

THE STORM: CHAPTER 3

FIRST RECONCILIATION

BY HAN TAMASHII

Characters:

Leanne

Gender: F

Age: 13

Hair Color: Brown

Hair Style: Long (middle of back), straight

Eye Color: Brown

Brynn

Gender: F

Age: 8

Hair Color: Brown

Hair Style: Medium (chin length)

Eye Color: Brown

Mary

Gender: F

Age: 9

Hair Color: Blonde

Hair Style: Medium (shoulder length), wavy, with bangs

Eye Color: Green

Author's Notes:

Birthdays are important to children, and for more than just the presents. It's like getting a promotion. You're older, treated with more respect, and given more freedom.

Birthday *parties* are also very important. This is the time when you gather your peers, friends, and enemies in order to display your new rank and status. This ensures that everyone knows where they fit into the hierarchy. And, of course, it's an excuse to eat cake and be hyper.

Have you ever been purposely not invited to a birthday party? It's an awful feeling of rejection and disrespect. When our protagonist feels that hurt, he vows to make sure it doesn't happen again. And he's got a year to make things right.

Let's pray for him and hope it doesn't take that long.

HT

THE STORM: CHAPTER 3 FIRST RECONCILIATION

"Why weren't you at Brynn's party?"

I was too stunned to reply to Mary's question. Party? What party? Mary, being used to my quiet demeanor, kept talking rapidly. I couldn't imagine her not talking, actually. It was her favorite thing to do. I imagine her talking in her sleep and talking in the bathroom. I bet she talked underwater when we took swimming lessons in Phys. Ed class at school.

"You really missed out. The cake was amazing! It was ice cream cake. Chocolate!"

Cake? That means...

"They didn't use eight candles, though. Just one big candle shaped like the number eight. I think that's cheating. How's she supposed to have boyfriends if she only has one candle to blow out?"

Birthday. Brynn's eighth birthday party. She didn't invite me. Did she hate me that much? Maybe it was just that she didn't want boys there.

"Everyone was there. Even boys. I was shocked! Who invites boys to a girl's birthday party?"

She hated me. Everyone was there, except me. Even boys. I'd never seen her playing with any other boys. I'm ashamed to admit it, but in the three weeks since we stopped talking, I've been keeping an eye on her. Leanne tells me how she's doing too, when I ask. She's a shy girl, and doesn't play often with anyone other than her sister. And never boys.

"It was fun anyway, though. We went to the lake! The water was a bit cold, but we swam around for awhile. I HATE seaweed. It's so gross! It got between my toes. Yech! My mom says some people EAT seaweed. But I think she's just making it up. She's such a dork sometimes."

The lake? I love the lake! I love swimming! I like the squishy feeling of seaweed between my toes! Why does someone like Mary get to go to such a wonderful party and I don't? Just because...because...wait, I'm not even sure why Brynn is mad at me.

"We had a fire and roasted hot dogs and marshmallows! Brynn's dad was showing me all the different ways to roast marshmallows. He's nice. Doesn't talk to me like I'm a little kid."

I wasn't even listening to her anymore. How could I let this go on so long without even finding out why Brynn was upset? I'm such a fool. I can't ask Brynn directly, though. Right? She would just yell at me to go away or something. I couldn't take that.

Leanne would know! Wouldn't she? And she would tell me. Since that day, however, we haven't seen each other very often. Since she normally plays with Brynn, and it's well established that Brynn doesn't want to be around me, it's difficult for us to spend time together.

When we do meet up, we always play the same game. I call it strip tag. She runs off, leading us somewhere private, and I follow trying to catch her. When the coast is clear, she lets me catch her. That's when the real games begin. I'd gotten

THE STORM: CHAPTER 3 FIRST RECONCILIATION

better with my hands and tongue. She didn't need to guide me as much anymore.

Thinking about it, I felt myself start to get hard. Mary, as cute as she was, wasn't someone I wanted seeing me with a hard on. I made some excuse and wandered off to find Leanne.

I didn't find her that day. Or the next. Her family went away for the weekend. The last weekend before school started up again. They went on camping trips and fishing trips all the time. It made me envious. My family rarely traveled.

