

## D a i s h i n s a i

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SOMETIMES I wonder how on earth I survived through my senior high. It wasn't like any ordinary high school experience, not to mention, any ordinary lengths I went as far as admission in scientific journalism school is concerned. Sure enough I studied till my guts flew out onto my notes when it came to the finals but to compensate, just like the rest of my "privileged English" high school crew, witnessed quite a few less educated people spilling out the contents of their guts as we crashed the clubs till dawn. All throughout my last senior years I remained in this particularly "mature" group who were decent examples of fully responsible adults but it wasn't until my credited research study abroad that I fully grasped the notion of the term "maturity" beyond the norms that some pre-graduate students ever have to go through. Apart from these unbeatable "study then knock the bouncers off with fakes if necessary" (their internal motifs) high school professionals, there was this one undeniable exception. This exception is to include Marcella -- my step niece-turned-best-twelve-year-old friend."

To begin with Marcella is a 21st century version of Amanda Thripp with the addition of red pig tails plus wide tortoise framed glasses that hang on the edge of her peachy toned nose. (I could have sworn she'd instantly land the role had she bothered to enroll herself for audition in LA.) Marcella is from Missouri but speaks fluent Italian (her grandfather was Italian and had introduced her to actually think feel and communicate in Italian without giving a damn whatsoever about the other, less charismatic language known as English).

Last May, after a random visit to Missouri her mom managed to actually blackmail me into taking Marcella with me to Kobe during my moderate to intense research on earthquake detection strategies (the moderate derives from the spontaneous outbursts of THE wildest parties in all of Kobe, not to mention the whole country). After repeatedly (brain) filtering this inevitable responsibility for handling this twelve year old step niece who I barely even knew for more than six months, I just thought .... WHAT COULD BE WORSE. Maybe I just didn't feel comfortable with the idea of showing up at one of the nation's "big time" earthquake coordinating expert's liquor laden, spliff blazing "wildcard" occasions (not that I'm hooked into nauseating drugs and alcohol) with a twelve year old Harriet, the spy wannabes tugging at my skirt as though it were some kite asking "Agnese che cosa e il significato della sismologia? (what is the use of seismology) in front of all the head seismologists. Now, looking back I realise a whole lot could have been

worse if it weren't for Marcella and her mother's refusal to take her along to an "insisted" romantic break to Bermuda.

As soon as we arrived at the research student hostel, I paid the cab-driver 1,800 yen and looked around, noticing the humidity of a warm day manipulating the aluminum speckled cement to melt between the layers of maroon bricks. The research would take place in the highly equipped laboratory known as "the centre of advanced earthquake technology" just about two blocks east from the hostel.

After I met with all three of my senior supervisors inside the hostel I decided to go directly to the glistening azure glassed laboratory. I was this close to walking out of the revolving hostel door when I realised ... that Marcella had vanished. How could I have blatantly lost her? I reassured myself that while I was busy speaking to the supervisors a while ago she might have just gone to the bathroom or something. But there was no bathroom on the ground floor nor did Marcella have the card to enter our room. The next thing I knew I was scurrying across the hostel lobby and out onto the streets of Kata-michii in search of an Amanda Thripp among thousands of herds of squinty eyed business and shopping orientated locals. I gave up after fifteen minutes and ended up just walking towards the laboratory to carry on my research (as well as call the police for Marcella's identification). Without breaking the code I entered the squeaky polished building and headed towards the reception. There was a small fragile looking woman no more than thirty with silver glasses and a white uniform who peered at me through her high tech lenses. "Can I be of some help to you?" she asked in Japanese.

"Could you give me the manual to have access to the scansion room?" She ran through her computer screen to check my name off and

