

# Chapter Five

## Hongbin's Heart



Selena's Family Room – Sims players

**T**he laughter, squeals and clapping emanated from the previously quiet room, bursting forth like a line of trumpeters announcing the arrival of royalty.

“Who’s going to jail first? Shahrul, Natalia, or Mr. and Mrs. Leo?”  
HyoJi laughed heartily as Shahrul and Natalia’s avatars stood frozen in front of a burly Sim’s Town Police Officer, awaiting their fate.

Right behind them, towel slung around his shoulders hiding his bare chest, jeans slung low on his hips, was Leo, hands behind his back in handcuffs, chattering energetically in Sim’s talk.

Jane, having returned to the front of the house wrapped in a terrycloth robe, appeared desperate to make the officer in charge understand that she and Leo were the owners of the home and apartment . . . and the girls had no doubt been playing a prank on Hongbin.

Slinking back into the confines of the sofa Selena wiped tears of hilarity from her eyes shaking her head in disbelief.

“What a way to start the day.” She continued to chuckle, glancing about the room at the others who were completely focused on the events unfolding in Blossom Town. “Whose idea WAS it anyway to break and enter to retrieve the note?” Asking around the room, all she got in response was a sea of shaking heads and shrugging shoulders. “Hmmm. That’s unusual. *Another glitch?* “Shahrul? You didn’t specifically ask Natalia to help you?”

“Nope! I was on my way to talk to Hongbin . . . see if maybe he wanted to go out or something. You know. You guys told me to make the first move remember? I don’t know HOW in the hell THIS happened? Why in the world would I have written Ravi a ‘love note’ anyway? I know better than that. Especially after what happened last night.”

All heads continued to nod, tongues clucking agreeably. The only one still suspicious of Shahrul’s explanation and possible excuse was Yuri.

Still reeling from her own personal issues at home, she was testy at best. And nothing about this gameplay seemed right. She wasn’t solely convinced that she just didn’t want to scrap the rest of the weekend and give in to her mother’s pleadings to come home. After all, she had

accomplished what she had come for. An intimate encounter with Ravi . . . some downtime with her friends (at least most of them), and now . . . on top of that, there was a pregnancy. Whatever was left for her relationship ‘could be’ played alone in the privacy of her own home.

Wincing at the thought of Shahrul writing a sappy ‘love note’ to her Bias (in and of itself) was enough to send her packing. Standing abruptly she swiveled around to face Shahrul, reaching for her laptop. “I can’t play anymore. My mother needs me at home.”

“Yuri!” Selena lunged toward her friend who had suffered a great deal both in play and in private since yesterday when they had all arrived. “No! Are you sure you can’t stay?”

Shahrul slipped away casually, dropping behind her own computer, her fingers already on the keyboard hoping to make some sense of what her avatar was about to do to keep from being arrested.

“Come on Yuri.” She snickered. “Stop being immature. I’m NOT after your husband. I told you that already. And look . . . here comes Hongbin now. Don’t you want to stay and see me hook this fish? You know I will. He’s crazy about me.” Her eyes dancing mischievously, she knew she was pushing Yuri to the end of her rope, but she wasn’t sure why. As Yuri flipped down the lid of her laptop, and began rolling up her sleeping bag, her eyes watered with angry tears. They had no idea what was going on with her. None of them. As wonderful as Selena was, she too was oblivious to the real issues. It was definitely time to leave.

“Can’t stay. No other options. My mom’s been trying to get me for hours. I need to go.”

The other girls crowded around, now more concerned that she was leaving instead of what might be going on with Shahrul and her new love interest, Hongbin.

“Awww, Yurrrr . . . it was fun being at the bachelor party you threw for Ken, Azhia sighed. “Shit, it won’t be the same when you leave. Now we won’t have Ravi in play with us. That’ll just be weird. He’s part of the group. Please stay!” She begged, already reaching out to stop Yuri from gathering the rest of her things.

“I . . . said . . . I . . . can’t!” Dropping her head forlornly, she tried not to face the others. “You just don’t get it. There isn’t anyone at home but my mom, and she needs me. Now. This isn’t important anymore.”

As the others gathered round to hug her goodbye, she paused in Selena’s warm embrace, quivering sadly.

