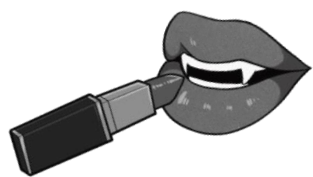


# Falling Blossoms

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FALLING BLOSSOMS

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**Note: The following content is from chapter number five of the book.**

## *Chapter Five*

EVERYTHING WAS WHITE. The first thing Yusei Matsuno noticed when he opened his eyes was how alabaster everything was. Then he blinked a few more times and his vision improved: it was just the ceiling.

As soon as he calmed down, it was time the pain chose to greet him. All his bones hurt, and he had the vague notion of his legs and one of his arms hanging down. He could feel the weight of the other weighting down next to his body. His head hurt much less than the rest of the body, and that was a relief because he needed to figure out where he was.

Turning his neck to the side, he found the door. He could also see that the walls were light as well as everything else. Looking to the other side, he found the sofa and the windows. Next to these two was a bench and high on the same wall, a small television.

Closing his eyes for a moment, he concentrated on the ache he was feeling and tried to remember what had happened. He failed; his mind throbbed hard as if there was a barrier there that wanted to stop him from entering.

Standing with great difficulty, he found himself in the mirror. He was angry. The usually handsome face was distorted in anger. He was screaming, but Yusei couldn't even hear it. Nor did want to.

He screamed for long minutes, and all he heard were the buzzing sounds coming from far away as if he were listening from inside a well. Then a woman opened the door, and she hugged him. She tried to calm him down and he just ignored her, continuing to say a dozen more inaudible things.

Then he kicked the trash can and left hand in hand with her. Yusei's hearing returned the moment the door slammed shut, leaving him alone in that white room.

Staring at the wall for who knows how long, he cursed when the salty taste of his tears reached his mouth, and the entire room went from white to the most astonishing shade of red...

Waking up with a start, Yusei was shaking from head to toe, his breathing deep and frantic. Sitting up, he ran his hand over his face and noticed that it was wet.

Looking at his fingers, he sighed when he realized that they were just tears. Every time he had this nightmare, even if it was the same one for the twentieth time in a row, he always had the irrational fear of finding everything stained red.

He got up, went to the kitchen, poured himself a glass of ice water, and drank it in one gulp. Then he went to the living room window, opening it and feeling the cold dawn wind helping to sober him up.

Reaching out and grabbing a pack of cigarettes and the lighter that was now on the side table, he lit it, instantly grateful for the taste in his mouth.

That was much better than the tears.

Staring at the sleeping city, Yusei remembered *him*. His face in the dream was exactly as he had last seen it, and he could have sworn that after twenty years, he had changed very little. He would never know, nor wanted to.

Looking at the wrist that held the cigarette, he stared at the small scar on his wrist, those were just the remnants of the plastic surgery. He had removed the mark *he* had left on him; as if in addition to a broken heart and a life of fear, he also deserved to leave him physically tainted.

No, Yusei would not give him that. That was why he had the surgery as soon as he found a doctor he trusted — four months before he started teaching at the University.

Taking a drag, he closed his eyes, and his treacherous mind took him straight to the moment he woke up inside the car. He was upside down, there was blood everywhere, including his face. And the blood was dripping from somewhere like a damn tap turned on; it was all he could hear besides the sound of sirens.

When he regained consciousness, he was in the hospital bed.

It took him hours to remember what had happened. How he had called him, telling him that *he* never wanted to see him again and that everything was over between them.

Have took hours for his mind to recap how Yusei had gotten into the car, and how he had been in a nearby city and that was why he had been found in the middle of the road. Finally, he remembered *him* making his last visit to the

hospital, and instead of a lovely and caring scene, he received the image of *him* screaming, and how he had left with *her*, leaving him completely abandoned.

The emotional pain was much greater than his many broken bones. Yusei had been hurt, and *he* had only stoned him.

