To Hold A Rosa

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Rosa Mori decides to move to America with her Aunt, Sigu Sato, After growing up in Japan with her parents her whole life. She moves to a small town in Florida called Tuckman where she meets a young man named Adam Walters. Walters has lived in Tuckman his whole life and has grown up with its negative dispositions and racist prejudice. He and Rosa fall in love shortly after meeting. Several months later Rosa finds out she is pregnant and a town where bi racial coupling and mating is a sin against sins she and Adam must cope with the struggle that is yet to come. But when Rosa dies during child Adam is forced to raise their daughter on his own and live with what the town has to over him.

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Chapter 1

To all of those who do not know: This is a short story that was too long to be put on one page. I had to set in novel for and switch the type back to short story. Instead of thinking of it as five chapters think of it as five parts.

There are a few Japanese words in this story and to save you the trouble and translate them for you here.

Musume; daughter

Haha; Mother

Aisuru; Love

For those who can actually speak Japanese and know the Grammar rules please let me know if i have used the correct forms because there were several and I really wanted a bit of the Japanese culture in this story.

Rosa's beginning

I moved to America with my Aunt Sigu. She moved there because she wanted to get out of the ghettos in Japan where she claimed there were men who would break into her house every other day. My parents have finally let me go to America after I begged them. Aunt Sigu had to persuade them as well until they finally said yes, but only when Sigu moved there first and settled herself in a home with a job that could support me. I am so excited to see everything: my aunt; the people; the places. I've heard it is like the whole world on one continent. I imagine that it would be like a giant city with different types of people. It is nothinglike that when I land, though, but it is very different from Japan. So much sand and ocean that stretches out so far I can't see where it ends.

I love my Aunt Sigu very much; she is old but she is very wise woman all the same, long silver hair, silver eyes, and wrinkled skin. She moved to Florida a few years ago and from her letters I can tell she is very happy here. She lives in small town called Tuckman. It is very small; so small that everyone knew one another. Knew other people's business.

Aunt Sigu met me at the airport. Standing with her cane by the doors waiting for me. She gave me a big smile and dropped her cane to give me a hug.

"My Rosa!" she squeals as if she were a child again. "Oh!-my you have grown so much, Musume! How are my sister and that man of her's treating?

"They are fine." I say with a yawn.

"Oh!- yes you must have jet lag." she says, picking up her cane and walking towards this large revolving suitcase producer. "Get your suitcase, now. I know you must be exhausted."

I grab my suitcase and we set off for her home. It is really hot outside but in a way that it is not unbearable; it feelst like wind blew on whenever it became too much. As if it knew when I would need her.

We drive down to Tuckman in my aunt's little red Jeep. I see all types of trees: some with fruit; some with spiky leaves; others with really big leaves. The sun is setting and the world looks orange; a beautiful sour candy coveringthe whole town.

We pull up to a small one story house. Very plain compared to the rest of the horizon but beautiful in itself: it is red for one thing, a bright red the color of new blood. The roof shingles are black; the windows are framed by white shutters. It is very different indeed.

"Alright now," aunt Sigu says, "your room is in the back on your left." She hugs me one last time before I make my way to my room. I point to the door that seems to be the right one.

"Here?"

She nods and I walk in.

The room is small with white walls and a plain full size bed. There is hardly any light in the room and the little light that did show was orange tint from the setting sun. There is a lamp on the nightstand and fresh sheets on the bed. The sheets smell like fresh water and cantaloup. I look out the window and I see several people of all ages roaming around; boys were walking home from the beach glistening with left over sea water. And little girls were out on the stoops playing with dolls. The elders were out on the porches rocking in rocking chairs and sipping lemonade as they gossiped.

But there was this one boy whom I thought was the most handsome. He was tall and lean and his eyes were the palest blue I have ever seen. He is one of the boys glistening as he walks, his hair is plastered to his face. He is laughing with his friends as they waltz down the street. It is the beginning of summer vacation and I see the most beautiful boy I could never hope to imagine in my lifetime in less than a day. He didn't see me staring at him through my window. I'm glad because I would not know what to do if he saw me.

