't care,” Lucas told her again, twisting his hands to stop shaking with anger and despair as he had done all that year long. The worst year in his life.

“I know you're lying. That girl was everything to you, Mr Lucas. I saw how much you suffered in the last months. You have to understand me: I wish I could have told you before, that Kira didn't forget you, as Mr Scott made you believe. I regret what I did, but I don't want to go away without telling you the truth. Kira wrote several letters to you in the past months. Eighty-six, exactly.”

She had finally succeeded in being the centre of Lucas's attention: he was staring at her bewildered, with open-wide eyes.

“Eighty-six letters? So, where are they?” he was able to ask her, while his brain was trying to focus on her words.

“Your father took them and burned them. All of them,” she revealed, while she avoided telling him that she had always read them. “I'm very sorry.”

Lucas kept staring into space with his hazy mind for a long while, before he could move a single muscle.

He didn't even react when Rosalinda went on saying she was sorry, before going out of that house, never to come back.

When Lucas came back into the real world, he could just feel a blind anger against the man who had brought him into the world and had then taken away from him even the poor comfort he could get in reading his best friend's letters.

He had been suffering for a long time and he hated Kira for having left him, after she had sworn again and again that she would never do it.

She had told him that she was ready to give anything up for him and she would never leave him, but instead...

Not even the t-shirt she had given him that cursed summer was left to him, as he had torn it to pieces in a fit of folly, after he had been discharged from hospital because of a dislocated shoulder.

He had fallen from the stairs by accident, he had told them after his father had threatened him.

He walked to the living room in a state of trance, since he knew he would find his father there, as drunk as a lord.

Their house was small, unlike the villa where they used to live in the past and which that vicious monster had foolishly lost in a game of poker a month before.

He quickly got to the piano-bar, where he found an empty bottle of bourbon lying on the counter.

His father was leaning down and looking for something else to drink, but he caught a glimpse of his son's arrival and he got up.

"Where's Rosalinda? I want her to go and buy some more bourbon," the man muttered while he tottered to his armchair, but his son blocked his way.

"You fired her, don't you remember? She went away a few moments ago and she told me about Kira's letters," Lucas told him, trying to hold back the anger which was starting to prostrate him.

"Silly bitch! Why should she tell you?! I wish I had fired her before."

"How could you dare burn Kira's letters," Lucas burst out, unable to hold back any more.

His father looked at him for a moment, puzzled by his son's sudden verbal attack, then he recovered his temper.

"I'm your father and I can do what I want! You belong to me."

"I don't belong to you!" Lucas shouted as an answer.

"How can you dare talk that way to your father?" the man got angry, addressing his fist to the boys' chest, but Lucas was able to avoid it by a feline leap. However, he was too angry to be satisfied with protecting himself. He needed to let off steam.

He felt the urge to give vent to his anger by beating someone for the first time in his life so, before he could even realize that new desire, he could feel his whole body stretching towards the man who had turned his childhood into hell, and striking his jaw violently, taking advantage of the drunkard's unsteadiness.

He was taken back into reality by a sharp pain in his hand.

Darren Scott was surprised and shocked by that attack, which had been more violent than he wanted to admit: he fell to his knees and felt a pain in his face.

He was trying to stand up, when he was stricken again, by a powerful kick which left him breathless.

"Silly bastard!" the man shouted at Lucas, panting and trying to protect himself.

"You are a bastard!" the boy replied, then assaulted him once more.

"I'll go and fetch my belt, then we'll see if you dare talk to me like that again," he threatened him in a voice shaking with anger.

"Just beat me! Beat me as long as you wish, dad! These are the only things you can do: get drunk and beat me. Well, you can do it, but I'm not going to keep still and wait for your blow with the belt any more!" his son shouted at him exasperated, while he went on punching him.

"You...rotten merchandise..." the man muttered, shaken by his son's assault.

"You're rotten merchandise!" his son suddenly replied. He felt tired of that assault which he couldn't stop any more and which seemed to get stronger and stronger after each new blow.

His father burst out laughing scornfully.

"Lucas, just remember this: a fruit never falls far from his tree."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are as corrupted and rotten as me. You're my son and I'm your father! My same blood runs in your veins!"

"I'm not going to be like you!"

"You already are. That's why everybody keeps leaving you, just like your mother did to you and me. Nobody wants to stay with such a failure as you. Even your young friend ran away, as soon as she could."

"That's not true! Kira loves me. They forced her to leave."

“You're a poor fool! That girl never really loved you, or she would have stayed here! You know, Lucas, I read the letters she kept writing to you. What a mawkish girl! But I can tell you this: Kira isn't coming back to you any more! And she isn't writing to you again, because she has decided to give up running after such a poor fool like you,” his father told him scornfully.