When Monday came again, I was suddenly in third grade. School was something I still enjoyed at that age. There were plenty of opportunities to show off my superior intellect without seeming to be as arrogant as I actually am. In my mind I was imagining how much fun it would be, and how far ahead of the other kids I would be.

All of my dreams were shattered, like a stained glass window hit by a meteor, when I walked into my homeroom and saw her there. Brynn and I were classmates. Universe, we have to talk.

She spotted me and spent the rest of the day pointedly ignoring me. When we chose seats, she sat as far as she could get. She actually asked a boy to move! I couldn't hear what she said, but as she was talking, she pointed directly at me. The boy looked around her, checking me out. He nodded, picked up his stuff and moved.

"Stay away from her, Creep!" he spit at me as he passed me. Universe, come on! Give a guy some pity.

Recesses were the hardest. It took all of five minutes before everyone in the class hated me. No one would play with me. The playground had some big tractor tires sunk half way into the ground. I ducked into the inside of one and hid until the bell rang to return to class.

I felt empty. Completely empty. When people talked, their words echoed inside me, but I could not make out their meaning. The teacher scolded me repeatedly, but I did not feel shame. Just a deep void where feeling should be.

Was Brynn enjoying this? Did she like seeing me suffer? I turned my head slowly towards her, but she was turned away from me looking out the window. It was a sunny day, and the sun shone brightly upon her. But somehow, the way she held herself, seemed gloomy.

Her back was slouched forward, shoulders drooped. Her head was almost on her desk, but turned to the side to look out the window. Her legs were crossed, as was proper since she was wearing her cute pink dress. Only the tips of her toes touched the ground. She looked...small. Pained. And I wasn't allowed to comfort her.

I raised my hand and told the teacher I was feeling sick. She gave me permission to go to the office and phone my parents. I shuffled out of the room and only looked back as I was closing the door. Brynn's head was down. All I wanted to do was stroke her hair and tell her it was all going to be alright. Instead, I closed the door and walked away.

Later that night someone knocked on our door. I heard it from my room, where I was

THE STORM: CHAPTER 3 FIRST RECONCILIATION

laying in bed looking as miserable as possible. My mom answered and a moment later I heard someone stomping up the stairs towards my room.

Leanne burst in without knocking. She leaped onto the bed and began some playful wrestling. When I didn't play along, she stopped and looked at me worriedly.

"You really are sick, huh?"

I was embarrassed. I didn't want anyone, especially her, to see me looking so wretched. This was, however, my opportunity. Leanne was here, without Brynn, and I could finally ask her the question that's been on my mind for half a week.

"Why...does Brynn hate me?"

The words had come up in sobs, and by the time I'd said Brynn's name, I was a crying, sniffing wreck. I was watching Leanne through tearful eyes, silently pleading for help. She glanced quickly towards the door of my room. A small, gentle smile graced her lips when she looked back at me.

Her arms wrapped around me and I melted into her embrace. The blissful comfort soothed my aching chest. My sobs quieted, tears slowed. She gently stroked my back and head, cooing softly like a mother to her baby. When I was finally calm again, she spoke.

"She thinks you don't like her."

What? That didn't make any sense at all. How could she not know that I liked her? She was my sparkling princess, radiant and divine. Her smiling face was all I needed to feel happy. When she had hugged me, I had felt an affection so overwhelmingly intense well up inside me, that I could not name it.

"I like her!" I shouted simply and determinedly. Leanne smiled warmly, holding me tight. Her eyes flicked towards my bedroom door again, but when I looked, there wasn't anything interesting over there to look at.

"I know. I know." she said over and over. Like a mantra, calming my soul.

It took me a huge amount of effort to get my next words past my lips. Over time, it hasn't gotten any easier to say them. They're heavy words, they seem to sit in your stomach like lead weights. You push and push trying to force them out, knowing that it's necessary. Nothing will change until you say them. But it still takes every ounce of strength in you to lift them into your throat.

"Help me. Help me make it better."