To my surprise he went into the small yellow house across the street from my window. I see him walking through the kitchen; into another room, and into another room that could only be described as his bedroom. He was shirtless when I saw him walking down the street but now he was stripping down even further and I have to look away.

I can hardly breathe!

I nearly saw him naked!

What kind of boy changes directly in front of a window?

I turn back around to close my curtains and my heart nearly broke out of my chest.

He is staring at me with the a questioning smirk on his face.

My cheeks are starting to heat up and I quickly close the curtains.

Chapter 2

Rosa's conclusion

The next morning Aunt Sigu tells me to run to the market and collect some fish and fry for dinner later. It is mid day and the sun is beaming down on my head. It is so hot I start to sweat minutes before I leave the house.

She told me to go left; all the way down the street until I see the town ahead.

"You can't miss it." she says, scribbling in her notebook about some unknown thing.

I wonder if she writes about me.

Probably not; I'm not that special to anyone. Especially to my aunt. I know she loves me but I can't see what she would write about me in her notebooks.

I walk all the down the street in the hot sun; my aunt made me wear a hat but the sun's rays were strong enough to stream through my hat and burn my scalp. The wind wasn't feeling benevolent today so it is very thick and humid out. I see the town a few blocks off. It took twenty minutes before I could see it after I left the house. She told me to go into a store called Fresh Market and pickup any two fish that I thought I might like.

Then I see him; the boy from the road. He is fully dressed in baggy denim shorts and tee shirt under a blue short sleeved over shirt. The blue brought out his eyes immensely. I see him walking towards the store I'm meant to go in but I froze.

I don't want him to see me. He might recognize me and laugh.

He hadn't seen me so I continue to walk into the store after him.

The market smells of raw fish and spices. Tasty and revolting at the same time. I gag for a moment when I first walked in but I got used to it after awhile.

I wonder if my aunt would mind if I pick up sushi instead. I never really liked any other type of fish than that. But there are so many fish I could not choose which one I might like. I know I don't want to eat a baby shark or an oyster or even a crab or lobster. There are so many fish I start to feel dizzy with decisions.

"Tilapia is good for beginners." I hear him laugh.

I jump and see that it is the boy again.

He recognized me.

He smils and points to a fish.

"That one there," he says, "that's Tilapia."

I'm looking at the fish though. I'm looking at his eyes. They are impossibly blue and so deep you could drown in them. His hair had looked dark last night but it was now light dirty blonde. His hair must have been soaked enough to darken its color.

He notices my staring and tilts his head.

"Are you okay?"

I nod.

I can't stop staring at him.

"My name is Adam." he says, shoving his hands in his pockets, "whats yours?"

I shake my head violently.

He takes a step back.

"My name is Rosa!" I say a little too loudly.

"Ah!- so Rosa is the one who was watching me last night." he says casually.

My throat feels like its closing and I can hardly breathe. Let alone speak.

"I-I didn't mean to see you." I say quietly. "I'm so sorry."

He smiles at me with the most beautifully warm smile.

"I never said I was upset about it." he says just as quietly. "Feel free to watch whenever you like."

I gasp and my jaw drops open. He laughs and picks up two Tilapias for me.

"Come on, and show me what else you need," he says, "I'll carry them for you."

I lead him around the store and pile on the different spices and breads and the fry.

When we finish shopping he walks with me back to my aunt's house.

"I could take a couple of bags if you like." I say, he had insisted on taking all the bags and walking me home when we were a the check out.

He shook his head. He was carrying the bags as if they weigh nothing and he hadn't even broken a sweat. His muscles were working though so I knew the bags were not light.

"A lady shouldn't have to carry bags home in this heat by herself," he laughs. He has the most wonderful laugh I nearly melt every time I hear it. And he laughs a lot.

"I'm sixteen!" I laugh, "I'm no lady."

"Any sensible female is a lady, Rosa." he says with a hint of disappointment.
I stay quiet after that until we reach the safety of my doorstep.

I smile at him and reach for the bags but he pulls them away.