Matsuno had broken his legs, two ribs, and an arm. The arm that could write. The arm that had given him a career as a writer. The arm that he had caressed countless times.

His recovery had been long and lonely... He had no family. His parents had died in an accident and his younger brother had fallen ill.

At seventeen, Yusei was alone in the world, with his brother, Kenji's, bills on his lap to pay, in addition to his living expenses.

At twenty, he no longer needed five jobs. He had paid off his debt and now worked at a good company. That's where he met *him*. He was so handsome; his short blond hair made him the local attraction since he was half European and half Japanese.

At twenty-one, Yusei lived with *him*. Secretly lovers, the two went through life as just best friends, and at that same age Matsuno published his first book — encouraged by him, who had given him support and helped him find a decent publisher. At that time, he also began his academic life, finally being able to afford a good college.

The years passed. Yusei published a few more volumes and graduated with honors. And still lived with *him*. Everything was fine, life seemed good and stable, until that specific day, a week before his birthday, when everything changed.

Sighing, he remembered how the recovery had been long, but possible, and as soon as he found himself walking alone and free from the hospital ties, it was time to pay off his debt. Which he did, because he had the amount saved, since his life was better, and then went home.

When he got there, all his things were thrown in front of the garage without any care or consideration. The rain and snow that day had destroyed everything.

By going through the pile of trash that was his belongings, he managed to recover some important things, and then Yusei found himself leaving that same night.

He slept from hotel to hotel, traveling for days in *his* car — a small form of revenge. When he arrived in the current city, Yusei looked for a place to live, getting rid of the car; selling it so cheaply that he couldn't even make good use of the money.

Crushing the cigarette remains against the glass ashtray, he closed the window, petting one of the cats that slept nearby, and went back to the room.

When his back hit the soft mattress, there was no escape: he remembered Keisuke. Remembered his smell and the warmth of his body.

But then he remembered *him* whose name he had insisted on forgetting, and how he had said that Yusei could never give *him* what *she* would give him: children and that being with him was a shame, while with her was not. He even added that Yusei ruined everything he touched, and she didn't.

Thinking of Keisuke and his angelic face, he remembered him sleeping there, on those same sheets, on the pillow by his side. His heart sank, but Yusei stood his ground: he would never ruin Keisuke's life, never hurt him like that. The young boy deserved better.

Sighing, closed his eyes, surprised by how tired he was. Allowing himself to rest, he enjoyed the remaining two hours until his alarm clock went off.

\*\*\*

Opening his lazy eyes, Yusei needed five minutes to get up and do his morning activities.

Within an hour he was in the car, parking in the usual spot and walking to the building where his classroom was.

A month and a half had passed, and with it, February had begun. Spring was near and the flowers would soon begin to fall. Yusei loved this season of the year, but this time it seemed like it would be so ordinary, so dull.

Ignoring that thought, headed for the stairs.

Once inside his classroom, the hours passed, and before he knew it, lunch had already passed and Keisuke's class was starting to pass through the door, each of his students sitting in their usual chairs.

Yusei organized his desk and enjoyed the excruciating wait before looking up and looking for the youngest's desk.

It shouldn't have been surprising, since this had been happening for weeks, but still, every time he found only emptiness it was a sharp pain in his chest.

Looking back at the board, he began to write the summary of the day and threw himself into his classes, hoping that the work would take away his concern for Keisuke...

What didn't happen, for as soon as the last class ended, Yusei immediately went to the office. He would casually and periodically try to find out the reason for so many absences if there was any warning or explanation.

While he waited for the attendant to check, Matsuno tapped his fingers against his leg, in a vain attempt to let out his anxiety.

"Yusei," she called. "The student is no longer part of the institution. Do you have any business to discuss with him? Do you need me to try to get in touch?"

He swallowed hard and smiled cordially before answering.

"No, it's nothing serious, just some paperwork. Well, now he won't need it, will he?", he laughed without finding it funny at all, shrugging his shoulders and leaving towards the courtyard.

