



青春敗者ぼっち野郎
お気に入りになる
金髪尻軽ギャルの

刑部大輔
illust. あやみ

Lonely Loser, I'll Become Blonde Frivolous Gyaru's Favourite (WN)

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prologue

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Chapter 1 - Dangerous Youth Study of Ichijou Family

According to my, Ichijou Jun's, and my sister's acting guardian aunt Arika's theory, generally, adolescent conflicts in first semester of second year of high school are terrific.

Er, what is this person saying? Naturally, I asked for an explanation. As a result, aunt shined with her big round eyeglasses, and during breakfast answered me this in a super high tension manner:

– Come on, Jun-kun. What are you being so sloppy for? Second year of high school is given to boys for them to flourish! That is absolutely indispensable! You will never have a chance to smoothly raising a flag with a girl after this period! Fu-fu!

– Haaa...

– Jun-kun, don't you have a girl you like? Summer vacation is getting closer, you know? Yeah, you have to make some meticulous preparations. 0 Virginity graduation during summer holiday of second year of high school0 is one of the win conditions in a game called high school life.

Aunt Arika was a little hysteric right from the morning. Having romcom shoujo manga artist as an occupation being the likely reason, whenever deadline is close she gets really nervous. Of course I understand that there is a need to consider her situation, so I decided to properly match our speeches, just like always.

Yeah, just like always.

It means that I, actually told my aunt many little lies.

Little lies like me having three friends who always play in this house after school.

Perhaps this is due to occupation too, but aunt always annoys with her speeches on youth or living in the moment. 0 God of Youth will punish those who skip school festivals0 or0 In the world of Youth, loners are sinners0 . All that ambiguous stuff is my aunt's doctrine.

For some reason, our Founder of the Youth Sect Arika, despite being one, is excessively strict. Not that I'm against it. In fact, I don't want her to know that I am a loner and worry her.

– I understand. Then from today onward I will do my best, and surprise aunt this summer.

– Good! It's OK to just bring someone home! You can do your naughty things, while I will pretend I didn't see anything. I will pretend to not see anything and get some material for my new work!

– No, doesn't that mean you will be staring while pretending not to see?

– Ufufu... Exposed?

I mean, wasn't that your intention from the beginning?

You have to eat breakfast, eat vegetables as much as you eat meat. That being aunt's policy, compared to lunch, breakfast in our home is more splendid. There are heaps of sweet-and-sour pork on the dish in the center of the dining table, but if you are negligent and don't eat any vegetables, they will be forcibly put on your plate. You can't be negligent with vegetables.

Probably anticipating such a situation, the one sitting on the side playing with the lettuce interrupted the conversation.

– That's impossible aunt Arika. In case of aniki, it's impossible.

Little girl, who has big round eyeglasses similar to aunt's, giggled.

She is Ichijou Keyaki.

She is my little sister and unfettered shut-in who behaves like a cat around people. It's almost 8 o'clock, but she still hasn't changed out of her pajamas. She is supposed to be a third grade middle school student, but it seems today, she isn't planning on going to school again.

– Has this person ever brought a girl on a day off?

– Oh, now that you mention it...

– He either studies earnestly or plays games with me.

– It will change soon. Watch me from now on.

– Have you brought anyone apart from your male friends? Admit it.

Keyaki grinned mischievously while playing with her fine black hair. She is certainly a shut-in, but ... she is so irritatingly perceptive. Also, she probably sees through that I am a loner.

– It's fine to stay this week with me too. Who's gonna care for me if you stop being loner, aniki?

– Keyaki-chan. Stop pampering your brother. He will really become a loner, you know?

Oh, shut up, don't underestimate me. I am one already.

Well, as a matter of fact, I don't mind being a loner. Of course I respect my aunt's point of view, however I'm too used to gloomy lifestyle to actually do what she suggests. Still, I haven't once retorted during times like this. Even if I did try argue on this, my logic would still end up being crushed by power. In the end, being good boy is the number one choice.

Besides, it is often during times like this that romcom protagonists start having useless confrontations with others and end up joining some weird clubs full of beautiful girls. I am so well-informed on that.

But what if a real loner was thrown into a group of beautiful girls? I get creeps just imagining it.

To start with, there's no chance for a decent conversation. The moment loner makes an eye contact with a girl, all the words will get stuck in the throat, as if he is surrounded by basilisks. If we speak in terms of wanting to run away in fear, it's already on the level of zombie films.

"Beautiful Girls Hazard". Nah, that's too ordinary. "Walking Bishoujos". Isn't that just girls

walk?" "Beautiful Girls Land". That's a suspicious institution or something for sure. Arrest them, arrest!

While I was thinking of useless things, time is already 7:55 am. Time to go.

– Thank you for the meal!

I nonchalantly rose from the seat, cleared the plates, and was already going to the entrance, when my little sister showed her face from the slowly opening door.