"I'll take them in for you." he says matter-of-factually.

I nod and open the door.

"Aunt Sigu!" I call.

"In the kitchen, Musume." Aunt Sigu calls back.

I lead Adam to the back were the kitchen is and point to the counter.

"Hello Ms. Sato." Adam says.

"Mr. Walters." she says plainly. "Thank you for helping my niece with our groceries."

She never looks up from the pot she's leaning over to acknowledge his presence. She just stirs a pot of copper goop.

"No problem at all, Ms. Sato." he says quietly.

I walk with him back to the front door even though he's ahead of me and seems like he's in a rush.

"Thank you again, Adam." I say although I am not sure he hears me.

"I didn't know Sato was your aunt." he says.

I nod and say that yes she is my aunt.

"What is wrong?" I say.

I stares at me carefully for a moment; sizing me up for some unknown reason. Then he looks into my eyes and down at my hands; to my feet, up to my shoulders, and back to my eyes again.

"Nothing." he says. "I want to see you again. Take you to the beach, maybe?"

I smile.

"Yes!" I say as loudly as I had said my name earlier.

He laughs and takes my hand in his before kissing my cheek.

"Remember what I said." he says with drawl. He lets go of my hand and starts towards his home.

I feel a sudden emptiness when he released my hand. I want him to hold on forever. Through everything and everyone.

"Rosa." I heard aunt Sigu call.

I went into the kitchen to answer.

"Yes?"

She looks up from her pot and into my eyes and I felt a shiver when those silver eyes hit mine.

"I don't want you seeing that boy anymore," she says darkly, "Do you understand?"

I shook my head.

"No I don't." I say, "What is wrong with Adam-"

"Do not address him informally in this house!" she bellows. "His kind are not welcome in this house or in this family."

What kind?

"What do you mean'His kind'?"

"The White kind, Rosa." she spat the words 'white kind'.

Where was this coming from?

"I still don't understand."

She let out a heavy sigh.

"We do not date, marry, or mate outside of the Japanese race," she says, "those people will soil our blood and turn us into animals! Do you want that for your family?"

I shake my head no.

I can't talk about this anymore.

"I'm going to take a shower," I say. And I lock myself in the bathroom for a few hours before going to my room.

Later that night Adam tapps on my window.

"Come with me," he whispers, "to the beach, right now."

I nod and listen for a moment. I hear aunt Sigu's light snores and slip on my shoes before crawling through my window.

We spent several hours together that night and I learned so much about him. He was nineteen; he lived by himself, he worked at the fresh market cleaning and gutting fish as well as shipping out to sea with the fishermen to help bring in their load. His parents both died from an intense fever five years ago. He lived with his grandmother up until recently. She died in her sleep only months ago and she left him the house and her money and everything. He graduated with honors at Tuckman High. He planned on going to college; Columbia University to major in psychology. He said that when he was in high school he used to fight a lot. He has a short temper with aggressive people.

The whole time we were together that night he held my hand. He never let go.

I told him things about myself from basic information to personal dispositions. I told him I was Japanese. I told him about my parents, about how they let me move here with my aunt even though she was seventy-two.

"My mother and aunt are fifteen years apart," I told him, "my parents didn't have me until they well into their forties."

He nodded along with every word I said until he decided to ask me a more personal question.

"Are you a virgin?" he asks; so casually I hardly processed the question.

I froze for a moment.

"No." I say not looking him in the eye. It is something that shames me to talk about.

Adam looks shocked at first then seeing my face he quickly fixes himself.

He held my hand tighter and I knew then that he would never let me go. I knew that I trust him more than I would ever trust anyone else.

Chapter 3

Adam's beginning

I've been secretly dating Rosa Mori for seven months now. I'm not ashamed of our secrecy, but I am scared for her. She told me before what her aunt had thought about me. I am bad blood to her; an evil person. She never liked me even before Rosa got here. Ms. Sato isn't the only one who thinksthat way though. In Tuckman the people are keen on keeping to their original ethnicity. Blood to blood. If someone were Mexican he would have to marry a Mexican. Any other race and there would be riots. We didn't mind befriending other races as long as we don't sleep with them. If you are an African woman and a Caucasian baby comes out of you you would most likely be ignored or judged as harshly as possible by the entire town. Some of the victims would actually move away from the harshness that had been inflicted upon them.

