

MOON RIVER

THE STORY FORMERLY KNOWN AS

"KISSING A FOOL"

By the *Ukrainian Sensation*:

Daniel Chervoniuk

Taking place in the totally real, fictional city of...

CHEROJO

WITH THE STORIES OF

Nikolai Zarins - The Protagonist

Bella McCartney - The Dreamer

Ashley Johnson - The Escapist

Amidu Osei - The Commit

Markus Janssons - The Boxer

*Moon river, wider than a mile  
I'm crossing you in style, someday...*

FADE IN.

INT. CHEROJO CORRECTIONAL PENITENTIARY - ???

JULIUS SANBACH (55). Dressed in orange behind a plexiglass screen. Wired phone clutched and whitening his knuckles. Forehead wrinkles, worn off Botox. Glaring at -

NIKOLAI ZARINS (18). Backpack propped up against his chair, coat draped behind his back. Hanes white tee, black chinos with non-fashionable tears. Chest high, chin up - PROUD.

JULIUS  
You ruined everything.

Nikolai's posture is unwavering.

JULIUS (CONT'D)  
I had plans for this city - major plans that would have led to so much growth, so much economic prosperity. I ran a good campaign. A damn powerful one too.

NIKOLAI  
I wasn't the one that ruined your campaign.

JULIUS  
I would've been acquitted if it wasn't for you. That damn trial, the nation's eyes glued to a small fucking city in the Midwest. I had my jury ready to acquit me, but then they were forced to make an example out of me. The billionaire is always the villain.

NIKOLAI  
I don't disagree with you there.

JULIUS  
What did you get? 15 seconds of fame in exchange for fucking the city over? Do you know how many of my hospitals are going to shut down now?

(MORE)

JULIUS (CONT'D)

How many nurses and technicians my board will have to lay off?

NIKOLAI

Were you asking those questions before or after embezzling your hospitals' fund money to support your political campaign?

JULIUS

I took money my hospitals didn't need and put it in a place where it did. I moved money. Dictionary definition of "investment". An investment for the city that raised you.

NIKOLAI

I don't give two shits about Cherojo.

JULIUS

Because you're a coward. The schooling system nursed a poor little son of immigrants into a Harvard student. Or whatever fucking college that article's gonna take you. I got my bachelors here, started my businesses here, made my money here, and Cherojo grew faster than cancer. And it's because I know where my *home* is.

Julius leans closer to the glass that divides them.

JULIUS (CONT'D)

You were born in my fucking hospital. And if you really cared about the steaming horseshit you spewed in that op-ed, you would die in my hospital too.

Nikolai's chin drops.

JULIUS (CONT'D)

You are not a bird. Cherojo is not a nest. You are a person, and Cherojo is a city that needs people like you. Smart people -

Julius PUNCHES the glass, STARTLING NIKOLAI.

JULIUS (CONT'D)  
(yelling)  
THAT USE THEIR SMARTS TO GIVE BACK  
TO THE COMMUNITY, NOT RUIN IT TO  
LOOK GOOD ON A FUCKING COMMON APP.

The guards YANK Julius away from the desk.

JULIUS (CONT'D)  
(yelling)  
DID YOU PAY TO REBUILD YOUR HOUSE  
AFTER YOU SET IT ON FIRE, NIKOLAI?  
OR DID YOU MOVE TO ANOTHER ONE WITH  
A BIGGER MATCHBOX!?

INT. MCCARTNEY'S ROOM - DAY

English classroom. Novel cover posters on the walls, white Christmas lights outlining the white boards.

A PROUD PENNY (Mrs.) MCCARTNEY (40's) addresses a CLASSROOM OF STUDENTS (17-18), among them being AMIDU OSEI (18), BELLA MCCARTNEY (18, Penny's daughter), and Nikolai.

Bella is a dream living in reality. Beautiful enough to make the world stop spinning - terribly attractive in the most effortless way.

Nikolai sits with Amidu, who's patting his back. Bella dreamily gazes at Nikolai.

PENNY  
It's a monumental achievement! Not only a published op-ed in the New York Times, but helping save your city from the likes of that monster! Oh!  
(to Nikolai)  
You've done what so many other writers, writers my age, have been trying to do for decades, and you've done it in high school.

Nikolai smiles at her.