– What?

– Today, 'that' is going on sale, so...

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– Good! It's OK to just bring someone home! You can do your naughty things, while I will pretend I didn't see anything. I will pretend to not see anything and get some material for my new work!

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Besides, it is often during times like this that romcom protagonists start having useless confrontations with others and end up joining some weird clubs full of beautiful girls. I am so well-informed on that.

But what if a real loner was thrown into a group of beautiful girls? I get creeps just imagining it.

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Chapter 2 - Classroom Positioning

Chime after the fourth period eased the leaden atmosphere of the class.

A short time after, someone on the window side flung open the window and wind whistled from the outside, where blue sky was now transparent.

Classroom was bustling during lunch break. Everybody was talking about yesterday's TV programs while eating bento at joined desks. Or about club related grumbles and love stories. Or so I thought, but it seems like they are talking about a popular game. Conversations like this, that are empty at first sight, are the most lasting when people grow up is what gra-, no, what aunt says. If it's about games, I too want to join the conversation a bit.

Be that as it may, it seems that since Golden Week ended the atmosphere of not only this class, but whole grade became more cheerful. At the end of the day, we, second graders, still have main events of school life like summer vacation, school trip and school festival ahead of us.

There is only now. Let's enjoy this moment right now. This feeling of elation that sounds so much like giving up, it's probably generally equally contagious. For the great majority of people.

Speaking of me, I only had two block of CalorieMade cheese, after which I opened ring of English vocabulary flashcards. ZU03.0. It's pretty useful for examination training. I've already lost count to how many repetitions I have done.

Recently, I've decided to spend my lunch breaks on reading this. Unchanged routine since my first year. Diversity comes only from the choice between English and Mathematics.

It's not like I really like studying.

When thinking about what is the most natural thing for a guy, who couldn't even say "let me in" since he was child, to do during lunch break, this is the best answer I came up with.

Trying to join the conversation without any reason, too unreal... I can't help but think of that. Just imagining it makes me want to cut my wrists. Before a problem of choosing a group to join, no amount of arms to cut is going to help. It's that bad.

Still, my pessimism is not unfruitful, so it is not absolutely awful. My test rank gradually rose to the 4th position among second years. I'm almost at the point where I can surpass, what-was-her-name, genius girl of the millennium. At such pace even Former Imperial University is not just a dream, so I cannot slack off.

However, there is still a little problem. Well, it really is a trivial problem, but... As expected, in an environment that reeks of "Youth", someone like me is treated as someone, who can't pick up on the mood.

– Hey. That guy is doing that again.

– That shady character, was it something-Jou-kun? Lol

– Don't know. Whatever-Jou-kun, who even cares about him? lololol

Stuff like that is being said at the back of the classroom.

Humph, say that as much as you like.

I think they are deliberately saying it so that I hear, but I'm not in the mood to talk back. The part about shady character is true, and not caring about goes both ways. I'm self-conscious about everything, so I don't care at all.

– Ah! Just now, Ichijou-kun twitched a bit. Will he cry now? lololol

– Oi! Stop crying! Lol

I take back my previous words. Ain't that too cruel!? That's already bullying. From now on, I'll really give my best at crying, so take a serious notice, Board of Education. OK?

Well, there are more than 300 people in one grade, so there are various types of people gathered here. Even if we only consider this class it still holds true. It's amusing how for the most part you can grasp a student's standing in class just by looking at where he sits during lunch break.

For example, those guys who were just deliberately badmouthing me audibly, they sit on the rightmost tables of the last rows near the corridor, while I sit on the rightmost table of the first row. So they are actually right behind me. They belong to the type of people labeled as the so-called "otaku", so I actually would like to join the same category as them. Still, there are no chances of that happening.

In fact, far from taking me into their circle, they are looking down on me.

On the other hand, the group positioned on the opposite side somewhat differs. They sit on the leftmost side at the back near windows. In other words, diagonally opposite from me. After looking at them for a few second, I can tell that their group consists of boys from football and basketball clubs, as well as several girls with outstanding appearance.

Hmm. Somehow, I feel that their lineup has good looks, good communication and good physical strength. You can feel it the first time you see them, they belong to the top caste of school. By the way, unlike the group of otaku, excelling guys don't care about me at all. Seems like they haven't noticed me right from the beginning.

Anyway, now they are talking about something with an ostentatiously loud voice.

– So, you know. That was a disaster, she ran away in the middle of our date...

– Haha, no way.

– Dumped you real fast, eh? Wipe your tears, baseball club.

– And Daichi-kun has a buzz cut, haha.

Uuh, isn't baseball club too pitiful? But I do like baseball... Still, they really like talks about love, don't they? I even think they come to school just to enjoy love talks.

They look for potential pairs and make conversation material out of them. At some point they start to really make an effort to make a pair stick together like love birds. Can't you let people and their love affairs be?