“Sorry.” Selena muttered, knowing that Shahrul had started the fiasco, and Yuri’s mother had ended it. She would have to make it a point to text her later to check up and see that she was alright. That’s what friends did.

“Bye guys.”

Heading out the door, Yuri couldn’t help but think that life as Ravi’s Sim’s wife, was a far cry from what she was about to go home to. It ‘had’ been fun to begin with. And now, alone . . . she would play out the new baby . . . (no handing it over to Jane), and maybe build them a new nursery

onto the house. At least she could finally put Shahrul and her obsession with Ravi behind her.

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## SIMS - BLOSSOM TOWN

Blossom Town Rec Center – 2 days later

“**H**OLD hands kids, stay together . . .” Leo urged the skittish gathering of children, ranging in ages from three to five, all jostling for first place at the head of the line, as they were ushered gingerly into the Blossom Town Rec Center Gymnasium.

So this was what it was like to have a ‘brood’ . . . Leo chuckled, amused at the little wagging heads around him, one with a finger up his nose, squeezing the life out of Leo’s pinkie . . . another tugging randomly at one pigtail, continuing to stand on her tiptoes, and twirl about . . . her little turquoise tutu bouncing as she turned.

It was a gathering of ‘the munchkins’, for their first dance rehearsal of ‘I Got A Boy’ . . . all to win the ‘Champion Gold’ for Jane and Junior. The prestigious award needed to get his little man a spot in the best pre-school in Blossom Town.

*How in the hell had he gotten roped into this?* Possibly by dropping his pants in the back yard the other night, and literally being caught with them ‘down’ by the local authorities. Jane’s quiet discussion with the detective

in charge had included making a ‘deal’ with him to let poor Leo off the hook . . . and later she dropped the bomb.

Now he needed to follow through and do something for her in return. *Of course. That’s what women did. It was all about the bribery. Bribery for favors, sex, food, a night out with the guys . . . if it wasn’t one thing it was another. And today . . . it was a trip to ‘Munchkin Land’.*

Scooting the last little body in through the large double doors, he sighed pointedly. He loved children. But wow. Not this many at once. Counting heads to make sure everyone had made it he couldn’t help but notice that N, Natalia, Selena, Hongbin, even oddly . . . Shahrul, were already bustling about the large gymnasium each with a task to do.

*And where the hell was Jane and Junior? Surely he wasn’t in the bathroom again? Seemed that was all he did lately was insist on checking out the women’s bathrooms all across Blossom Town, every time they went somewhere.*

“Okay kiddos. Stand really still and when the music starts, raise your hands, and follow me. Do exactly as I say, until Mrs. Jane can come help you.”

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“**S**O what’s my role in this whole thing?” Hongbin asked N, smiling across the gym at Shahrul, who had taken it upon herself to help Natalia take pictures of the gym layout for

decorations later. “Isn’t she gorgeous? I’m finally gonna ask her out later on.”



Continuing to stare, he watched her kneel down toward the little girl with the pigtails who had wandered away from the lineup to pet his puppy ‘Dasher’. Waiting patiently she allowed the child to spend a few moments loving on the little golden retriever, then hugging her gently, guided her back toward Leo and the others.

N smiled, unable to figure out what exactly Hongbin was going to do with someone like Shahrul, who had made it clear the other night that she was torn between a married Ravi . . . and the possibility of a relationship with his hyung. *By the way? Where WAS Ravi?*

“Your role in this whole thing is to help with choreo. And is she gorgeous? Well, de . . . if you think so, doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks.”

N’s eyes followed around the large area settling on his own girlfriend Selena. She looked especially fresh and radiant today. Even after arguing (yet again) last night, about the placement of the damned bedroom closet, in the new house he was building. *Why did women have to be so opinionated about ‘closets’ of all things? It was a space for ‘stuff’ for God’s sake.* Not worth fighting over, but for some strange reason she continued to butt heads with him over it.

“Hongbin . . . where’s Ravi? Thought he was coming to help out today?” He asked, his eyes shifting again to Shahrul and Natalia, heads bent over a cell phone looking through the photographs they had just taken.