There! I'd done it. I felt exhausted. Worn out. Leanne kissed my forehead. It was the simplest gesture. Natural. Effortless. It made all the difference to me, at that moment. It was just what I needed.

"Oh, don't worry. She'll come around. Just you wait and see."

I believed her. There really wasn't any reason to, but her small reassurance sank deep into my mind and took root. It sprouted quickly into a beautiful flower. I looked upon the pink petals and felt hope.

THE STORM: CHAPTER 3 FIRST RECONCILIATION

Hope was a bit faded, but still alive, the next day as I walked into home room. Brynn was already there. She looked over as I entered. Our eyes met, but I looked down quickly. I thought I saw something different in that moment, but I couldn't be sure.

Classes passed slowly. The dreaded recess was looming ahead, so I didn't mind. If time were to stop, I would have rejoiced. There's nothing more lonely than being surrounded by people and feeling alone.

The bell rang, as it must, and in contrast to my peers, I sluggishly shuffled outside. I surveyed the playground. Should I try to play with someone? Nothing has changed, though, has it? No, I'll just go to my hiding spot and wait for the bell.

I ducked down into the tire. The smell of the rubber burning in my nose. The dark interior was comforting. It felt private. Like my own little space. Even when one of the other kids would run over the top, it didn't bother me. In here, I was safe.

I was smiling to myself as I begun to imagine this tire as a fortress. The walls and gates protecting those inside. No one could enter without the king's permission, and I was the king. The thought was startled right out of my head as Brynn ducked under the edge of my fortress, stepping inside wordlessly. We've been invaded.

I couldn't look her in the eyes, so I studied her dress. Today she was wearing a white and purple dress. It had lace and frills on it. I thought it looked too nice to wear to school. It wasn't even picture day. Her shoes were shiny black and strappy. Also much too nice to wear in the sand like this. Her white knee socks were going to get filthy!

My eyes raised to hers, my intent was to warn her that her clothes would get dirty playing under here. Looking into her deep brown eyes, however, I was paralyzed. She was beautiful. Stunning. I'd forgotten just how radiant she was. She hadn't been this near to me for weeks.

My legs weakened and wobbled. I let myself fall. My knees thudded into the dirt, but I didn't feel a thing. My eyes were still locked on hers. She looked startled when I fell. She may have said something if I had not beat her to it.

"I'm sorry," as soon as the words left my mouth, I thought they were completely inadequate. I wanted to tell her how much I liked her. The way she brightened my world. I wanted her to know the way I adored her. A simple apology just wasn't enough, but my throat constricted, cutting off any words that may have followed.

What happened next was better than anything that had happened. It was better than Christmas morning. It was better than birthdays. Nothing could compare when she smiled at me. A smile that said a thousand things, but most importantly, it said, "I forgive you."

I couldn't help but smile too. It was infectious. At first it was smile of relief and gratitude. It kept growing, though, until it was full of joy and affection. I'm sure, with that smile, she knew everything. I didn't need to speak a word. It was plain to see.

And so, in an instant, we were friends once more. I thought that would be it. What

THE STORM: CHAPTER 3 FIRST RECONCILIATION

more could there be to end this sad chapter of my life? Brynn was more imaginative than I was, apparently. She knelt down, oblivious to the fact that she was getting a beautiful dress dirty. She took my right hand in both of hers. She leaned in. She kissed me.

It was a soft, tender kiss. Our lips barely touched, but I remember their softness vividly. Her hands were squeezing my right hand tightly. I didn't want her to ever let go.

My left hand, moving on its own, touched her cheek. Our kiss ended and she nuzzled her face into my hand. I pulled her to me and held her. With our cheeks touching, and my lips near her ear, I said the most obvious and unnecessary thing.

"I like you."

Leanne says,

*"It didn't matter at all, did it? The more you were with me,
the more you wanted to be with her. You're just like HIM.
Why can't you look at ME that way? Look at me!"*

*"I was in the hall outside your door the whole time.
I couldn't go in. I'd been so mean. You were crying,
and then you yelled again. That yell made me whole again,"*

says Brynn

*FIRST RECONCILIATION
THE STORM: CHAPTER 3
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