Stumbling, he got into the car, drove away with it, and headed for the main road towards his house.

It was as if he had been punched in the stomach.

Keisuke had dropped out of university?!

When his vision blurred and a shrill horn honked at him, Yusei wiped the back of his hand over his eyes and looked for the first curb he could park on.

Turning on his hazard lights, he stared at the road. Cars were passing quickly through the glass, stopping a little further ahead, getting tangled up when changing lanes, and many other things that he stopped noticing at a certain point, once the tears started rolling down without warning.

The hole in his chest seemed to grow, and he closed his eyes he could see nothing but the white ceiling from the hospital and Keisuke's smile and his breath started to fade away.

The pain in his torso grew as if a giant was crushing him, the shortness of breath was like he had fallen into a pool of spikes. Keisuke had dropped out of college because of him.

Keisuke had somehow given up his dream for his sake.

Again. He had caused harm again.

Yusei felt his throat tighten, the knot forming so quickly that all he could do was give in to the pain.

He screamed. Screamed loudly and for so long that when his voice finally ended, his throat burned, and his eyes were so swollen that he had to stay in the car for a few more minutes, just waiting for his parts to give him a break and he could drive again.

Breathing hurt and the feeling that he had made another mistake was like having beetles under his skin. Reaching for his cell phone, he opened his contact list and stared at Keisuke's name. Maybe he should call, or send a message... Maybe. But he also knew that it was better to do nothing. And that second option was what Yusei chose, despite a voice inside his mind whispering a variety of questions.

When the movements in his chest stopped hurting so much, he put the car in gear and continued his way, arriving at his apartment in a few minutes.

Opening the door, his cats came as always to congratulate him, and Yusei threw himself on the couch, putting on his coat and shoes. He didn't care.

Looking to the side, he saw the succulent he had received as a gift. It didn't seem to be dying, but it didn't have the same shine as when he had first placed it under the corner table.

It was like Yusei: it was just there.

Closing his eyes, which were hurt by the insistent crying, Matsuno allowed the days to pass, and he and the plant continued to deteriorate; the strength of the roots was losing, the shine of the bark becoming increasingly invisible...

Checking his electronic calendar, noticed that it was the second Saturday of March. Frowning, he ignored the fact that he had barely seen the days pass by and went to take a shower. When the steam was already filling the bathroom, Yusei took off his clothes and the reflection in the mirror startled him.

The circles under his eyes were deep and dark. He had lost considerable weight, and his chest and collarbones were marked.

It wasn't a very healthy sight, but he couldn't expect anything better, after all, his new diet was based on nicotine and frozen food.

He stepped under the hot water and remembered Keisuke once more. Maybe he needed to move since there wasn't a single room in the house that wasn't filled with memories. Sighing, he closed his eyes and let the water run over his face.

For a moment it was as if Keisuke was there, caressing his foamy shoulders and kissing his neck. His musky scent filled the room, such was the force of nature that he was.

Taking his face out of the current and staring at his feet, Yusei wondered if he should try to call him, really check why he had dropped out of college, and try to come to some kind of agreement.

He could stop teaching there. It wouldn't be a problem to leave the city, he had done it once, he could do it again. Maybe Keisuke could tell him that he had just changed institutions, which Yusei would also be able to handle.

What he couldn't do was live in that limbo. Despair, resentment, and guilt ate at his flesh in silence, advancing a few more centimeters every day and Yusei really couldn't take it anymore.

He *needed* to call. Needed to find out something.

Sighing deeply, he finished washing himself, dried, and looked for his cell phone. His trembling fingers selected Keisuke's name, and the towel fell from his head. Threw it on the floor, ignoring the dripping ends as if they were crying.

Clicking on the call option, put the phone to his ear and what he heard made him finally break down.

*"The number dialed does not exist."*

His hardened armor finished cracking, the shards falling across the floor with the noise of a hundred storms.

