

## Bonnets and Blossoms

**2061**

**Fort Worth**

Ren Fukamura. Nagaoka, Japan.

Now landing: Fort Worth, Texas.

Cherry blossoms and blue bonnets. The cure. Nobody knows it, yet the world holds its breath.

I lean on the friends around me. Texan at heart. Japanese by heritage. The world awaits the answer.

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**2026**

**Nagaoka**

The annual bloom of cherry blossoms is a period of renewal for many, but in my life, it's trembling breaths and unfulfilled promises.

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I turn 18 today; a day to rejoice. But instead all I feel is shame. Shame that I couldn't live up to my mother's fading will. Shame that I can only sit and watch as my father succumbs to the same brutal fate.

"Ren. Remember the cherry blossoms..." he says in a faded but incisive voice. I close my eyes as the world swirls around me. I'm not going to fail my father, not this time.

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**2049**

**Nagaoka**

*How could I ever forget the cherry blossoms?*

I walk out the front door into the yard where I marvel at the single cherry blossom tree. It's almost entirely bare this time of year, but still, a few petals linger. Plucking a single petal, for a split second, everything just feels right.

*Mom, Dad. I miss you.*

Every suppressed emotion of the past two decades comes crashing over me. Tears cascade and pool gently on the petal in my hand. The petal holds its structure, unpenetrated by the liquid. *Impenetrable. The perfect carrier.*

I have the answer now. I run inside to my computer as I book a flight across the globe. *The toxins of Bluebonnets. The perfect assassin.*

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**2061**

**Fort Worth**

*Gone. Totally gone.* The moment of breakthrough is surreal—like a sweet nectar coursing through your veins. Right before my eyes, the slide, once choked with dense clusters of disease, is now cleansed. The vile cancerous cells had collapsed, shriveled under the strength of our work. Nanoparticles, constructed from two totally diverse plants, bonding to disintegrate vile pathogens from the inside out.

It felt like everyone was counting on me, but in reality, I was never alone. These Texans had my back; they made the impossible feat of *curing cancer*, possible. From the cherry blossom trees of Nagaoka to the bluebonnet fields of Fort Worth, we had found the cure. Progress made in the presence of our brothers and sisters. Progress not separated by borders and never diminished by collaboration. *Fort Worth: My second home.*

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As I gaze out the window, everyone cheering around me, my eyes latch onto a distinct patch of pink foliage in the distance. Drifting towards the window is a singular petal, dancing in the wind. Slowly it falls, down and down. But nearing the ground, it suddenly rises again. A swirl of hundreds of petals sweeps it back up into the air. Unlatching the window, I let the whirlwind of pink scatter the lab like confetti at a birthday party. The delicate floral scent fills my nostrils as the room rings in sweet laughter.