...

– Hmm, what do you think of buzz cuts, Tachibana?

– Ah, all boys wanna hear about that. What's your type, Tachibana?

Eventually, blond girl at the center of that group became the topic. Sitting on the top of the table and crossing her legs she said "Eh, me?" with a troubled look on her face.

Tachibana Karen. On the surface she is a naïve beautiful girl popular among both sexes, but behind the scenes, she is an infamous bitch. Regarding her infamy, there are actually no front and rear sides to it, it's more of an open secret. Anyway, there are numerous rumors about her. There are different rumors, so putting aside minor details, common topic among them is "She eats any guy, whom she takes an interest in".

Well, it seems guys in our class want to be eaten by her, so when her type of boy became topic of discussion, class suddenly quieted down.

– Hmm, It's like this...

Actually, her dressing was a head-on provocation for all youngsters of the world. It is not only about her flashy hair and looked after facial features. Two unfastened buttons of her shirt slightly reveal moderately developed chest. The length of her skirt is clearly violating the school regulations, meanwhile she sits with her legs crossed and feet bare.

Who cares about that! Got to study! Study!

Right now, that strange girl is only a source of troubles for me. Since the time Tachibana started coming to the library... I have been spending weird after school hours. Anyway, I'm only helping her with studies. Helping a gyaru, who is so dim witted at first glance.

She's not coming today again, right...?

– I guess I prefer manly type. I need to get fired up too, or something. Well, buzz cut is acceptable too, but it looks like I'm just complaining, no?

– No way, and I have just been dumped earlier too...

The ship of Daichi-kun from baseball club was sunk before he even confessed. That is too unreasonable... I would like to say some words of comfort to him, but, unfortunately, I am a loner. Even though it's bitter, I can't say a word. Please come to me anytime you want. And while you're at it, please become friends with me.

Well, what to say here... With this much boys and girls gathered in one room, it's no wonder there are different types of people.

Those, who prefer talks about love. Those, who find both joy and sorrow in mobile games. Or those, who have nothing else to do apart from studying.

That is why I don't mind being made fun of, but I want to be recognized for that. If there was no bookworm who can't pick up on the mood, those happy otakus would probably be lonely with no one to look down on. Perhaps, they wouldn't be playing games so calmly.

To sum up, I contribute to the class by not being able to sense the mood. For this reason, by all means, I hope I can come with an agreement with each and every one of my classmates.

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Chapter 3 - Annoying

After all, Tachibana came to the library after school that day as well. Well, to be accurate, she was already there. She arrived one step faster than me, though I left classroom right after homeroom.

A bit further into the library, she was there near the window, just as usual. In contrast to how cheerful she is during class, the girl was quietly reading a book.

In addition, she was not sitting on the chair, but unmannerly on top of the desk. Dull white sunlight was falling on her. From time to time she would look out the window, seemingly bored. I wonder if that face looking at textbook is serious or listless?

Still, this schoolgirl doesn't match with a dusty solemn room at all... On the contrary, when she looks bored... It was a strangely magical scene.

After noticing my approach, she gave me a resentful glare.

And the first thing she said to me was

– ...Annoying

Whoa. Have I done something wrong?

No, no, it wasn't me. I have confidence I haven't done anything different from the usual.

I had absolutely 0 good guesses, but I was confident of my innocence, so I walked to next seat and took out my study tools from the bag without worries.

In any case, the fact that she came here probably means that she came to study, so let us finish everything quickly. Even so, I think me having a non-refusing personality is a disaster. Personally, I do think it is as pathetic as it can be. And my situation deteriorated in just the few days between the day when I was first asked to help with homework and today.

Well, it's not that I'm dissatisfied to that extent. I come here alone anyway...

...

– Hey!

Tachibana pulled on the sleeve of my uniform. Blonde girl's big eyes looked frustrated about something. For a moment her fair-skinned face came so close, flowerlike sweet aroma tickled my nostrils. I gulped. Air almost stopped inside my throat.

– Wh-, what?

– Annoying. Really annoying.

– Did you mean to say "Quickly ask what is annoying me, virgin loser"?

– Well, I wouldn't go that far... Let's leave it at idiot virgin shitty loser...

– That is even more disparaging! What are you, elementary school student!?

Give me a break, that kind of chat is not under jurisdiction of a damned lonely bookworm loser like me. Just having to help with studies every day almost makes me go crazy.

– Look. Even if you want to complain, there is a more suitable company, right? And you have many friends for that.

– Ha? It's not like that. It's not about me. It's about you, bookworm.

– What? About me?

– About what was said today! During lunch break, you know?

– Aa, now that you mention it...

So it is concerning that group at the back of the classroom, those guys that were having fun playing mobile games. Certainly, that guy was spiteful, eh. He spoke in quite a loud voice so I heard him, but it even reached Tachibana's bustling group. That is to say, everyone in the classroom heard it...