Lucas would rather be slashed by his father's belt at that moment, than listening to his terrible words, which were rotting him from inside.

He was feeling dirty and ready for self-destruction.

He called Kira's name one last time, but he already knew that his dear friend wouldn't run to help him and heal him from the pain which was tormenting him. She would never come back.

He rushed out of the room, feeling shattered and disgusted for what he was and what he might become, and left his father there, coughing and recovering his breathe with the help of a bottle of whisky.

## RELATIONSHIPS

*Tokyo, Japan, January 9th 2017*

“You're so beautiful,” her mother whispered to her, while she finished combing her hair.

“Thanks,” Kira exclaimed with a broad smile on her lips, which made Elizabeth's heart leap with joy. Seeing that happy look on her daughter's face was the best lenitive she had, to wipe away the anxiety and anguish she had been feeling in the last two years.

And it was all happening thanks to Adam Gramell. By his sweetness and sensitivity, that boy had been able to find his way into Kira's heart, helping her to forget Lucas Scott, that boy in Princeton.

Elizabeth hadn't certainly appreciated very much the fact that he was two years older than Kira, but her daughter's smile had been enough to dispel her fears.

Besides, Adam was the kindest and most harmless boy in the world and Kira didn't seem to worry about all the love letters he got from his classmates.

“I trust him, mum! I know Adam very well, and I'm sure he would never deceive me!” Kira had told her two weeks before.

“Deceive you? Oh, Kira, have you already gone so far? You told me you were just friends! You're still so young and...” her mother had got scared.

“Keep calm, mum! And then, I'm fifteen years old, nearly sixteen! I'm not a child any more and we haven't gone so far yet, even if Adam is seventeen!”

“Really? Haven't you? Would you tell me, if it was...”

“Mum, just trust me. Adam and I are just friends, even if I can't deny that we have been thinking about pairing off lately.”

“Please, Kira...”

“I know: I must take it easy. I mustn't hurry up. As you always say, make love and not sex with a stranger. Blah, blah, blah,” Kira kept saying like a robot, as she had memorized her mother's advice. Elizabeth had panicked five months before, when Kira had told her that her classmate Misaki wasn't a virgin any more.

“That's perfect.”

“However, Adam knows I'm not ready yet and that's okay for him. He told me that our friendship is the most important thing.”

“I hope so,” her mother sighed, surrendering.

Luckily the door bell rang at that moment, putting an end to a conversation which always made Kira uneasy, also because of her sense of guilt for all the lies she kept telling about Adam and herself.

“It must be Adam! Can you go and open the door? I'm still choosing the shoes I'm going to wear,” Kira asked her, trying to tidy up the clothes she had thrown on her bed.

She saw her mother hesitating for a moment, before she walked away.

“I'm really happy, do you know it?” she told Kira, then she went out of the room.

“So am I, mum. But please, hurry up now, or Adam will believe that I'm going to keep him outside in the cold. You know he feels it so much!”

“I didn't believe you could start smiling again, after we left Princeton and... Lucas,” Elizabeth mumbled cautiously. She hadn't spoken about that for some months, because she didn't want to make her daughter cry, but she felt that something was changing at that moment.

Kira suddenly stopped when she heard her friend's name, then, without raising her eyes from her clothes, she succeeded in answering after a long while, without surrendering to sadness.

“I'm going back to him, mum. I promised.”

Elizabeth started shaking because of her daughter's words and she understood she was wrong: nothing had changed.

\*\*\*

*Princeton, Kentucky, January 15<sup>th</sup> 2017*

As soon as the girl's mouth brushed his lower lip, he couldn't avoid moaning with pain.

"Couldn't you wait one more day, before letting Kurt split your lip?" the blonde girl said in a flute-like voice, making her tongue slip down his neck till his naked chest.

"Come on, get dressed. My lesson is starting in twenty minutes," Lucas suddenly got nervous, trying to get free from that leech.

"Since when have you cared about school?" the girl laughed amused, putting her bra on with a theatrical gesture, trying to turn Lucas's attention on herself, but he didn't reply and without even casting a glance at her, he put his trousers on and walked away.

"Are you going to call me tomorrow? There's a party..." she tried again.

"No, I'm busy" Lucas said quickly in an irritated voice, making the girl's nerves jump.

"Are you ditching me, filthy bastard?"

"Just think as you wish. I'm going."

"Is that all? We've just made love and you're leaving me like that now!" the young woman sobbed, on the verge of tears.

Lucas cast a quick glance at her and felt like breaking something, when he saw her tears. His hands were still hurting after his fight with Kurt, so he had hoped he could calm his fiery temper with the help of Jennifer's fabulous body, but, as it had happened to him four times before, he hadn't felt anything for her, excepted an overwhelming orgasm.

