

Sweet and Sour

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Memories are funny things. They have a life of their own, bubbling up when you least expect them. And once they unfurl before your eyes, there's almost nothing you can do to stop them.

Some memories are sweet, the kind you are happy to replay in your mind. They make you smile and your heart skip. You want to curl up with those memories and snuggle them. But there are sour memories, too. Sharp, painful ones that make you flinch and your heart curdle. Like I said, you can't control the kind of memories that appear. So it's often better not to remember them at all.

Sometimes, though, it just happens. Like when the plane touched down on the runway, and I jolted awake. We were back in Mystic, Connecticut, where I'd spent six weeks of every summer for the first eleven years of my life. Two years had passed since the last

time we'd come, and as I blinked at the familiar sight of TF Green Airport, I shoved the memories of previous summers down deep inside myself. I held them there as we disembarked, grabbed our luggage from one of the four baggage carousels, and climbed into the hired car waiting for us at the pickup spot. My parents laughed at how disoriented I seemed—I never fell asleep on our cross-country summer flights. But this summer was different.

I tried to look on the bright side, at how excited Mom was to see Holly, her best friend since college. Not long after graduating, Holly had married Wes Koyama and moved from California to Fairfield, Connecticut, and she and my mom had made a pact to see each other at least once a year. Fortunately the Koyama family had a vacation house in Mystic for all of us to use in the summer. Mom and Holly had kept their promise to each other until Wes's job had taken the family to Japan for two years. Last summer was the first they'd ever missed. But now they would be reunited. I grinned, thinking of my best friend back home, Lila Tan, and how our friendship would last forever like Mom and Holly's had.

"It's nice to see you smile, finally," Mom said as we drove over the border from Rhode Island into Connecticut.

"Hmmm." I didn't bother explaining to her that my smile had nothing to do with being here for the summer. Mom would get to hang out with her best friend while I would be apart from mine. I'd

had to leave Lila behind in California, and that thought vaporized all my good feelings.

“Oh, Mai,” Mom said, putting her arm around my shoulders and hugging me toward her. “Don’t look so sad. I know you’re going to miss hanging out with Lila this summer, but she’ll be visiting in a few weeks. You’ll see her then.”

Mom was right. I blew out a breath and pasted on a smile. I knew my parents loved me, but I also knew that they didn’t know how to handle it when I was sad. A memory surfaced from when I was in the third grade. A friend—or at least I’d thought she was a friend—had disinvited me from her birthday party, and I’d cried uncontrollably. When I couldn’t stop, Mom had gotten frustrated with me, brushing off my sadness. To be fair, she had been in the middle of a conference call, but still.

“And,” Dad said from the front passenger seat, smiling at me, “you get to spend the summer with Zach!”

Both of my parents still thought that Zach Koyama was my best friend. Because of course they did. We used to be inseparable. We’d spend every waking moment of our summers playing and talking and laughing. During the rest of the year, I’d count the days until we’d be reunited.

But all that had changed. Two summers ago, he’d humiliated me, and our friendship had shattered. Something my parents and,

probably his, didn't know. If the Koyamas had come back to the States last summer instead of staying in Japan, maybe Zach and I could have fixed what had broken. But too much time had passed, and my anger had grown. All I wanted now was to punish Zach. What was that saying? Revenge was sweet, and I was definitely going to get my revenge!

As always, Dad asked the driver to take Exit 90—the scenic route—even though it meant fighting the aquarium and museum traffic. But traditions were important, and I was especially glad for this one because it would delay our arrival.

We passed motels and a gas station, a mill, and quaint (as Mom called them) New England houses totally unlike the stucco homes and townhouse communities back in Silicon Valley. I pressed my face against the window as we drove along the river, watching cormorants dive into the water.

Gradually all the anger I had for Zach was replaced by the hum of low-level excitement. I had mostly great memories of Mystic, and I'd get to spend the next six weeks doing all the things I loved—birdwatching, hiking, collecting rocks and feathers, and being in nature. But when the car made the right turn to leave the river behind, my heart squeezed in my chest. Anger battled with excitement. In the end, anger won.

The driver made a sharp turn onto Egret Pond Road, the

Koyama's private lane. I was surprised not to hear the crunch of gravel.

"Oh!" Dad exclaimed. "They paved the road."

The smooth sound of tires against asphalt was oddly foreign and jarring. Around the curve, Egret Pond came into sight, the sun sparkling stars on the water's surface. At least the view was the same. The car pulled up in front of the detached garage, and I looked up at the Koyamas' three-story colonial house, my heart pounding because I'd see Zach in moments.

Memories swirled inside my head, threatening to rise to the surface. So many memories, sweet and sour, of this house and pond, the scent of lilacs and mud, the prickling heat. And Zach. Always Zach.

Dad opened the door.

"It's go-time," I said under my breath as I pushed the memories away and stepped out of the car.