It felt as if someone was holding his bare heart in their hands.

He dialed again. Again. And a dozen more times.

Without even thinking about it, he grabbed a coat, keys, and wallet, stuffing them into the pocket of his sweatpants and heading out the door. Inside the car, he realized that he had left his cell phone on the couch, but Keisuke was no longer within his reach anyway, it wouldn't make any difference anyway.

As he left the garage and turned the first corner, Yusei forced his mind to remember how he got to Keisuke's family hotel, and with a little effort he managed to do it, missing a corner or two, but managing to get there in record time and without any accidents.

The place was exactly as the youngest had told him. It looked like something out of a dream. A huge piece of land, with gardens and more gardens. The main building was all imperial style, with statues in front and hand-carved roofs.

Parking the car in the area reserved for this, got out of it, and walked to the reception. He asked about Keisuke, but the attendant only said that he was not on the property at the time.

'What now?', Yusei thought. What would he do now?

He had no plan, he had nothing.

Exhaling heavily, he returned to the parking lot, but a tall figure with snow-white hair was standing next to his car, and unlike Keisuke once set on the ground like a child, this one exuded a pose of authority, even a bit of anger.

"What are you doing here?"

"You're the brother," he said to no one in particular. "What I have to say is between the two of us."

"Maybe." The blond narrowed his eyes, and his mouth twisted in disdain. "But when your actions hurt him so badly, it becomes my problem too."

The silence they shared was eerie. Yusei's heart was beating so hard he could feel it in his ears.

"Keisuke has been talking about you for months. He admires you so much and you, after all, are just a coward."

Yusei exhaled once more, putting the key in the car and opening the door.

"I'm sorry about that," he replied, ignoring the vision that was starting to water again. "I'm just trying to protect him."

Takumi approached a bit, and his reddish eyes were so intense that he got curious to know how he and the brunette could be blood brothers and have such different appearances.

"Protecting him or yourself?" he asked. "Whichever option, you didn't do either one right."

He was about to get in the car and ignore that conversation that seemed to come straight out of a mirror when Takumi grabbed his arm.

"He's in the park. "

When the Koyama let him go, Yusei thanked him silently, then took his seat, started the car, and drove off.

The way to the park was long and stressful. There was a lot of traffic and the whole time Yusei's doubts bombarded him.

Coward.

Coward.

*Coward.*

Takumi was right. He was a coward.

A coward for ending up like that. For living hidden in that apartment for years. For pushing Keisuke with so much pressure without even giving him time to breathe.

His figure came back to mind, and his voice too, as if he were right in front of him. And then the realization came to him like a punch: out of nowhere, breaking some teeth, suddenly.

Yusei had done the same thing they had done to him.

And that was the greatest proof that deep down, he was a damned coward.

He had put Keisuke through unnecessary torment and suffering. Although he still thought that relationship would not be good for the younger, he could have done it differently. He could have been more cordial, sat down, and talked in a more adult manner.

He needed to apologize, and that was what he would do. He would ask for forgiveness and try to redeem himself in the best way that Keisuke would allow.

Parking the car in the only possible space: at the end of the park, Yusei had to walk for a long time, until he finally reached the clearings, where the trees shone with their varied colors. The cherry blossom patch was a long pink dot in the middle of that cloudy sky.

He looked for Keisuke with his eyes, walked from one point to the other, and couldn't find him. Feeling his pockets, he realized that he didn't have his phone and then remembered that the other had changed his number.

Damn! Kept looking up, staring at the flowers that had begun to fall. One of them passed in front of his face and he lowered his face a bit.

Behind the pink shadow of the petal, Yusei saw a mane of straight, brown hair sitting a little further ahead. Holding his breath as he realized that he was resting under the same tree where he had confessed to him, Yusei took the first step towards him.

Suddenly everything lost its meaning. All his fears ran away like water.

Approaching through the remaining steps, he called out to him.