I knew all of this andyet I still made love to Rosa. She trusted me enough to let me have her as her second.

"No," she said, "I want you to be my first."

She never talked about her first and I was okay with that.

But when she told me she was pregnant three months later there was an issue. Sato knew it was mine just from the look on Rosa's face. She spit at me and told me that I would never see that baby.

"You can't stop me from seeing my own child!" I yelled at her.

"You had best mind me in my house, Walters." she said coldly.

She wasn't listening to me and Rosa was in the bathroom throwing up. There was nothing I could do now. Not while her aunt was watching her.

I didn't get to see Rosa again for another three months. And that was through her window. Since she was seven months in her aunt didn't allow her to go to school or even out of the house for that matter. I was scared for her, when I finally saw her she had looked more like she lost weight rather than gained it.

I ask her how she is doing,

She smiles at me.

"I'm doing fine, just tired." she says wearily. Bags are hanging from her little eyes and her hair is matted and tangled.

God what has that woman done to her?

I ask her if the baby is okay.

"Your daughter is perfectly healthy." she laughs. It is her first time telling me the sex of the baby and I feel my heart leap.

"A girl?" I ask, not quite believing her.

She continues to laugh and nods her head.

I tell her to keep her voice down and she covers her mouth with her hands but she couldn't stop herself from laughing and neither could I.

She let me climb through the window and lay with her in bed for awhile. I miss the feel of her skin more than I thought I had. I couldn't stop touching her and kissing her. She is so small next to me; like a child herself. I feel a pang of sadness admitting to myself that we were both only kids. Sato would never let me near them when the baby is born. She would see it as the blind leading the blind.

I distract myself from those painful thoughts.

"What are you naming her?" I ask.

She put her index finger to her chin in exaggerated thinking and giggles.

"I like Lily," she says, "and don't tell me you don't like that name because I've always liked it. It reminds me of the lilies in Japan. Mother had a beautiful garden full of lilacs, roses, tulips, daisies, and lilies. She named me Rosa after the most beautiful rose in her garden."

I smile at her and say that Lily is perfect.

She kisses me and holds on to me despite the large bump that is her stomach. I couldn't help but think about Lily and Rosa. Rosa looks so fragile I'm afraid the baby would turn out unhealthy.

No, I can't think like that way.

I need this baby to be born no matter what the town says.

"I love you, Rosa." I say.

She smiles up at me with her eyes closed.

"I know, aisuru." she says tiredly. That isn't my first time saying those words to her I just want to reassure her.

"Have you told your parents?"

"That I love you?"

"You know what I'm talking about."

She opens her eyes and looks at me sadly.

"They won't talk to me," she says, "Sigu has already talked to them. She told them I bare bad blood in my body."

My blood ran cold.

I am really starting to hate that woman.

"Your blood is not bad, aisuru." she whispers, holding my hand so tightly it hurts. But I don't pull away.

I can only bring myself to smile at her.

But she is looking at the ceiling with sorrow in her eyes.

"Are you okay?"

She nods and turns away from me, scooting herself back so she touches me more. I wrap my arms around her and drift off into a wary sleep. I can never sleep peacefully in this house; always worrying about Sato barging in and kicking me out...literally. I hardly ever sleep soundly, though. The last time I did it was after me and Rosa had slept together several months ago. We felt safe with each other that night. There was no one to bother us and the night was filled with the sound of cicadas and the smell of lemons. I was happier than I had ever been in my lifetime when I was with her.

I dread the moment I have to leave. It is nowearly in the morning. Sato is still sleeping.

I climb out of the window as quietly as I can. It is still dark but the sky is a bluish pink and the stars still shone bright and high.

Rosa grabs my hand when I'm fully out of the window.

"If I don't see you before the baby arrives," she says, "I want you to be at the hospital with me no matter what, okay?"