Shrugging his shoulders, Hongbin quirked one eyebrow. “Don’t know. Ask Leo, or Jane. They would know, if he isn’t coming. I haven’t talked to him since the other day. I’ll be back in a minute. I’m going over there to help out the girls. Jane’s here and she seems to be taking charge with Leo. Pretty sure they don’t need me right now.”

“Yeah, okay.”

N leaned against one of the basketball poles, wanting to find a way to get Natalia alone long enough to see if she needed any advice for backdrops or costuming, but Selena was already prancing over toward him gleefully, looking like she had never laid eyes on him before.

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**H**E was coming over . . . Shahrul coughed slightly standing tall, one hand to her breast in anticipation. *He did look good enough to eat today.* Maybe the decadence of her little escapade into his apartment the other night made catching him more alluring. She didn’t know. But one thing was for sure. His piercing dark eyes were undressing her as he sauntered across the room, causing a responsive shiver to run the gambit of her spine, even surrounded by the loud din of squealing children, and the yelping puppy at her heels. Maybe it was time to make her move. He looked ready . . . more than ready.

“Hi.” She greeted him softly, fluttering her long dark eyelashes.

Even though it was no secret she hadn't given him the time of day before, that didn't seem to matter now. She knew . . . he had always had the hots for her. The others were constantly begging her to give him a chance. So here she was . . . giving him his chance.

With Jane's loud piercing directives exploding in her ears he approached her confidently, one hand down as he reached for 'Dasher', tugging him up and into his arms, chuckling as the puppy's tongue made a swath of spit around his nose and eyes.

“Hi yourself.”

“It's craziness in here huh?” She asked, leaning in to scratch the dog's neck as well.

“Yeah. You might say that. Poor Leo. He and Jane got their hands full with this one. Whose idea was this anyway?”

“I heard it was Janes'. She's trying to win the dance contest to get Junior a spot in the pre-school. You remember who won last year don't you? That little redheaded brat named Dizzy.”

Hongbin rolled his eyes at her knowingly. “Oh that's right. Aghhh. I remember now. She did that ballet thing with her big brother. I didn't think it was right for them to let her win when she had somebody older dancing with her. Well. Leo's the best. And I guess I'm here to help too. N

said he would do what he could. Can't drop the ball where VIXX is concerned. Doesn't look good for publicity no matter what the age group."

Dasher wriggled mercilessly until Hongbin was finally forced to let him down, leaving him awkward in Shahrul's presence. *Where to go from here? He wanted to ask her to dinner. He 'needed' to ask her to dinner. Especially after the other night. They had been acquaintances for a while, not really what one would call friends, but hung out together just because she associated with all the other girls.*

She was his exact 'type'. Still in college, she loved to dress fancy, wore her make-up carefully and always looked amazing. Quite frankly, he was a little bit frightened of her and her 'take no prisoners' attitude. But, fear wasn't going to get him a date.

"What are you doing afterward?" He asked almost shyly.

"After this?"

Shahrul leaned in, hands clasped behind her back, noticing that the pigtailed little girl from earlier was making her way back over toward the two of them, intent on dissing the dance and focused on Dasher.

"Ahhh, nothing I guess. Why? Got something in mind?"

*Here it came. He was going to ask her out. She just knew it. Now maybe the girls would ease up on her.*

His dimples creasing adorably, he grinned. "Maybe. How about we share a pizza at my place?" It was all he could think of at the last minute.

The music swelled, and as the little girl lunged toward Dasher, the pup took off running toward the line-up of children, scattering them in all directions, their squealing and laughter echoing around the hollow walls of the gym.

“Ughhhh. DASHER! COME!” Hongbin shouted, as he jumped away from Shahrul and darted off toward the corner doorway, before the little dog managed to make his way out and into the deserted lobby.

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#### Selena’s Family Room – Sims players

“**T**HE DOG THE DOG!” screamed Jane, jumping up from her position on the floor next to the fireplace. “SHHRUL! MY GOD!” Laughing at the upheaval Shahrul had allowed to happen in the middle of her practice with the children, Jane knew she should be angry but just couldn’t bring herself to go there. “He’s just so freaking cute! Whose idea was he? Yours or Hongbins?” She questioned, watching the chaos play out in front of her.