*“Keisuke.”*

The dark-haired boy looked up when he heard a familiar voice. Upon seeing Yusei's face, the younger man was startled, the wound on his chest bleeding instantly as if the sight of the teacher was a handful of salt.

He definitely wasn't expecting to find him there. Not after so many months. Not after he had managed to pick up all his broken pieces, put them together on the table, and start gluing them back together.

But perhaps that meeting was, in fact, necessary. Swallowing hard, he finally stopped to look at the face he loved so much and was surprised by what he found: a haggard, thin, middle-aged man, with eyes that were both concave and bright.

Cutting off the exchange of glances, Keisuke began to look at the floor. Yusei remained standing and silent, and even though he wanted to say something, his voice seemed to have disappeared.

Like a movie, everything came back to him.

When Yusei had kicked him out of the house, it had taken him half an hour to finally leave the front of the building. As if he was numb, he stood there, waiting for something to happen and for time to go back; for Yusei to come down and explain the reason for that, or something else.

But nothing happened. And so, Keisuke had to call his brother, who came to pick him up in their father's car. He was so broken, so shocked, that he had to tell him the nature of the relationship between him and Yusei; he had nowhere else to run. His brother was a good sibling, and so he gave him support and space, as well as a lap during the nights when he had done nothing but cry.

Keisuke went to university the first week, believing he was strong enough for it, but halfway through the second week, he gave up. It hurt too much, it kept

him awake, and it cut off his appetite. Being in the same environment as Yusei was not healthy...

He'd spent three whole weeks working with his parents, immersed in the world he had tried so hard to escape. He passed the following days organizing the preparations for the arrival of clients for the spring, in addition to helping manage the private parties that were periodically held at the hotel.

During those three weeks, he stayed in that part, and Takumi remained in the treasury. It was surprising to see how well the two brothers and their parents had worked together.

When he noticed how good he felt there, something inside Keisuke snapped. The realization that his love for his favorite author had made him want so much to be in that universe, but there, he saw that he didn't belong there.

He also recognized that the breakup with Yusei hadn't been the culprit for this new notion of reality.

Of course, the conclusion had been the needle that had burst the bubble, but the soap and water that formed that bubble were much thicker than it seemed.

The next day, he dropped out of university, focusing all his energy on the business that was his greatest legacy. When he told his parents about his decision, they gave him the best support he could possibly hope to get. They said it was okay, and that if he wanted to go into another field, he was free to do so, but of course, they were happy that he wanted to stay at the hotel.

So, another month passed.

And with it came moments of longing, moments of regret. Winter was getting mild, and the snow was starting to melt... During these changes in the weather, through the window, every night, Keisuke faced his feelings.

He had felt a lot of anger at the fact that there had been no explanations, and at Yusei's lack of consideration for him, but he had accepted during the sleepless nights that the older man was hurt too much.

There was a lot that Keisuke didn't know, and if Yusei wouldn't let him get close, there was nothing the younger man could do. It was a simple matter of logic, and it was enough to restore his strength and make him move forward.

He wasn't made of iron. His shell was bleeding every day, and he needed patience to let the flesh rest and coagulate. He would survive this, even though Yusei had stolen a big piece of himself in the process.

Sitting under the tree that he had confessed his love for him, Keisuke would go to that bench once a week, in a masochistic and somewhat wrong way of trying to heal himself. It was funny, but he wanted to forget, at the same time he hoped that Yusei would try to get back together.

He loved Yusei with all his soul, he also realized that in one of the lonely afternoons of working. Not only for the idea he had of Yusei as a novelist, not for

the way he had kept him raised on an altar for so long, but for the man he had known for almost a year.

He loved the Matsuno for the man he was. He loved him for the way he fought before his eyes, preventing Keisuke from penetrating that armor. He loved the older man for the way he tried. For the way, he gave himself up on that beautiful winter day.

He loved Yusei, even though it had ended in such a cruel way.

Part of him wished for that reunion that seemed to come straight out of a book, while the other told him to be realistic.