– What's wrong with them? That's practically bullying. So annoying. Laughing like idiots in the classroom, I felt so angry! I was planning to say something...

– It is good that you gave up on that. Things can get complicated, so please don't do things like that.

Tachibana got irritated and clasped my sleeve tighter.

When I tried to lightly shake off her hand, she glared at me. Is this what they call "look daggers"? Is a gyaru looking daggers at me right now?

The only thing in my vision is her face. Hey, so who are you actually angry with?

– There was no real harm, so it doesn't matter.

– Bookworm is okay with that, but I am not! It makes absolutely no sense...

To begin with, why is it you and not me who is annoyed? Now that really makes no sense.

– Don't you hate always being alone? That and let yourself be irritated.

Unpleasant, huh? Well, it is unpleasant, but it is not such a simple topic. I have been a loner for a considerably long time, but Tachibana seems like a complete opposite of me. That's right. What kind of explanation should I give, so that she can understand?

Being alone is like having your own house. You get used to being alone so much, it starts getting really comfortable. Besides, as long as I'm disliked, I can only be alone. In perspective, it gives a peace of mind. It's like from now on, loneliness is guaranteed to me. Hence, it's not as simple as just feeling unpleasant. If things get bad, at times, solitude itself can become a way out and it is quite frightening. Even if someone friendly appears, loner, unfamiliar with goodness of others, will be completely confused and act suspiciously as a result. If I become hated even by that friendly person, then I would better be a loner right from the beginning.

No... That's not it, right, Ichijou Jun? Explaining her all of that, you think that you want her to understand you? Haa... Stop, stop. This will just ruin the mood.

Somehow, thinking by myself made me dizzy. Being a loner means that you can't start a conversation yourself, yet your inner thoughts are so noisy, it worries you. There are at least three different threads of self-consciousness in my brain that always start a debate by themselves, therefore I have so many uncontrollable concerns.

Goodness! And I was planning to help with studies after this...

– I... don't really dislike it you know. I'm one of those who don't care what others think about them.

Otherwise, how would I be able to study during lunch break?

– It's so sad... So you don't care about whole class?

– Well, it is not exactly like that...

– Anyway, I do not like it. Don't like that bookworm is hated. Even though you are a good person. And kind.

– Let's end this conversation here, I'm feeling itchy! Look, didn't you come here to study? Pull out your workbook, right now! You came here because of topics you don't understand, no?

Tachibana sighed, clearly not content, but she finally released my sleeve.

Despite the heated argument, today's study safely proceeded. She has certainly gotten used to being taught, and Tachibana's earnestness increased considerably to boot.

In the beginning she only asked for homework, while today,

– Err... It's about past here, is it Past Tense?

– Wrong, that is Present Simple. Take notice of the verb at the front like 'advise' or 'recommend', they are the verbs of advising someone. Having 'that' after them, means that it is Present Simple.

– Eeh, like I know that! Unfair!

– Not my problem. If you want to complain, travel to England and complain to the authors. Otherwise, just give up and memorize. You've got only two choices.

– Virgin acting as a demon teacher...

– Quiet! Come on, show me willpower of a bitch.

– Hahaha, what the heck does that mean?

Currently, difficulty level of the questions is rising. These problems include material required for the next Midterm, and there is still one month before it. Haha, now you're a bookworm too.

Still, gyaru who has a say in the class is studying seriously only after school? What kind of crazy woman is this? Like, for a long time it was said that good girls should go play outside after school. So go to karaoke or something.

Of course I can't say that. Tachibana clearly has her own reasons to be doing something like this... Yet I haven't asked anything. It's not like we are friends or anything.

Instead, my imagination is producing some stupid guesses on its own. Like... In truth, she is aiming to become a doctor and is secretly studying with fervor under disguise of playing around. In the future she will be blonde beauty surgeon, a.k.a. Doctor Bitch. Please don't use senseless high-school girl slang when writing medical records.

Hmm... Mystery deepens. I feel like lately we are having reasonable chats, but I still don't know anything about her.

For the whole day, this period is the only time when we speak to each other.

We don't speak to each other in classroom. It is the same in gym, sports ground or during home economics practice. We are total strangers on the way to and from school.

However, it is more comfortable to me this way.

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- Of course you know. Teach me then. See you...

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It all feels like a joke. Well, it might be an illusion or something. Everything can stop at any moment.

Tomorrow is Friday, possibly our last session. Who knows if she will come next week.

Simply being a male, this situation makes my chest feel itchy unconditionally. I'll try really hard to forget all about it, and it seems like it will take fair amount of time for me to calm down after I get back home.

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– That is even more disparaging! What are you, elementary school student!?