“Not mine. I hate animals.” Shahrul shrugged her shoulders, attempting to get Hongbin’s avatar to gather the puppy before he did any more damage.”

“Awwww. How can you hate puppies? They’re so amazing. That’s one of the reasons I love Leo. He’s a serious animal lover. Me too.”

“Yeahhh. Well. I’m okay with kids and stuff, but animals . . . not so much.” Shahrul scrunched her nose at Jane, hearing the others chuckling and whispering in the background. “I hear you!” She shouted, tossing her eyes back toward them, knowing they would use any opportunity they could to gossip about her now that Yuri was gone, and Ravi was out of play.

“We’re not laughing at you. We’re laughing at that!” Selena pointed at the game noticing that Leo had his hands full with Junior, wound tightly about his leg, forcing him to crumple to the floor unable to do anything but pacify the frightened screaming child as Dasher bounded merrily around and around the gym.

No sooner had the excitement died down in the game, than Selena noticed that Azhia was nowhere to be found.

“Hey guys. Where’s Azi? I didn’t see her leave did you?” Scanning the small group before her, she counted heads.

Just about that time Azhia appeared from the bathroom area, void of the sweats she had arrived in, now dressed in jeans, sporting a clean sweater, hair pulled back, and make-up on.

“I have to go.” She blurted out, lunging hurriedly toward her laptop, and gathering her things. “My Acapella group goes to finals next weekend, and the main soloist has pneumonia and can’t sing. They’ve called me to do her part for her, so I need to go join them at practice. I’m so sorry guys. That means Ken’s out of the game.”

Shaking her head sadly she muttered. “I was hoping to get through the wedding this weekend. Damn. Guess I’ll have to play it alone. This idol thing was great, my vote is we do it again next time. It really has been fun, despite all the arguing and ‘weird’ stuff. Annyeong.” Hugging Selena’s neck she waved the other’s goodbye and bolted toward the front door.

“Well shit.” Shahrul sniffed haughtily. “There goes another member . . . guess I better get Hongbin on the line before the whole game falls apart huh?”

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## SIMS - BLOSSOM TOWN

### Blossom Town Rec Center

**P**ERCHED at the top of the step stool Natalia folded at the waist, tape measure in hand, muttering measurements to herself quietly amongst the uproar going on around her. Sometimes it was so stressful being one of the only ones’ concerned about the state of the decorations. Shahrul had helped for a little while but all of a sudden even she had disappeared, leaving her to fend for herself.

Dasher careened out of control around and around the vast gymnasium skimming past Hongbin’s outstretched arms and wriggling playfully out of the grasp of the gathering of giggling children.

Interrupted by the commotion, N's conversation with Selena took a back seat as suddenly, and without warning Dasher spotted the bright pink shoelaces of Natalia's tennis shoes, dangling from the middle step of the stool.

Like a bullet shot from a gun, he raced toward the unsuspecting girl, hell bent on the satisfaction of a new pink chew toy. N saw him coming before Natalia did and leaving Selena behind skidded up to her backside just as the collision ensued, tangling the both of them into a knot on the floor, with Dasher bouncing gleefully at her toes, tugging mercilessly at the still dangling shoelaces.

The gathering about the two grew as everyone converged on the pile-up, attempting to make sure they were unhurt, finally trapping Dasher in his own wild, euphoric adventure.

Staring down into Natalia's expressive hazel eyes, N gulped loudly. *Why was he feeling so drawn to this girl? Even with a multitude of squealing children and concerned adults about them, all he could see was her. It was as if she was bewitching him with her eyes, daring him to get inside her head and her heart.*

“Are you okay?” He asked quietly. “Nothing broken?”

“For crying out loud N.” Selena piped up shoving him aside, hands on her hips in aggravation. “Of course she's okay. Look at her. She tripped down like ONE step. Come on, get up Natalia.”

Reaching out she tugged at the girls' sleeve attempting to pull her up and away from her boyfriend's protective stance. The two girls' eyes met, sparks flying between them as clearly as night and day.

“Yeah. I'm good.” Natalia grinned at N, purposefully ignoring Selena's assistance and standing, pushed off his shoulder gracefully. “Thanks. Appreciate the save.”