Keisuke had told himself when he left the house: that it was the last free day he would spend under the tree.

He would let Yusei go from his system for good. He didn't regret loving him or how their relationship ended. The Koyama was old enough to admit that a love story doesn't need to be eternal to be beautiful, but rather beautiful for as long as it lasts.

And even in the tragedy that had been the end, what they had had had been beautiful. Keisuke would remember it, of course, with sadness, but he would never diminish its importance.

That's why hearing Yusei's voice and finding him in front of him with hurt and even a desperate expression made all his obstinacy crumble: the sound of the rocks that formed his new wall fell to the ground as if they were, in fact, made of paper.

Puffing the air inside as if it hurt, he looked at the teacher's face.

"I went to the hotel," he said. "Takumi told me where to find him."

He couldn't seem to understand if should or shouldn't answer, and Yusei, after a few seconds of silence, spoke again:

"Can I sit down?"

"Yeah, sure...", he blabbered, still astonished.

After settling down, Yusei clasped his hands together, crossing his fingers as if he were nervous.

Staring at the older man's face, Keisuke saw him look up at the tree. It was then that he noticed how the leaves had started falling earlier, and the petals were passing around Matsuno as if they were offering themselves to him as a gift.

"I came here to tell you something, but when I saw you, I felt I lost focus. So, first things first: I came to ask about the fact that you dropped out of Uni, and to apologize for being the reason."

Keisuke was going to open his mouth to explain, but Yusei raised his index finger, in a clear signal for him to shut up.

After what seemed like an eternity, he continued:

"I lost my parents when I was fifteen. When I was seventeen, my younger brother got sick and died as well."

He could see his eyes getting teary but said nothing, just stood there, waiting for him to proceed.

"When I was twenty, I met someone. We lived together for four years until one day he called me and said he hated me.", — Yusei stopped for a moment to take a deep breath, as if what came next was very difficult. "I got nervous and tried to get home as quickly as possible, but I ended up in a car accident."

Keisuke had frozen looking at Yusei's anguished face, his broken voice coming out more and more intense, as if there was a lump in his throat — he could almost see it.

"When I woke up in the hospital, he was yelling at me, and there was a woman with him. I remember feeling pain in every part of my body but when I finally stopped to look at *them*, I saw them hand in hand and that could only mean one thing."

He paused for a brief moment and looked at the leaf that just fell by his side.

"I had an anxiety attack, and they sedated me for about two days. Two days had passed when I finally woke up again, and a coworker at the time explained to me what happened.

Keisuke cursed, but Yusei was not distracted by it.

"I had mentioned our relationship to a friend of ours. For some reason that I still don't understand, this reached his ear, which reached the ear of the woman who showed up at the hospital, which reached the ear of my editor... For God's sake, we lived together! Where was it written that I couldn't say we were a couple?!"

Yusei frowned, taking a deep breath as a single tear ran down his face.

"I broke five parts of my body, including both my legs and my writing hand. When I got out of the hospital, I went to my house just to find out he had thrown my things in front of the garage, as if it and I were trash. He had brought her to live there and the two of them, during the hell I went through recovering in the hospital, had gotten married and set up their perfect life."

Yusei finally lowered his face, looking straight at him. The Koyama felt as if a tractor had run over his head. There was so much more pain in Yusei's heart than he had anticipated, and that shook his little inside world.

"I gathered what was left of my stuff, dropped everything, and ended up here, in Kyoto. Three months after I moved in, I called my colleague to find out the rest of the story and resolve some issues related to documents. His family,

with money, covered everything up and blackmailed whoever was needed, including me. But I would never accept a single note of that dirty money.”

Yusei finally looked at him as if seeking approval, and when the dark-haired man placed one of his hands over the older man's, he seemed to find the strength to continue.

“The hardest part was when I found out that she had given birth the day they tried to buy me. And that they had been together since the second year of my relationship with him.”