"Yes, of course."

She kisses my hand before letting it go. My hand burns when her lips leave my skin. I want her touch so much it hurts. I want to hold her forever without a care in the world.

I leave her there with that devil woman and start for my home.

I look back several times but I never saw her looking back at me.

I would never forget her face but I wish I had seen her one last time.

Chapter 4

Adam's Lily

Like Rosa predicted I did not get a chance to see her before she went into labor. Her parents had come to visit her.

Which surprised me.

But they were there all day and night at her bedside so I couldn't get over there or call her. I couldn't even send her a letter because I was pretty sure they would read it.

Her father was a very tall mad with a salt and pepper hair and thick black mustache. He seemed to have a thing for suits because that's all I ever saw him in for the past two months. Mrs. Mori was a short slender woman with raven black hair; Rosa took after her the most except for the eyes. She had her fathers dark eyes. Her mother's eyes were silver like her sister's. They both looked to be in their mid fifties; their skin wasn't wrinkled much. Mr. Mori seemed to be the oldest though, he looked older at least.

They didn't seem the least bit disturbed by their daughter's condition; they didn't seem indifferent or irritated by her.

They looked happy.

It made me wonder if Rosa even told them about me.

Had she lied to me?-about her parents not speaking to her?

I couldn't separate my feelings about that revelation. I shouldn't hope for something as bad as her parents hating her but it shouldn'tdisappoint that they weren't mad either.

That is what I was thinking about when the phone rang.

"Aisuru?" it was Rosa whispering in the receiver, she was panting and her voice was straining. As if she were in pain I heard her groan curtly before continuing. But she didn't have to continue.

"I'm coming." I say.

"Meet at the hospital." she says.

Then she hung up.

I wait a few minutes for her and her parents to leave first. I don't have a car but I am not risking them seeing me on the street.

I had also forgotten how far the hospital is.

Two hours later I arrive at Tuckman Hospital. Since this is a small town there wasn't much activity going on in the hospital, ever. It was actually very quiet when I first walked in. Eerie quiet.

My throat constricted and my heart fluttered uncomfortably in my chest.

Something was wrong.

My hand is burning and my lips are dry. I can barely breathe.

I realized it wasn't the hospital that was quiet. It was my hearing. I zoned out everything.

I took the elevator to the maternity ward and found Rosa's parents and aunt sitting, crying in the waiting room.

Sato saw me first.

"You!" she screams." This is your fault!"

Her parents were looking at me now. Both of their cheeks were streaked with tears.

Mrs. Mori's mouth fell open and I heard a faint "No..."

"You murderer!" Sato was still shrieking at me.

Mr. Mori didn't look at me.

The doctor saw the commotion and seemed to understand the situation immediately. He took four long strides over to me and grabs my arm with a fierceness that breaks my heart. He practically dragged me to room 309 before shoving me in the space and closing the door behind him.

"I can assume you are the father." he says with obvious disdain. I had no idea the doctors acted this way too.

I nod.

"Good. I can't let the grandparents leave with the...child." he says. He scrunched his face when he said "Child", as if my daughter weren't human. I almost hit him.

"What's wrong with Rosa?"

He looks at me with forced pity.

"She died during child birth," he says plainly, "she was too small to bear it."

I'm not surprised. I knew she was dead the minute I stepped into the hospital lobby.

"Why can't her parents take her?" I ask, I really had no idea why. I'm too young andthey're much older and experienced with children.

"This is for you." he pulls out a note. My name is on the front. In her handwriting. "She's in room 316 if you want to see her before we take her downstairs."

I nod and he walks out of the room.

I open the note. There are two; one with my name on it the other one says Lily.

Adam,

I'm sorry but I couldn't tell you that I was carrying that baby with half my life. She was killing me from the inside out. I'm too small to bear the weight of this glorious miracle. When you read this I may be gone....God I hope the doctors gave this to you. I don't know what would happen to Lily if they didn't. She is yours, Adam. No one can take her away from you without a fight... and I know you will fight for her. I could see it in your eyes when I told you it was a girl. That sparkle in those big beautiful blue eyes. I never told you this but I've always loved your eyes. They attracted me to you from the beginning. I wrote another note for Lily when she gets older. Promise you won't read or even help her read it. It is for her eyes alone.