N smiled back, noticing that Selena already had her arm entwined through his preparing to drag him from the area immediately. Seemed fangirls were always at odds over him, but this was different. Not sure how he felt about Selena's sudden burst of jealousy he followed her back toward the bleachers and away from the eyes of the questioning members and children around them.

“Selenaaa . . .” He cooed, dropping down on the hard wooden bench beside her. “What was that all about? I thought you and Natalia were friends? She could've been hurt.”

“Really N? Are you THAT gullible? You didn't see the way she was looking at you? Like you were her freaking ‘Knight-In-Shining-Armor’, come to save her from the fire-breathing dragon named ‘Dasher’. Geez. Men! Run around with their heads up their butts most of the time.”

N chuckled. He knew what she was talking about. Natalia had been notoriously flirting with him for several weeks now. (Ever since they had attended Ken's bachelor party.) And, despite his growing feelings for Selena . . . she was hard to ignore.

The differences between them were countless. But, in the course of building his house, along with Ken and Azhia's impending nuptials, Selena had made it abundantly clear, she was after the ring and the title. With talk about a future and a family he was beginning to feel railroaded into a long-term relationship he wasn't sure he was ready for.

Then along came Natalia . . . with her exquisite dark mane of hair and wickedly sinful eyes that seemed to enflame the part of him that still yearned for freedom and adventure. *Did he really 'want' Ken, Ravi or Leo's life right now?* Glancing over at the crowd of children hovering about Jane's legs as she quietly barked orders to them he, shivered. *Not really.* But, his love for Selena seemed genuine, and his heart was already invested.

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## SIMS - BLOSSOM TOWN

### Hongbins' Apartment

**W**ITH Dasher tucked safely away in Leo's back yard, Hongbin followed Shahrul's enticing backside up the narrow staircase to the front door. Pizza in hand, he leaned around her, unlocking it, hearing it creak under his weight.

Within moments, the small garage apartment was lit, the still steaming pizza deposited in the middle of the tiny kitchen counter.

Shahrul shrugged out of her jacket, trying not to take her mind back to the other night . . . visions of the police lights . . . handcuffs . . . and threat of arrest hanging over her head. *It had been stupid what she had done. Over what? A love confession to a married man? When had she turned into 'that' girl?*

Staring around the apartment she couldn't help but notice that the walls were covered with black and white photographs of dogs and their owners, various silhouettes and people, and even some zoo animals. All sizes, some framed, some not. It occurred to her she had been so focused on her goal at her previous 'unannounced' visit, Hongbin's immense collection had been entirely overlooked.

"Wowww, Hongbin." She whistled, running her fingers around the wall curiously. "I knew you liked photography but geez. These are amazing. I see you outside with your camera . . . a lot actually."

Hongbin blushed, lifting the top of the pizza box, grabbing plates from the cabinet behind him. "Aishhh. It's nothing really. Just a silly hobby. I like black and white the best. Can't tell huh?"

"I love black and white too. Bet you didn't know one of my favorite pass times is to go to the art museums and galleries huh? I love to walk through and just look at all the different artists."

Still following her eyes about the area, she was suddenly riveted to a good-sized photo of none-other than herself. Taken at Ken's bachelor party, she remembered having bent in Ravi's back yard with Dasher and

Junior, letting the now growing pup lick circles around Junior's giggling, happy face.

Unbeknownst to her, Hongbin had snuck up and snapped a few photos loving the comradery of the three, and the story it told. It was his favorite, and he had hung it in a place of honor over the small kitchen table.

“OH! It's me!” She squealed, hands clasped in front of her gleefully. “I remember doing that! Oh my God. Junior was having so much fun. He loves Dasher. Such a shame he was so scared today. I can't believe you captured that.”

“It's my favorite.” Hongbin, set the pizza on the small table, with plates, and napkins, swiveling back around behind her, catching a whiff of the sweet smelling shampoo she used on her short-cropped hair. “Would you like to have it? It's yours.”

He couldn't help himself. He would have given her every photo ever taken if she had expressed an interest in any others. Hell, he would give her the world. All she had to do was ask.

“Are you serious?”