He avoided reminding her that what they had just done was mere sex, since he didn't know anything about her, just her bra's size.

"That's true," he just answered, then he shut the door behind himself and rushed to his classroom, ready to start a mess and to annoy professor Kleyton.

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*Tokyo, Japan, January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2017*

"Are you ready?" Adam whispered to her, approaching his lips to hers.

Kira swallowed hard and nodded slightly. She felt like a coiled spring and her heart was beating fast, while she kept wondering if she was doing the right thing.

"Listen, if you've changed your mind about it..." Adam got worried and moved away from her.

"Of course I haven't!" Kira got nervous. She had had that idea as she wanted to help her friend, so she couldn't back off now. "I'm ready."

She could see Adam's face approaching hers once more, till she felt his lips on her own. She started, at a loss, opening her lips slightly and getting closer to him, just like Misaki had told her.

"What are you doing? It's disgusting!" Adam exclaimed shocked, wiping his mouth by the palm of his hand.

"Thanks," Kira replied sarcastically. "I'm trying to help you and you're paying me back this way! Sorry, but I have never kissed any boy before! I was just following Misaki's advice."

"Kira, please! Misaki's boyfriend is Tsutomu, he's just a heap of testosterone and rudeness."

"That's right!"

"Kira, you know what we are up to, aren't you?"

"Of course I do."

"We are never going to pair off like them."

"I know it. That's why I thought that, to make our story more realistic, we should try to kiss each other in public at least, so we wouldn't look like strangers from that point of view," Kira reminded him. She had spent three weeks studying all the details of their absurd plan, which would finally help his dear friend to get free from all the advances of the girls trying to seduce him (since Youra had left him) and from his father's searching and accusing eyes, as he wanted to see him with a girl.

"That's right, but please, close your mouth! I don't want to get your tongue stuck into my throat," Adam begged her, feeling slightly disgusted, then he tried to kiss her once more.

Kira kept her lips shut this time, but they were soft and the kiss was successful, even if the magical atmosphere she had imagined had vanished some moments before.

“Your lips are wonderful, Kira-chan. But unfortunately you aren't the right one for me,” Adam sighed, moved by his only true friend's efforts. “I'm a bit sorry because thanks to our story, no other boy will be able to...taste you.”

Kira's cheeks turned suddenly bright red, but she was serious and ready to go on with the text she had planned for that day.

She knew that if she pretended to have a love story with gorgeous and greatly demanded Adam Gramell, she wouldn't have any other chance to start a true love story, but she didn't care, as she had understood that she wouldn't have time for that, because of his studies and a part-time job she was looking for. She didn't want to lose her place as the best student in her class, together with the tidy sum she was putting by for her journey to Princeton.

## COMING BACK

**Lucas**

*Princeton, Kentucky, September 28<sup>th</sup> 2018*

“One more stunt like that, and I'll suspend you from school, Lucas,” the headmistress shouted angrily. “I don't care if the new term has just started. I'm not going to stand your rash acts any more, is it clear?”

“Yes, it is,” I answered slowly, with a bored half-smile, while I tried to hold back my anger which wanted to burst out against those two bastards, Garcia and Setton.

My knuckles were grazed because of the punches I had given that morning, but it hadn't been enough to prevent them from whining and going to the headmistress.

I looked around myself and saw all the students taking distances from me and from that woman, who was as spineless as an invertebrate, but who was able at the same time to terrify those silly idiots.

I had got used to stirring fear and disgust: there were some people who considered me just what I was, dregs and rotten merchandise. For some others I was instead just a criminal on bail, but I was such a good fuck as to prevent half of the girls who had already come to bed with me, from holding back their lascivious panties.

However, I couldn't stand all that notoriety anymore and I suddenly started looking for a cigarette. I needed to get out from that hellish place and take a pair of drags, if I wanted to avoid shooting my head before the end of the lesson.

I searched the back pocket of my jeans. It was empty.

“Hell, I threw the packet away before the headmistress arrived!”

Feeling really annoyed and anxious because of the way that day had started, I rushed to the door. If I was lucky, I could get to the dormitory just in time, take a packet of cigarettes and go back to my classroom, before the bell rang.

While all the people there were still staring at me, I walked along the corridor, with my usual defiant look.

I was going to get into the hall, when a vision dazzled me. Well, it had to be a vision. It certainly was.

I was paralysed by what my eyes couldn't realize yet, so I stopped, staring straight in front of me, till her eyes crossed mine.

I felt struck like I had never been before, when I noticed her surprise and her overwhelming happiness, which made her drop her trolley to the floor.