Promise.

I love you more than anything in the world, Adam. Forever and beyond. I'll always watch over the two of you and protect you. You're are my family and I want it to stay that way. Take Lily home with YOU.

Don't let my parents take destroy our family, they won't take care of her and love her like you would.

All my love and more;

Rosa

My hands are shaking, my vision blurry from tears I hadn't even known were there until I finished reading.

I fold the note and put it in my jean pockets. I fold the second one and place it in my wallet behind my license.

I walk out of the room, ignoring Sato as she continuedscream her epithets at me, and went straight to the doctor.

He looks up at me and nods his head. I follow him to room 316.

"I'll get the kid for you," he says, "no need for it to stay over night."

You just want the half-breed out of the hospital you ass.

He left the room.

Rosa...looked so pale and plastic. I can't believe it is her at first. She looks sad more than she looks peaceful. Her dark hair is a mess. Her lips are blue.

I take her cold limp hand in mine and whisper in her ear.

"I'll take care of us. I promise."

I kiss her frozen blue lips and release her hand.

The doctor rolls my daughter in along with a chart in his hand.

"Fill this out and you can go." he says tossing the chart at me.

I glare at him for a moment and start filling out the chart.

When I finish I roll Lily out into the hall with me. The doctor was standing by a water fountain chatting and laughing with another doctor.

He sees me approach him.

"Finished?"

I ignore his question.

"She's healthy right?"

"Yes. Are you finished?"

I smile ingenuously.

"Yeah."

I smash the clipboard across his face; cracking the cardboard and breaking his nose. I made sure I put all my weight into it. I give the clipboard to the woman standing next to him. Too stunned to reject it she took the clipboard gently out of my hand and continued to stare, mouth agape, at the wounded man.

I pick Lily up out of the crib and walk out of the room, into the elevator, and out of the hospital. The Morises had seen me leave but they did not make a sound nor move. They only watched me with their mouths open as I walked past them with their granddaughter in my hands.

I took the bus home this time, I didn't want Lily out in the heat. As we rode the bus I watched Lily. This was my first time actually looking at her. I counted her toes and her fingers both hands and feet having ten toes and ten fingers. I took off her cap and saw that she had barely any hair but it was dark stringy just like her mother's. She looked just like Rosa. Same head shape and facial expression as she slept. I put her cap back on and just watched her nearly missing my stop from staring so intently.

I needed to go shopping but I couldn't take her with me. The stores around here didn't have newborn carriers. I went home and laid her on the bed next to me while I thought about what I was going to do. I needed a car and I needed a babysitter. Preferably a free one. I hated that I had to do this myself, no one had thrown a shower for Rosa when she was pregnant.

No one would babysit a mixed baby either.

My doorbell rang and Mr. Mori was there.

"We brought baby gift." he says and he points at his car. It is loaded with a dismantled crib and a few car seats. There are blankets and bottles and old clothes. Everything looks used, except the car seats.

I couldn't bring myself to speak. The man who had not even bothered to look at me in the hospital is now offering me gifts.

He raised his eyebrow at me and grabbs my wrist.

"Come, get gifts," he says, his English isn't that great and I wonder how Rosa picked it up so well. My eyes start to well when I thought of Rosa.

Mr. Mori looks back at me and shakr his head.

"No cry. Help!" he demands. I nod and help him unload the hand-me-downs out of the car. He helps me put the crib together in my grandmother's old room and we put the small cradle in my room next to the bed.

Everything has some kind of Japanese symbols on them. Very beautiful, delicate lines and designs.

Mori saw me notice them and smiles for the first time since I've seen him.

"She must never forget who her people are." he says as clear as day. He gives me an ancient rag doll that looks similar to Mrs. Mori. "This was Rosa's favorite thing. It was in her room under pillow." I nod and gently take the doll from him.

