

## THE STORM: CHAPTER 5

### *THE BETRAYER*

BY HAN TAMASHII

#### **Characters:**

*Leanne*

Gender: F

Age: 14

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

#### **Author's Notes:**

Doing the right thing is hard. It doesn't matter how old or how righteous you are, it takes a strong constitution to do the right thing in the face of adversity. It's even more difficult when the 'right thing' will hurt one of your friends.

There have been a few times when I have had to decide whether to risk damaging a friendship or do nothing, and watch a friend do something foolish. Something that would not only hurt them, in the long run, but hurt those around them. I have always opted to save my friends in spite of themselves.

In this case, I wonder if it was the best choice. I believe I did the right thing, of course. But did it change anything or just delay the inevitable? Years later, I see no real benefit to my actions. Nothing to balance the suffering that they caused.

I don't know if I would do the same thing again. And moral uncertainty...scares the hell out of me.

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I only saw it for an instant. The blinds were promptly shut, blocking out my view. Sinking to the ground where I was hid, I thought about what I'd seen. My first clear thought was that I was glad Brynn had not been with me. My second clear thought was one of disbelief.

Leanne's boyfriend...was an old guy?!? He looked to be about thirty. Chubby and long haired. Not attractive by any standard, in my opinion. Leanne, however, had seemed to feel differently.

It had been a month or so since we played our game in Leanne's room. Since then, she had begun to shun both Brynn and I. She refused to play with us, walk home from school with us, or even let us attend her birthday party last week.

This October was much too cold for a party like they had for Brynn's birthday. No trips to the lake or swimming or roasting hot dogs over an open fire. Leanne instead opted for a sleepover party. She invited several of her friends from school. All girls, incidentally.

Brynn and I had been banished from her house for the duration of the party. We were not to be seen or heard of while Leanne's friends were over. She, being 14 now, was much too old to be hanging out with kids like us.

Brynn had stayed at my house overnight. We had fun, despite our unfair treatment. We played board games and talked until we couldn't keep our eyes open any longer, then we made our way to our indoor camp. Our sleeping bags were laid out on the living room floor. We'd made a fake campfire out of cardboard and colored it with those markers that smelled like fruit. We held hand until we fell asleep.

After that night, Leanne was openly cruel to us. She'd yell and tell us to get lost whenever we asked her to play with us. We were hurt and confused. Brynn was even more affected by it than I.

She had changed. It was in the blink of an eye, too. One day we were all friends and having fun together, the next we were bitter enemies. The biggest change was how she acted towards Brynn. There was this look of pure hate in her eyes whenever she saw Brynn.

At the time, I'd been unable to even imagine what could bring about such a change. What could conjure up such rage so quickly. Later on, I discovered that it had not been quick or sudden at all. It had been brewing, festering inside her for almost a year. And it had finally consumed her.

Being denied the advantage of hindsight, it was curiosity that made me follow her that day. She was headed off to see her boyfriend, who no one up until that day, had seen. It was a common joke between Brynn and I that he was imaginary. George the ghostly boyfriend, we called him. Tragically, this was not the case.

I trailed her from a distance. I knew where she went whenever she was going to see her boyfriend. Always to the same quarter and stood under the same tree facing the same townhouse.

She had been there two or three times since we had first followed her. There was nothing much to see, though. She would pace awhile, sometimes she would cry. Then she would just walk away looking miserable.

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This day was different. After her normal routine of brooding and pacing, she stood up straight and took a strong posture. It reminded me of that first day we'd watched her. Before she fell.

Today, she didn't fall. She didn't back down or walk away, either. She walked. Slowly, but steadily, she willed her feet forward. Towards that townhouse. Until she stood in front of it's door.

Trembling mightily, her finger pressed the doorbell. The awful waiting. Second ticked away as I waited, watching Leanne wait. The door opened after long minute. From where I was hidden, I couldn't see his face.

They talked. I couldn't hear a word, but Leanne's posture wilted. She looked like she was pleading, begging almost. Then a hand reached out and pulled her inside. Not that he was forcing her. She looked relieved and stepped into the house eagerly.

This scene only increased my curiosity. I knew how to get some answers, and that's what I did. Sneaking around to the back of the townhouse, keeping my head below the top of the wooden fence, I got into position to peer through the patio blinds.

By the time I was able to get a good look, a shocking scene was already in progress. Leanne was standing, bent over at the waist and leaning on something, with her skirt pulled up and her panties at her knees.

The man was stepping out of his jeans at that moment. I saw that he had an erection and was stepping up behind Leanne. His body was in the way and I couldn't see if he entered her or not. They were starting to move a bit, though, before he stopped and reached for the cord to close the blinds.

Confusion was the dominant emotion. I didn't have much knowledge or experience with sex, but I knew, instinctively, that this was wrong. Leanne and I had fooled around, sure, but that was different. It was just games.