I was shattered and almost terrified by that vision, which was making my brain go haywire, then I saw her curving that small heart-shaped mouth I had never forgotten. Just when I thought I was recovering from that shock, I found myself plunging my face into her dark and sweet-smelling hair, while she threw herself into my arms and dragged me closer to her.

To the middle of a hurricane whirl.

I was left breathless as soon as the soft smell of her skin got to my nostrils.

“Lucas,” she whispered in a broken voice, piercing through my mind and soul.

I thought I would explode. I had to keep grasping at my rationality to avoid sinking into the emotional storm which was making my heart beat till it blew up.

I shut my eyes to wipe away that devilish illusion but when I opened them again, I saw it. Really. For the first time in many years.

“I've been missing you so much,” I could just hear, being suddenly captured by her wood-green eyes stuck into mine with an adoring and sad shade, while I could feel her soft and warm hands slipping along my neck and stopping on my drawn and incredulous face.

Her fingers brushed gently my left eyebrow, where I had a scar, and she half-closed her eyes for a moment. Then she stared back at me and smiled, deeply moved.

“Kira,” I was able to utter in spite of my dry throat.

As soon as I heard my own words, I understood I was lost.

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### **Kira**

I couldn't believe I was so lucky.

Adam was right when he had taken me to the shrine the day before I left and had forced me to buy a good-luck talisman.

It was working!

If I only thought about all the sacrifices I had made in the last two years, working as a part-time receptionist to spare the money, pay my journey and finance a private detective who would look for Lucas.

Instead... Heaven had been on my side for once so, after my parents' separation and my mum's decision to go back to the USA, I had immediately packed my bags, even if I was attending my last year at High School.

However, I could never have dreamt of meeting Lucas so soon and even without the help of the detective I had found on the Net!

I thanked Adam silently once more for his support and because he had never let me give up all hope. I decided to spend half of my money to buy some designer clothes for him: that was his greatest passion. By the way, I knew his taste and his clothes size perfectly, since we had spent a lot of time together going around shopping.

I smiled happy for what my fate had given me: a perfect journey, a warm September weather, my mum's leave to stay in Princeton on my own, even if I had to live at the school dormitory, while she would stay at an old friend's in Davenport, waiting to get her job as social worker back.

But the most surprising thing had been Lucas, who seemed ready to welcome me in the town High School, when I saw him walking towards me.

Oh my God, I had been missing him so much!

I had had to grasp at my super self-control to avoid bursting out crying, but when I had seen him looking at me with his wonderful, wide open hazelnut eyes, that I could make out in a thousand, I hadn't been able to hold back and I had run into his arms.

Luckily I was used to Adam's tallness and I had stood on my tiptoes by instinct, to throw my arms around his neck.

I hadn't played basketball for a while, so I hadn't become much taller, while Lucas had grown a lot.

With my body close to his, I had also felt his muscles stiffening against me under his light t-shirt.

They were very similar to the ones Adam kept moulding at the gym every day and that had made me feel in the seventh heaven. Adam was right: Lucas had grown up and I was sure that, being so well-built, he surely wouldn't let his father beat him so easily any more.

However, I had to hold back the itch I felt in my hands, ready to pull his t-shirt up and check if he had any marks of belt on his skin, or anything else.

By touching his skin and hearing his voice after such a long time, I felt the stone I had been carrying with me for so many years crumble down. Lucas was safe. He was with me. At last!

The only negative side, which was making me feel upset once more, was the scar on his left brow. Even if it was slightly covered by a piercing, I couldn't avoid noticing it, because his hair hadn't grown there again.

I took his hands into mine and held them tight, still entranced for such a quick and unexpected meeting.

“You can't imagine how much I have been missing you, Lucas. I'm so... happy,” I exclaimed stumbling on the last word, after I had brushed my fingers on the deep wounds he had on his knuckles.

I looked at him scared, at the thought of what he must have done to get safe from his father's violence.

I saw him staring straight into my eyes for a moment, then he suddenly drew back frightened.

“Lucas, are you okay?” I tried to ask him. I felt so anxious that I was almost choking, but he didn't answer me.

I tried to get closer and put my hand on his arm, but something behind me pushed me violently, making me lose my balance.

Luckily Lucas reached out his arm and held me, even if he brushed against my breast in doing it. I turned, uneasy and surprised for that strange assault and, before I could even realize what the hell was going on, I found myself crushed into four arms and enveloped in a cloud of vanilla scent.

“Kira! What a surprise!” a very sharp female voice squealed, piercing through my ears.

As soon as I was able to get free from that octopus-hug, I saw Roxanne smiling face, covered with freckles and piercings, before me. At the same time, Jane's curly red hair peeped out behind me.

My two beloved friends!

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