Shahrul touched the glass longingly. He was being so transparent and tender right now. Feeling suddenly exposed, her heart ached with a rare feeling of vulnerability.

“Of course.” Lifting the picture from the hook he held it in front of the two of them carefully. “It’s you at your best. It’s clear you love children and animals. It’s written all over your face.”

Shahrul looked into the warm face of the girl squatted down, hands out to a giddy toddler and wiggling pup. *Was that really her?* On the outside she wasn’t always a fan, but inside the welling of her heart told her otherwise.

“It is isn’t it?” She whispered. Turning to him, she smiled. “Can we go out sometime and take some more?”

“Wow. Daebak. Arasseo. I’d love that.” Hongbin grinned back. “We can take Dasher. Maybe next week when my schedule is freed up again. Come on. The pizza’s getting cold.”

Laying the picture at the end of the table, he urged her to sit, relax and enjoy their makeshift, last minute excuse for a special dinner. He wished he could have made it ‘more special’. Candlelight, wine, music . . . but for some odd reason he still felt the significance of the invitation, despite the meager meal, harsh lighting and memories of the break-in. A road he wasn’t willing to go down . . . at any cost.

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**T**hey thought they knew each other, but clearly they did not. Over pizza and soda the story into each of their lives began to unfold. Before moving to Blossom Town she had been hurt. His name

was Rory. She was the popular one in school. The cheerleader . . . straight “A” student. He . . . the jock. It had been expected they would date. But, it turned out to be a disaster.

Now, hesitant to run headlong into another relationship . . . Shahrul was skittish. He understood. But that didn’t stop him from trying. When his confession came . . . it was earnest and heartfelt. He wanted her to know, he would never hurt her. Not now, not ever.

Shahrul curled both feet underneath the soft blanket, giving in to the warmth of Hongbin’s arms encased around both shoulders. *He liked her. In fact, he might actually ‘love’ her.* Something that had been void from her life for a very long time. As her walls came down under the gentle caress of his fingers down one bare arm, the sounds of thunder rumbled quietly in the background. It was about to storm.

She hated the rain. In the throes of a torrential downpour, Rory had dumped her at the side of the road in the middle of nowhere, clad in only the short cheerleading outfit she had left the house in, stripped of her dignity and pride.

And every storm thereafter just reminded her that men were not to be trusted, or endured. Until Ravi came along. But, even at that . . . she gave in to the obsession because she knew he was married, and she could never really have him.

But, Hongbin who wore his heart on his sleeve, was a bird of another feather. He was engaging and funny, his eyes intense, dimples insanely amazing when he smiled and those full luscious lips . . . oh so kissable.

With the wind beginning to howl outside the window at their backs, and the lightening streaking across the sky . . . when he bent over, a finger to her chin . . . she folded.

And unbeknownst to them both, the large wooden back yard gate blew open in the strong gusts, and seeing a rabbit, Dasher bolted excitedly out into the rain, headed toward the dimly lit road.

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Selena's Family Room – Sims players

“**K**ISS HER! KISS HER!” The girls chanted, watching Hongbin lean down toward Shahrul's avatar.  
Wanting to jump in front of the screen to stop them from

their scrutiny, Shahrul shrunk back, a finger to her lips unconsciously. This self-professed Ravi fangirl was about to give her heart to someone else.

Selena smirked, observing Shahrul's reaction to the excitement building around her in the living area. *She wasn't really a malicious girl . . . just confused. And despite her shaky beginnings in the game, her story was touchingly being played out in front of them all. Hongbin was smitten, and by the looks of Shahrul's flushed cheeks . . . so was she.*

Then quite unexpectedly, the sound of screeching tires outside broke through the girl's shrill voices, followed by the frantic yelp of a neighbor's dog . . .

The room fell silent, all heads turned in the direction of the door as Shahrul leapt from the couch, without thinking . . . nearly tripping over the others in her haste to get to the animals distressed sounds for help.



Only Selena, whose eyes darted from her friend to the screen and back again, noticed that an on-screen happy Dasher had discovered the open backyard gate and was running willy-nilly, toward a rain slick, darkened street.

*Now what? Could this get any worse? How in the world had the events in Blossom Town permeated their reality?*

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