Give me a break, that kind of chat is not under jurisdiction of a damned lonely bookworm loser like me. Just having to help with studies every day almost makes me go crazy.

– Look. Even if you want to complain, there is a more suitable company, right? And you have many friends for that.

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– About what was said today! During lunch break, you know?

– Aa, now that you mention it...

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– What's wrong with them? That's practically bullying. So annoying. Laughing like idiots in the classroom, I felt so angry! I was planning to say something...

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When I tried to lightly shake off her hand, she glared at me. Is this what they call "look daggers"? Is a gyaru looking daggers at me right now?

The only thing in my vision is her face. Hey, so who are you actually angry with?

– There was no real harm, so it doesn't matter.

– Bookworm is okay with that, but I am not! It makes absolutely no sense...

To begin with, why is it you and not me who is annoyed? Now that really makes no sense.

– Don't you hate always being alone? That and let yourself be irritated.

Unpleasant, huh? Well, it is unpleasant, but it is not such a simple topic. I have been a loner for a considerably long time, but Tachibana seems like a complete opposite of me. That's right. What kind of explanation should I give, so that she can understand?

Being alone is like having your own house. You get used to being alone so much, it starts getting really comfortable. Besides, as long as I'm disliked, I can only be alone. In perspective, it gives a peace of mind. It's like from now on, loneliness is guaranteed to me. Hence, it's not as simple as just feeling unpleasant. If things get bad, at times, solitude itself can become a way out and it is quite frightening. Even if someone friendly appears, loner, unfamiliar with goodness of others, will be completely confused and act suspiciously as a result. If I become hated even by that friendly person, then I would better be a loner right from the beginning.

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c4

Chapter 4 - Group Arrangement

Pessimistic image - check. Languid school hours passed by. I am as lonely as always, just as sky is blue as always.

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Besides, I'm surprised that there was another loner apart from me in this class. Next time, when something similar happens, I should be the one to stand up and do it.

– So, how many people there should be in a group?

– Haven't you heard? Half boys, half girls, total number of 5 or 6 people in a group. Groups are self-catering.

– We have a lot on our shoulders, huh?

– Haha... Sad truth.

Just like that, not having much of a conversation, we sat in silence.

Eh, Half boys, half girls? Everybody in the classroom is divided by groups of boys or girls. That is, are they going to use a lottery at the end? While I was thinking so, finalized groups have already started appearing. What's going on here?

Looking back, I think that today, I have been totally careless. Everything will conclude just like always, like every day. I honestly believed that.

Everything will conclude just like always, like every day

My common sense was once more crushed by the voice coming from outside.

– Hello? Yes, yes, you two. You, weren't you Ichijou-kun?

I was startled. I got it just from the voice. Having turned, I saw the obvious owner of the voice standing there. Tachibana Karen and two girls, seemingly her friends, on her right and left.

– You see, we were left out, you know? Let us in - She smiled

She smiled

!!!There is absolutely no way your group was left out. So shameless!

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As expected, her friends weren't exactly happy. One of them was observing me and Komatsu-kun with a vacant look. The other looked apologetic and had a forced smile on her face.

What an extremely awkward atmosphere. It is so awkward, that nearby Komatsu-kun turned to me with a frightened face.

– Karen, we are better off searching further, no? – Ahaha... What should we do?

See, they, too, think it is a mismatch. Quickly go somewhere else, you. Both parties are reluctant here.

– It's all good. Aren't boys all the same?

Was proclaimed with a smile by the simple blonde.

Now that I notice, it feels like surroundings are getting quiet. Don't these guys looking at you feel unpleasant? You three stand out too much. It is spreading onto us too.

– Tachibana-san, was it? You see, I was thinking, there are probably more suitable boy groups for vigorous girls like you, so...
I was so frantic, my voice switched into falsetto mid-way. However, it appears like our situation serves as entertainment for this strange girl.
– Even if you say it, it seems like all other groups are finalized. It's too late now, so sad.
She looks like she is barely holding her laugh.
– It would seem our group is decided. Please take care of us! Lol
Needless to say, it went exactly as she said. What a farce. Naturally, I questioned her regarding this case after school. Yet the more I spoke, the more she laughed and got joyful, so I stopped.
Seriously, what's wrong with her?

Apparently Japanese schools have regular interviews in written form. Students have to fill in what results they had on recent test, what are their future plans and means to get better results, what results they expect to get on next tests. Example

This is a Japanese internet slang related to Ninja Slayer. Translation of the original phrase is “What about the case of Mirrorshade=SUN’s take of responsibility” (SUN is apparently for mirrorshades meaning sunglasses). In the novel, Mirrorshade is a ninja who has to take responsibility for making a blunder in a hierarchical military organization. So people use the above phrase when some problem is about to happen, where Somebody=SUN is on the receiving end of the problem.

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Chapter 5 - Loner's Weekend

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– Ha, sheltered one that goes to school. Come, greet your death. Fuhahahaha!