PENNY (CONT'D)  
I am so absolutely perplexed, just at the memory - you coming into my classroom as a little freshman - not even 15 years old.  
(to the class)  
And he wanted to learn. He wanted to make a difference.  
(MORE)

PENNY (CONT'D)

A tiny, smiling baby. Take this with you, as you start applying to your means of higher education, or even if you don't want to go to college - figure out what you *want to do*, and *lead your life with it*. Move with your desires, and everything will change, as they have for your classmate, Nikolai. All the ivy league schools at his feet.

Nikolai's face has REDDENED.

PENNY (CONT'D)

(to Nikolai)

Well, I don't mean to fluster you. Congratulations, and thank you for everything you've done for your city.

Penny starts CLAPPING, and the class JOINS. THROUGH THE NOISE, WE HEAR -

BELLA

Wooooo! Nikolai! So proud of you!

AMIDU

(re: Bella)

You got a cheerleader, bro.

EXT. SOCCER FIELD / ARENA STANDS - LATE EVENING

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP GAME. Nikolai's high school, ADAMS HIGH, has eleven of their best soccer players facing EAST CENTRAL's XI.

The scoreboard reads the score: **2-2**, in the **81st MINUTE** with four minutes of extra time.

Three minutes left to be a hero.

AMIDU hangs on the wing, by the half-field line. Two EC players ready to trap him. By their demeanor ALONE, a toddler could tell that Amidu is the **BEST PLAYER ON THE PITCH**.

Adam's GOALIE rolls the ball out to the left WINGBACK, who lofted a pass up field to Amidu. Amidu goes up for it with an EC PLAYER (Caucasian), who PUSHES AMIDU in the air, causing him to ALMOST land on his side.

The ball sails OVER Amidu, out of bounds. East Central ball.

ADAMS COACH  
Where's the fucking foul, ref?

The ref runs by him, pretending not to hear him.

The same EC player stands over Amidu.

EC PLAYER #1  
Paper thin! Didn't eat enough  
jollof this morning?

Amidu gets back up to his feet and marks a midfielder calling for the ball.

**FROM THE STANDS**

Nikolai is with ASHLEY JOHNSON (18), his girlfriend of 3 YEARS, an ETERNITY in high school. They're amongst HUNDREDS of other SPECTATORS, some of whom being COLLEGE SCOUTS with notepads.

NIKOLAI  
They've been fucking hacking at him  
all night!

ASHLEY  
(with the CHANT)  
We're the best! We can't be beat!  
We will never! Accept defeat!  
Goooooooo, COYOTES!

STUDENT HECKLER  
East Central are dog fuckers!

A bunch of the crowd start to LAUGH.

NIKOLAI  
It's fucking ridiculous!

ASHLEY  
He's already scored twice, babe. Of course they're gonna get rough on him.

NIKOLAI  
But they gotta call that!

Nikolai notices the college scouts jotting into their notepads.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)  
(to the scouts)  
He's going to Duke, you pests!

## **THE FIELD**

**83rd MINUTE. ONE MINUTE LEFT.**

East Central's MIDFIELDER plays a through ball to their STRIKER, but Adams' CENTER BACK sticks a foot in to get in the way of the ball. Adams' midfielder retrieves and slots a pass to AMIDU, who receives it at the half field line.

Amidu controls the ball EFFORTLESSLY, now facing the same EC player in front of him. Adams' FORWARD goes on a run.

FORWARD  
Through Amidu! Through!

Amidu fakes the pass and CUTS INSIDE with the ball, taking his defender on.

ADAMS COACH  
He's baby food, Amidu!

He feints right with a scissor move and takes an outward touch to the left, BEATING HIS DEFENDER, running down the baseline. The student section CHEERS.

The EC player SLIDE TACKLES from BEHIND, getting NONE OF THE BALL, CLEATS CUTTING into AMIDU'S CALVES. Amidu goes DOWN.

NO CALL FROM THE REF.

ADAMS COACH (CONT'D)  
That's a fucking RED, Ref! Are you  
fucking -

Amidu gets right back UP, retrieving the ball and cutting back toward the middle of the field, this time about 25 yards from the GOAL. EC's CENTER BACK steps up to take Amidu on.

Amidu MISDIRECTS the defender with a HOCUS POCUS dribble move, tapping the ball from around his body and making the defender tackle at AIR.

It's a date between him and the EC GOALIE now, who's focused on him from about 22 yards out. He's been beaten twice by Amidu already - he isn't going to let a third through; he's the best GOALKEEPER IN THE STATE.