"I go and get milk for baby-"

"Lily." I correct him.

He bows his head and smiles.

"Lily, I get milk for Lily."

He leaves for the store. I'm glad he hadn't suggested to stay and watch her for me, I wouldn't have let him. I still don't completely trust him despite the gifts.

It made me think about what Rosa had said to me that night.

"They won't speak to me." she said yet her father seemed happy to see the baby when I let him peek in on her while she slept. She still hasn't opened her eyes yet and I wonder what color her eyes would be.

I still don'tunderstand why Rosa lied to me.

Was she ashamed... of me?

She didn't want them to know about me that was for sure.

I hear Lily fussing in my room so I go and check on her. She's probably hungry and I hope Mori remembers to get diapers.

When I open the door there she is fussing on the bed swinging her fist in the air; her face is red and I wondered how long she'd been crying. She had a gentle cry, the kind that would sound peaceful if you didn't she was there. I picked her up and held her in my arms. She had been laying in the middle of a small pillow fort Mori had made to keep her from rolling.

She opened her eyes when she felt my hands around her. I gasp. She has my eyes. They were such a bright blue I was worried she might be blind. But she smiled at me; a wrinkly gummy smile and she stared straight into my eyes. She is definitely not blind. I smile back at her and kiss her forehead, she felt cold so I bundled her up some more.

"You look just like your mommy, Lily," I coo at her, "you are so beautiful just like her."

I feel her little feet kicking at at me and I laugh. She makes a little choking sound and I see that she's trying to laugh with me.

She's so smart. I can see it in her eyes. She's going to be a little brainchild.

I hear Mori come into the house and call out to me.

"In here." I say loud enough not to upset Lily. But she's distracted by the fan spinning on the ceiling. Mori walks in and sees the baby staring mesmerized at the fan and lets out a chuckle.

"You feed her now, Walter." he says and gives me a bottle with warm formula already in it.

I thank him and feed Lily.

He sits next to me and watches as Lily sucks hungry on the nip.

He sighs.

"So much like Rosa." he says, "She has your eyes. So blue, so pretty a blue."

When I finish feeding Lily I put her in her cradle to sleep.

Mori pulls me to the side and tells me that he and his wife are staying in America for awhile. To get away from Japan. He said he would be happy to pay for a babysitter and a car for me so I could travel swiftly if there was an emergency.

I accept the car but I tell him I can afford a babysitter.

He frowns.

"No one will babysit Lily for you, Walter." he says grimly. He knew about the town's disposition as well. "You may have to move."

I shake my head.

"This is my grandmother's house." I say, "I'm not letting these people run me out of my home."

He sighs and suggest he hire me a nanny. I decline. I already had an idea for a babysitter. He is young but he wasn't yet corrupted by the towns racial prejudice.

The boy was me best friend's little brother. John Tanner. He is ten but I know he can do the job. And keep a secret. As well as defend Lily and himself if anything happens. He is a a very smart kid and pretty big for his age. I'd feel better with him here than with a nanny who may likely kidnap my daughter.

Mori tells me that if I ever change my mind that I could find them in Kentucky. I said I'd think about it and he nods and says he'll be back tomorrow to help me find a car.

I walk back into the bedroom and see Lily is still staring at the ceiling. I smile and pick her up out of the cradle. She looks at me as if she hadn't noticed I was holding her. I hold the doll next to her; they are about the same tiny size. Lily looks at the rag doll and smiles she hits it with her fist as if she's trying to grab it but can't get her arms to move correctly. She pouts and starts to fuss. I put down the doll and hold her closer. She smells like fresh roses and sugar.

Rosa.

I finally let myself cry the rest of the night. Holding Lily the whole time; never letting her go just like I promised. She watches me quizzically all night. She is a night baby. She dozes off occasionally but would wake up minutes later and just stare at me with bright blue eyes.

"My little Lily Rosa Walters." I whisper to her.

She smiles at me.

Chapter 5

Five years later...

"Happy birthday Lily!" I shout. Lily is five years old today and I can't stop crying!