My little sister Keyaki was, umm, in high spirits. She was so lively, it seemed her glasses would start glowing with bright light.

– You are on fire this morning. Are you high? High blood pressure?

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– No! I see right through your little scheme of getting used to controls, aniki!

We do only one thing on Saturdays. Playing games with Keyaki for at least half a day is the most common thing. Additionally, this week is special as the popular fighting game Crash Brothers has been just released, so I will inevitably be her opponent for the whole night. Hardcore 24-hour play. It is extremely hard on the body and I'm worried that our lifespan will be likely cut.

Do I care about that? No way. I'm slowly getting fired up.

On one hand there is Keyaki, hardcore gamer. Having dark circles under eyes is normal to her. On the other hand, there is me. Shitty small fry, who earnestly goes to school.

Our skill difference is crystal clear. No matter what the game, I fall behind her in many aspects. There can be a real contest only in sports games like baseball or football, where I have better chance of winning, but they are not the games that my little sister wants to play. But if it is about a popular title that was just released... She is interested and still not used to the controls.

In other words, this is my best chance of raising the precious flag of victory. Of course I am getting fired up.

By the way, according to an urban legend, this game is number one in popularity when it comes to series played at get-togethers with friends. Whomever the opponent may be, if you play against my little sister on a regular basis, you wouldn't want to lose to her.

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– Ha, useless, lol. You have always been too predictable.

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I can't come up with a single passable excuse for my fails at small rapid movements or weak reaction speed. While eating ChocoMade chocolate during lunch break, I was thinking.

Somehow, there were too many various events for one week. Well, not exactly various, they are mostly about one person.

For me, who doesn't do anything except studying, to have worries linger till weekend is very uncharacteristic. I'm not sure if I should be proud of it, but generally I forget all my troubles over one night.

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First thing I always remember is her happily grinning face. Perhaps also, her flowery scent. And finally, her poking me as if greeting me, with that soft hand of hers...

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Chapter 6 - Baggage Guy

– Uu, you're so cruel, Ichijou-kun

One of the loners of my class, in other words, my comrade-in-loneliness Komatsu-kun has said so with glistening eyes. I have unconsciously had a trivial thought about how this boy's freckles made his face look so young. Lost in thought, I forgot why he was angry for a moment.

Well, according to me, someone talking to me is a very unlikely situation. However, this time only the circumstances are somewhat special. As the school trip is self-catering, yesterday every group had a discussion on this and that.

And I was absent at that time.

On Sunday, agreeing for some reason with my little sister's "Beautiful girl comes in a set with a precious vase" theory, I have restored my mood by playing games. I was so enthusiastic, that my body broke down. By the end of our session, I could win two out of five fights against my little sister, so yesterday I was lying on the sickbed with a satisfaction from personal growth.

On the other hand, at the same time this feeble boy was encircled by three stylish gals and forced to talk with them.

– That was too much for me! How could you leave me alone with them!

– I'm really sorry, okay?

– You're so...

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– School trip doesn't matter. Well... I have done as I pleased thanks to your absence. But not being able to make a contact during times like this... No way.

– Didn't I just take a day off?

I see. Still, I'm a little troubled here...

– I don't have it

– Don't have what?

– I truly don't have it. Neither smartphone nor cell phone. Never had one. Even once.

Tachibana was lightly lost for words, getting stiff for a moment. She couldn't even reply "Seriously?" or "Stop kidding, quickly take it out" Instead, she gave me a criticizing look,

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Nevertheless, yeah... There are many benefits to not having smartphone. Your contact address book is so hollow, there is absolutely no possibility of feeling inferiority complex due to anybody. By the way, right after class shuffle, during the common contacts exchange, it is magnificent as I can act grandly. After all, I don't have a phone in the first place.

– If anything, why don't you have one? Everyone has it, you know? Are you a fossil?

– Excuse me for answering a question with a question, but why do you think that a loner has a need for it? I simply do not need it. Something like "parents are prohibiting me from having it" is certainly not the case.

– In that case, go quickly buy one. You're not loner anymore. Now there is me.

– Huh? I'm not proud of it, but even if I buy one, there is no one except you to register as a contact. I'm not going to pay phone price and mobile fees because of one person.

– Please?

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Tachibana has roughly clasped my arm sleeve and stared at me with a serious look. She pulled me so close, I could smell her scent. Somehow, this girl has different perfume every single day... Uh, what am I thinking about?

Why is it that... I have been like this many times, but I still can't get used to looking someone in the eye. I feel my heart squeezing every time it happens. Truly stressful. What face should I make, where should I look, I honestly don't understand... Thus, I reflexively turn my gaze away and answer.

– ...Sometime, soon. I'll tell when I buy it.

– Yay, great! I'm counting on you, truly.

