

## **Chapter 1: Before Dawn**

"Ahhhhhhhhh...." I sighed as I wiped the sweat off my forehead. The sun was blazing through the sky, making it too hot to be wearing a full-blown uniform. And yes, that was exactly what I had to wear on that day. I was wearing the '*Complete uniform with proper shoes*' that my new school wanted me to wear. 'Whose idea was it to start the academic year in the middle of July?' I wondered to myself as I walked towards a small shop.

The shopkeeper, who was sitting at the corner of the shop, stood up when he saw me walk in. I asked him for a bottle of water and he proceeded to pull one out of the fridge. Before handing it to me though, he squinted at me for a while before finally asking, 'You're a fresher in Luciole High?'

'Nah, third year.'

'Huh? Isn't it impossible to transfer straight into third year?'

'Well... Ah! I'm quite late so I'll be going off now.'" I quickly handed him the money and immediately ran out into the road. I kept running until I turned a corner and was sure that the shop was out of sight. By the time I stopped, I was covered in sweat as the sun scorched my skin. I quickly gulped down the water but it was of no use. The heat was killing me. I looked to the front but there was nothing on the roadside, nothing that could give me shade. I cursed myself for running so much. 'The sun is not always a good thing. Sometimes, the dawn can be a curse,' I remembered my mom's words.

'The sun really can be a curse, eh? Never thought it was tr-OW!' my thoughts were suddenly interrupted when something hit me on the back of my head. I turned back in shock and saw a girl grinning at me from a distance. She was walking towards me, pointing to the ground. I looked down and saw an umbrella. I gently rubbed the back of my head, umbrellas certainly hurt when they are thrown at you.

Quickly, I opened up the umbrella. It wasn't a lot cooler in its shade but I was glad that the sun wasn't directly overhead anymore. By the time I looked back at her, the girl had already come up close to me and she was now right up to my face. She was kinda short, had short red hair, and wore a big smile on her face. She leaned in close and I could smell her rose-flavoured perfume. She looked at me as if I was a puppy and whispered, 'You're one of the new freshers? Hm... you don't look that young though.'

'Yeah... Third year transfer student.'

'Ehhhhh, but sn't it kinda impossible to transfer into third year?'

'Is it? I got in quite easily.' I looked right at her, not breaking eye contact.

'Hmmm... I didn't know that. WELL WELL, which section did you transfer to?'

'Section A... I think.'

Her eyes lit up and I couldn't help but think that she was the one who resembled a puppy.  
'WE'RE IN THE SAME SECTION!! I'M RUBY, NICE TO MEET YOU.'

'I-I'm Kain,' I replied. There was no way I was ever matching her enthusiasm.

'Kain? Hmmmm... umu umu. It matches you perfectly.'

'Eh? What do you mean?'

'You're a bad guy ofc. You haven't thanked me for the umbrella yet.' She started pouting while looking away. Yup, she was definitely a puppy.

'Oh, my bad. Thanks for the umbrella, it helped a lot. The sun was killing me.'

'Ehe,' she smiled, 'Good good. Ah, we better get going, I don't wanna be late on the first day.'

She started marching onwards. I didn't move, hoping that she'd go on without me. But it was just wishful thinking as she quickly turned around and signalled to tell me to follow her. 'That umbrella is mine, so if you want to keep using it then you'll have to walk with me.' I sighed and caught up with her.

We walked in silence for a while as she greeted most of the students we met along the way. She gave a cheerful smile to everyone she met. But, there was something off about her... nah, maybe I was just overthinking.

'You're from around here?' she asked.

'Yeah, I live just a mile up from Cranberry Street.'

'REALLYYY??' Her eyes lit up again, 'WE LIVE REALLY CLOSE TO EACH OTHER!!'

'I-I see.' She leaned in close again so I slowly pushed her away.

'But but, it's strange. How come I've never met you?'

'Ah... I moved in recently.'

'You and your family?'

'My mom died recently and my dad... he left a long time back.'

'Oh... I-I'm sorry.'

'It's okay. I've gotten over it... probably.'

'Um um, have you joined a club yet?' I could see that she was desperately trying to change the subject.

'Not yet.'

'Ehhhhh, any idea what club you're going to join?'

'I probably won't be joining any.'

'That won't do, everyone has to join one,' she replied with a smug look on her face. 'You play any sports?'

'Not interested.'

'Art, music, painting, chess, anything like that?'

'Nope, nope, nope and nope.'

'Hehehehe.' Smugness intensifies. 'Do you want to join my club?'

'Hm? What club?'

'It's a secret. Hehehehe.' Smugness overload. 'Come find me after the opening ceremony, i'll take you there.'

'I don't thi-.'

Before I could finish, she quickly ran ahead of me. She stopped in front of the school gate and waved at me, the same cheerful smile on her face. I slowly waved back. By the time I realised that I didn't get the chance to reject her proposal, she had already disappeared inside the gates.

I stopped in front of the gates and looked inside. It was one of the bigger schools that I had seen in this city. Big buildings, large auditorium, a huge stadium-esque playground and ofc, lots of students walking, gossiping and playing around the campus. 'Looks like it's gonna be a lively year,' I thought to myself. I closed my eyes, took a few deep breaths and walked in. It was the beginning of my final school year as well as the dawn of my first year in Luciole High.