Honestly, I didn't understand the difference. I only knew that there was one. This was something different, and it was something they shouldn't be doing. Another thing I knew was that this was something I should tell an adult about.

It wasn't something I did easily, however. Friends have a certain loyalty to each other. Even now that we weren't all that friendly towards each other, it was difficult for me to tattle on her.

In the end, I thought about how she had been acting recently. She had been edgy, irritable, and angry. If this was something good for her, she should be happy, right? The only thing I saw was a constant suffering. An unending agony that I imagined feeling a thousand times worse than falling off your bike.

And so it was that an hour later I was sitting on my couch telling my parents what I'd seen. They listened. They took me seriously. Which didn't make it easy to do, but it made it less difficult. I was crying by the end. A small bag of nerves and jitters.

That feeling didn't fade over the next few days. There were police everywhere. They talked to me, my parents, Leanne and her family. They took the man into custody. My

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involvement was never revealed to Leanne or her parents. My betrayal was secret.

It still didn't feel good. Even worse, because it was so intensely applauded by my parents and the police. They called me a hero. In my mind a hero was someone with a gun or super powers. They could fly and they saved everyone without fail. They made everyone smile again.

Leanne was not smiling. From what Brynn was telling me, she was doing a whole lot of crying. None of it turned out like it should have. There was no happily ever after for this story.

The man was never convicted. In fact, Leanne's parents dropped the charges. I know now why, but at the time, I couldn't begin to imagine. Apparently the police can't just walk away from a possible sexual abuse case, though. They came back to question me again.

This time, with Leanne and her parents denying the whole event, the police were much less friendly with me. They asked me questions until I was so scared and upset, I couldn't remember what happened anymore. They told me I was angry because she was mean to me. I wanted to get back at her. I did this all for revenge, didn't I? They kept on and on. I just wanted them to go away. So I told them I made it all up.

The police seemed satisfied, but my parents were furious. I heard one cop talking to my dad, "He had to learn not to make false accusations like that. We wasted a lot of time and manpower here. And we caused a lot of grief for that family."

In a blink, I went from hero to criminal. Oh nothing really happened. I was grounded for awhile, but no one was going to charge an eight year old with anything.

The man was apologized to. He went on living as if nothing had happened. Although his neighbors always treated him with suspicion after that. It was small satisfaction, though.

A week later I was still grounded. My parents made an exception, and let Brynn come in. She was crying, already, and flung herself into my arms. We hugged. It took ten minutes before she could speak.

"We're moving," she whimpered, "in two weeks."

As soon as she said it, she was reduced to violent sobbing again. She pulled away from me and ran out the door as I stood there, stunned.

You know how they say your life flashes before your eyes as you're about to die? My friendship with Leanne and Brynn flashed before my eyes just then. We'd only known each other for a few months. It didn't feel like a short time at all. It felt full. It felt like something that couldn't be defined by it's age.

We had played, fought, made up, played some more. We'd laughed and cried and held each other. It was a time that stands out in my mind. It's a time that over and over, thrusts itself back into my memory. Even when I often wish I could forget every detail. The more I wish, the more vivid the memory seems. That's my punishment, I think.

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The next two weeks were long, but uneventful. My release date had been decided to be the day after Leanne and Brynn's family moved. I'm not sure if it was cruel or merciful. I would have liked to say goodbye, but I don't think I could have I could have looked Leanne in the eye. And neither of the girls came to see me, after Brynn's tearful announcement.

They had arrived out of nothing, and now they disappeared into nothing. Who's to say that they ever really existed?

My time in solitude caused me to become quite skilled at being alone. I learned to entertain myself by diving into my imagination. Fantastic stories were flitting through my head at all times. They were full of heroes, princesses, and betrayal.

When I went outside alone for the first time in over two weeks, the world felt different. It seemed emptier. I wandered around aimlessly. Sometimes I would watched other kids playing. Sometimes I would find a quiet place to be alone. But from then on, I always felt alone. I carried the loneliness with me. It was inside me now. Part of me.

I never let anyone get close to me. There was always a distance between me and my friends. Always a few things I wasn't willing to share with them. This distance was a protection for everyone. It protected me from being hurt, but also, it protected my friends. From me. In my mind, well-meaning as I was, I had become cursed.

I was the betrayer. I hurt everyone I care about.

*Leanne says,*

*"I told my dad that if Tom was convicted,  
that the cops would hear all about how my dear daddy touched me.  
It wasn't Tom's fault anyway. I'm just a dirty whore.  
Just like daddy made me."*

*"At first my parents were mad at Leanne.  
They called her 'tramp', 'slut', and 'whore'.  
That's how I learned those words.  
But then, it all went away, and no one talked about it ever again,"*

*says Brynn*

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END*