Soon, I didn't say when exactly. One year later is approximately soon too, yeah. Perfectly true.

In the end, I was still outsmarted. Later that day, when we were finished with studies, Tachibana has already cheered up and gave my back a poke with her usual complacent smile.

– Hey, bookworm? Then, we meet on Saturday at 12 o'clock in front of the station.

There is absolutely no logic in what she said. I asked with my facial expression only "What are you talking about?" As a result, for some reason she triumphantly grinned.

– Eh, haven't you heard? Shopping, it was decided that you will go.

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– Look here, there's no way I will entrust it to you alone, lol. And the recipe is already decided on.

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Uh, she certainly has a point. Besides, haven't you meddled with me too much recently? I haven't thought that her meddling will expand to my days off. Look, make advances on more guys, otherwise your qualifications and reputation as a bitch will drop.

Come to think of it, rumors of her being bitchy, how true are they?

– Well, that's how it is, so you absolutely cannot catch a cold or anything on Saturday, Baggage guy.

– Haa... For the reference, if I accidentally catch a cold, what will happen?

– Every day I will come to tease you during lunch break in front of everyone. You don't like it, right? I already know that.

– I'll go, I'll go. Err, I would be glad to accompany you.

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And this are the circumstances of how my plans for weekend were drawn up. How am I going to explain this to Keyaki?

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– Eh, ah, I do.

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I seriously don't understand what type of face to make in front of her. And it doesn't look like to change no matter how many days pass.

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Well, according to me, someone talking to me is a very unlikely situation. However, this time only the circumstances are somewhat special. As the school trip is self-catering, yesterday every group had a discussion on this and that.

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On Sunday, agreeing for some reason with my little sister's "Beautiful girl comes in a set with a precious vase" theory, I have restored my mood by playing games. I was so enthusiastic, that my body broke down. By the end of our session, I could win two out of five fights against my little sister, so yesterday I was lying on the sickbed with a satisfaction from personal growth.

On the other hand, at the same time this feeble boy was encircled by three stylish gals and forced to talk with them.

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one background character and outgoing girls

Sitting in silence and having no rights to speak is actually a nice outcome. If I was there, I would shit myself from fright right there. Not only that, I feel that, if I was extorted money from, I would be saying "Please forgive me with this, thank you, thank you" while taking everything out of my purse. School castes are scary.

Although I haven't skipped the school on purpose, I have truly done a bad thing to Komatsu-kun. Besides, school trip is still ahead, and I don't want to harm my companion loner's spirit. I decided to apologize with all of my sincerity.

– Are you okay? How much did they take from you? Yeah, about that. I have to at least share half the burden.

– They haven't taken anything from me. It's just that it was so awkward... While the three of them were happily chatting, I was fidgeting nearby alone.

– So that's how it went...

It seems I was imagining too much. Well, people of different castes differ not only in class, they are entirely different race of people. My imagination tends to go wild if I'm careless. Especially when it comes to sociable people, I end up thinking their standard is "Alcohol, blackjack and hookers"¹, yet in reality they are surprisingly normal people when you speak face-to-face with them. So, people do not necessarily match their appearance.

Alcohol, blackjack and hookers

1

1

Still, the other party this time is Tachibana Karen and her merry friends. Appearances not matching or whatever, I know what kind of group they are. Those girls live making fun of others, there is no such thing as too vigilant with them. Even Komatsu-kun, who knows how they will treat him in the future.

– So, that discussion... What exactly have you guys done? - I timidly asked.

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– ... Ichijou-kun was absent, so they decided some things on their own.

– Some things?

– Like cooking paella in a pot.

Oh my, we will do actual cooking. It is probably because the core of our group are girls, but cooking is a somewhat attention-grabbing activity. Though I can't cook.

– Therefore, Ichijou-kun is now in charge of shopping.

– Why is it assumed that I know ingredients needed for paella?

– She said "That loner is smart, doesn't he know everything anyway?"

That loner is smart, doesn't he know everything anyway?

– Too sloppy... First of all, assuming I'm smart is too sloppy.

Well, I may say so, but I just need to look up the recipe and find out the ingredients. Huh? Apart from some irresponsible points, isn't our group unexpectedly normal? It may be called being in charge, but I'm just being a gofer. The fact that I'm going shopping, means that someone else is in charge of cooking. Seems like I'm having an easy ride this time.

... So I was thinking, but the conversation was left until after the lessons.

In general, school events are torture for loners and pessimists, so I rejoiced, having found out that trip will be easier than I thought. Not so easy that I would start humming though... I came to the library a bit

tensed up.

Tachibana was there, at the usual place.

Seems like today she is not so motivated to study. She was playing with her abundant blonde hair while listlessly looking out of the window.

There was a clear blue sky outside. This room is on the opposite side of the sports ground, so yells coming from sports clubs were not resounding, but felt more like faint echoes. This almost empty and soundless room gives an impression that it is strangely isolated from any other place, both visually and acoustically.