Lily was still sleeping when I barged into her room with her birthday cake. She jumped up when she heard my booming voice and I saw her eyes light up when she saw the strawberry cake all fiery with several sparkling candles.

"Daddy!" she says with a huge grin showing her missing tooth in the corner of her mouth. She leaps out of bed and comes to stand in front of me as I kneel down for her to blow out the candles.

She blows and some of the sparks kiss my face but I don't care. She looks so happy. Happier than I've ever seen her on her birthday.

Today I'm going to give her the letter.

I made sure she could read it as early as possible. She's very smart and caught on quickly and she understands things I didn't even I understood yet. She scared me sometimes. She is such an old soul I sometimes forget that I'm talking to a five-year-old.

I give her the letter I've kept in my nightstand for so many years.

"What's this?" she says licking her finger where she scooped of some icing. She loves strawberry just like Rosa did. And I had to fight to keep from tearing.

"It's a letter." I say.

She raises her eyebrows questioningly.

"From *Haha*..."

Her mouth falls open and she turns away from me to open the letter.

I wait for her to finish, which seems like forever.

She folds the letter and tucks it in a little pocket inher nightgown.

She looks... indifferent.

"What is it, Musume?" I ask. Mori would travel down to town every now and then for a few months. He taught Lily Japanese. I picked up a few words but I'm sure my Japanese is very bad.

She smiles.

"She told me to never let you read it." she laughs.

I laugh with her even though I feel hurt.

More secrets kept from me?

I never found out why she lied to me about her parents but I had forgiven her on that and moved on. But Lily too? Why get her to keep secrets from me?

"Come on," I say, taking her hand I lead her to the kitchen so we can have cake. It is Saturday and I plan spending the whole day with her at the park and the movies and maybe with her grandfather. Mrs. Mori left Mr. Mori when she found out he was helping me. I thought that was the most ridiculous reason for divorce I had ever heard. Lily had never met her grandmother and I'm that she isn't interested in meeting Lily. Sato moved out of her home nextdoor and went to live with Mrs. Mori somewhere in India. Or at least that's Mori told me. I'm glad Sato is gone. I wouldn't have wanted that ridiculous woman around my daughter.

It was around five o'clock when we arrived at the park. People were watchingus with blazing animosity but Lily didn't notice and I ignore them. We play together for hours until John shows up. After five years he still babysits Lily for me. His brother knows and he doesn't speak to me anymore, he ignores his younger brother as well, but John stayed loyal to me and watches over Lily when I need him.

Lily's face lit up when she saw him.

"Johnny!" she shouts clapping and jumping around. She is so happy I never want to leave the park.

"Hey birthday girl!" shouts back and scoops her up like she weighs nothing. He's fifteen and taller than me now. Bigger too. He plays linebacker on Tuckman High's football team. He was more like a brother to me than his brother ever was, and I'm glad to have him around in Lily's life.

I let them play together and relax myself on a bench. The park was beautiful with its lights and gardens. So much beauty. It was November and a little chilly for Florida weather. I could almost see my breath in the air each time I exhaled.

I see Lily running at me with something in her hand..

"Daddy!- look!" she shoves a rose in my face. A perfect and beautiful rose.
Itake it gently from her

"Isnnit pretty!" she is so excited to have found a rose. And I don't blame her. There were hardly any rose bushes in the garden and where there were the roses didn't look as healthy as this one.

"It's beautiful, Musume." I say, "Your mother would've loved this."

She grins.

"Mommy told me to find you a rose," she squeals, "and I did! And it's perfect!"

My heart flips when she tells me this, and my eyes start to well.

She is jumping up and down clapping. John is staring at me. He's seen me cry before and he put his hand on my shoulder.

"Thank you, Musume." I say, a tear had escaped my eye.

She stops jumping.

"Are you okay, daddy?" she looks just like Rosa when she worries.

I nod.

"I'm just happy," I say. And that is the full truth. "Come on lets go play and find some more roses."

She grins so big I thought her cheeks must hurt but she only grabs my hand and we run off into the garden together with John right behind us.

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