But the ball is at the feet of AMIDU OSEI.

Amidu winds up his left arm, setting up his left foot right next to the ball, and swinging his GOD-GIVEN right leg, placing his foot THROUGH THE BALL - POWER SHOT.

It sails through the air like a bullet, over the heads of the remaining defenders. The crowd watches in AWE, holding their breaths.

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*\*SWOOSH\* !*

TOP LEFT CORNER, \*CLANGING\* OFF THE FRAME AT THE BACK OF THE GOAL. GOALIE WAS AT FULL STRETCH, BUT HAD NO CHANCE.

Amidu RUNS straight to the student section to celebrate but doesn't get there on time - his teammates JUMP ON HIM and bring him to the ground, ECSTATIC and DELIRIOUS.

THE ADAMS COACH (40's) is going NUTS, HUGGING all of the assistant coaches. The BENCH PLAYERS RUSH the dogpile, jumping on top and adding their weight.

Nikolai and Ashley go CRAZY, JUMPING UP WITH THE STUDENT SECTION. The SCOUTS get caught in the EXCITEMENT, CHEERING.

CROWD (CONT'D)  
(CHANTING)  
WE JUST SAW OSEI...  
AND WE JUST SAY HOORAY...  
YOU KNOW HIM AS AMIDU...  
BUT WE KNOW HE'LL GET US THROUGH  
To the  
GOAL! GOAL! GOAL! GOAL!  
THAT'S OUR AMIDU OSEI!

Nikolai is the LOUDEST VOICE in the crowd.

## A HALF HOUR LATER

Confetti on the field, parents and students about for both sides, cheering with or consoling their respective player. Nikolai and Amidu are posing for a picture that Ashley is taking. Amidu has a medal that he's holding proudly.

**\*CLICK\*!**

AMIDU  
(to Nikolai)  
You tryna come by for dinner bro?

NIKOLAI  
Gotta stop by at Apperkot first.  
Promised Tomas I'd see him.

AMIDU  
You know we ain't eating 'til like  
11 though.

NIKOLAI  
Shoot, I'll have to see.

AMIDU  
Lemme know bro. The fam wanna  
celebrate Sanbach getting that  
sentence.

NIKOLAI  
Everybody home?

AMIDU  
Yessir. They miss you.

The two dap up. Amidu gives Ashley a hug.

AMIDU (CONT'D)  
I'll see y'all later.

NIKOLAI  
Aye, enjoy the moment bro!

Amidu shines a wide smile, walking back to the locker room.

AMIDU  
You know me!

INT. APPERKOT BOXING CLUB - LATER

TOMAS VITOLS (50's, fat), towel around his neck, padded up, is working MARKUS JANSSONS (18) through their combo practices, alone in the boxing ring. *MARKUS AND TOMAS BOTH HAVE SLAVIC ACCENTS.*

Nikolai and Ashley watch Markus; his punches are lightning strikes and his blocks are brick walls. Somehow, Tomas is at his pace.

*[WHENEVER A CHARACTER SPEAKS IN LATVIAN, IT'S SUBTITLED.]*

TOMAS  
(in Latvian)  
You wanna put on a show? Put on a  
show.

Markus LAUNCHES a FLURRY of punches, making Tomas move a little faster - the coach smiles at his pupil.

TOMAS (CONT'D)  
Yes!

Markus goes again, making TOMAS dance with him in the ring. For his shape, Tomas's stamina and speed make obvious his past as a boxer.

**MINUTES LATER**

Tomas grabs KVASS, a Slavic (non-alcoholic) beverage, from the fridge in the backroom and pours Nikolai a glass. Markus motions to the bottle.

TOMAS (CONT'D)  
(to Markus)  
You drink your water.  
(to Ashley)  
And you don't like. Right?

Ashley shakes her head "no", smiling.

TOMAS (CONT'D)  
(re: Nikolai)  
For me and Kola. Best Latvian  
journalist to ever be! You know  
what?

Tomas hands his phone to Ashley.

TOMAS (CONT'D)  
Can you take picture, please?

Tomas and Nikolai are both smiling at Ashley's phone camera with their glasses of kvass; there's a Latvian flag behind them.

\*FLASH\*! The two look at the picture, then smiling at each other.

TOMAS (CONT'D)  
Perfect! Oh.

Tomas grabs at his head.