The older closed his eyes for a moment or two, and Keisuke stroked his hand slowly, not knowing what to do.

Those details explained so much...

“Keisuke”, he called, turning to the younger with eyes so pleading that it was impossible to look away. “Forgive me! I ended up doing the same to you, and I know that doesn't justify it, but *please*, forgive me!”

Yusei's tears were now falling freely, and when he realized it, he was crying too. Crying for the pain of Yusei's past, and his pain itself.

“It's okay, Yusei,” he said, his voice so shaky that he only hoped the other wouldn't notice.

“No, it's not! It's not okay at all! I love you so much and yet I was able to hurt you... Please, Keisuke, don't leave the University because of me! I'll leave town, I'm going to another facility...” Yusei turned to face him, holding Keisuke's hands tightly, preventing him from moving. “It doesn't matter! Just don't give up on your dream. *Please*, don't let me destroy your dream...”

As if he was going anywhere else... Ever.

Besides, what had Yusei just said?

“You what?” he asked, the thrill mixed with pain domaining his body.

“What, what?”

“What did you just say...”

“Damn it, Kei, I told you not to stop studying...”

He shook his head before replying:

“No. Before that.”

Yusei blushed but didn't look away. And that made Keisuke want to smile. He *had* changed. Months ago, he would have been unable to sustain that, maybe not even recognize he was feeling something alike.

He sighed in completely gave up.

“I told you I love you.”

It was Keisuke's turn to feel his eyes burn, and he, who had never been ashamed of showing feelings, was embarrassed for the first time in his life.

Happiness seemed so unattainable to him that hearing what he most longed for was like being attracted to a carnivorous plant.

Sitting on the wooden bench, facing the man twenty years older than him, staring at the most adorable dark-haired man he had ever met, Keisuke felt hope grow, spreading through his veins like roots.

The sun had begun to set, and night could already be seen behind the Matsuno's unruly hair.

"Enough to start a relationship with me?", he asked in one go.

Yusei blushed again, and just like before, he kept his gaze fixed.

"If you accept me..."

Yusei gave him such a bright and beautiful smile that Keisuke felt the ground soften beneath his feet.

He couldn't believe this was happening. He was in heaven, but he also had his doubts... He needed to clarify what had happened at college, calm him down about his share of the blame, and let him know that everything was okay. In addition to reinforcing how much he loved him, and that he would *never* do what the other had done.

Yes... He needed to say all that...

But he couldn't now, not when Yusei was getting too close.

Widening his eyes, he felt his heart beating so hard that he would walk through the streets of the park in circles just to calm himself if he kept this up.

Yusei reached for his shoulder, pulling out a cherry blossom that had fallen at some point during their conversation upon his sweater then brought it to Keisuke's ear, tucking it behind his brown hair, and smiling softly and satisfied with the result.

A breath later, the older man held his face gently, slowly bringing his lips closer until he was so close that he could taste it.

The scent of ocean and flowers came with the wind, dancing under his nose, happiness digging its way back into his chest, another empty and hollow one.

"I love you, Keisuke."

The dark-haired man's lips opened in a genuine smile. Hearing those words from Yusei was like living a dream, a dream now so real and with so many new nuances, the true nuances of adult life, with its wrongs and rights, its pain and joy.

He would ensure that Yusei would never know suffering again. "

I love you, teacher..."

He smiled at him again even though his cheeks were flushed and his eyes shining with insistent tears, he closed the distance, pulling Keisuke into a loving kiss.

He groaned at the act. The soft touch of his lips was *exactly* as he remembered... Now added to the fact that this was the first kiss initiated by the older.

Yusei had truly changed... So, Keisuke allowed the warmth of his heart to spread to the rest of his body and surrendered himself to the kiss he was receiving.

A kiss of forgiveness; a kiss of reunion.

A kiss of love.

A love that he would cherish and adore until death. For him, there was no one else.

His heart belonged to Yusei Matsuno and only to him.