It seems Tachibana has noticed me.

– Ah, bookworm...&j

She blinked at looked at me with round eyes. She started smiling, but apparently she suddenly recalled something at that moment. Her expression changed to the blaming stare,

– ...No way.

– What? If it's about yesterday's absence, I'm sorry.

Well, we do belong to the same group... And I haven't participated in the discussion. Moreover, I haven't helped with her studies. This apology is not the same with the one I expressed to Komatsu-kun, but it's not that I don't think I should say "I'm sorry" to her.

I'm sorry

– How is your health?

– No problems. Then, let's quickly start. Which subject today?

However, when I got closer, Tachibana held out her hand to me. What is it? Is she saying "Hand over"? Hand over

Eh? Is this...

– Extortion...?

– No! Idi-o-o-t! Bookworm is an idi-o-o-t!

Tachibana has folded her arms in dissatisfied manner and puffed out her cheeks.

What should I have taken out for it to be correct?

– Smartphone! LINE! I was simply worried and couldn't contact you!

– Aa, so that's what it was about...

– School trip doesn't matter. Well... I have done as I pleased thanks to your absence. But not being able to make a contact during times like this... No way.

– Didn't I just take a day off?

I see. Still, I'm a little troubled here...

– I don't have it

– Don't have what?

– I truly don't have it. Neither smartphone nor cell phone. Never had one. Even once.

Tachibana was lightly lost for words, getting stiff for a moment. She couldn't even reply "Seriously?" or "Stop kidding, quickly take it out" Instead, she gave me a criticizing look,

Seriously?

Stop kidding, quickly take it out

– Seriously, no way, virgin

– How do you even link it to virgin!

This girl, she just wants to say virgin this, virgin that.

Not that her being surprised is unreasonable. Nowadays, it's almost impossible to find someone in high school who doesn't have a phone.

Nevertheless, yeah... There are many benefits to not having smartphone. Your contact address book is so hollow, there is absolutely no possibility of feeling inferiority complex due to anybody. By the way, right after class shuffle, during the common contacts exchange, it is magnificent as I can act grandly. After all, I don't have a phone in the first place.

– If anything, why don't you have one? Everyone has it, you know? Are you a fossil?

– Excuse me for answering a question with a question, but why do you think that a loner has a need for it? I simply do not need it. Something like "parents are prohibiting me from having it" is certainly not the

case.

parents are prohibiting me from having it

– In that case, go quickly buy one. You're not loner anymore. Now there is me.

– Huh? I'm not proud of it, but even if I buy one, there is no one except you to register as a contact. I'm not going to pay phone price and mobile fees because of one person.

– Please?

– No

– Seriously, please...

Tachibana has roughly clasped my arm sleeve and stared at me with a serious look. She pulled me so close, I could smell her scent. Somehow, this girl has different perfume every single day... Uh, what am I thinking about?

Why is it that... I have been like this many times, but I still can't get used to looking someone in the eye. I feel my heart squeezing every time it happens. Truly stressful. What face should I make, where should I look, I honestly don't understand... Thus, I reflexively turn my gaze away and answer.

– ...Sometime, soon. I'll tell when I buy it.

– Yay, great! I'm counting on you, truly.

Soon, I didn't say when exactly. One year later is approximately soon too, yeah. Perfectly true.

In the end, I was still outsmarted. Later that day, when we were finished with studies, Tachibana has already cheered up and gave my back a poke with her usual complacent smile.

– Hey, bookworm? Then, we meet on Saturday at 12 o'clock in front of the station.

There is absolutely no logic in what she said. I asked with my facial expression only "What are you talking about?" As a result, for some reason she triumphantly grinned.

What are you talking about?

– Eh, haven't you heard? Shopping, it was decided that you will go.

– I know that I'm in charge of shopping. That sort of work, I can do it alone.

– Look here, there's no way I will entrust it to you alone, lol. And the recipe is already decided on.

Everything was on the premise that I will go along.

Uh, she certainly has a point. Besides, haven't you meddled with me too much recently? I haven't thought that her meddling will expand to my days off. Look, make advances on more guys, otherwise your qualifications and reputation as a bitch will drop.

Come to think of it, rumors of her being bitchy, how true are they?

– Well, that's how it is, so you absolutely cannot catch a cold or anything on Saturday, Baggage guy.

– Haa... For the reference, if I accidentally catch a cold, what will happen?

– Every day I will come to tease you during lunch break in front of everyone. You don't like it, right? I already know that.

– I'll go, I'll go. Err, I would be glad to accompany you.

– Very well & j

And this are the circumstances of how my plans for weekend were drawn up. How am I going to explain this to Keyaki?

– Fufu... I'm so looking forward to it. Do you?

– Eh, ah, I do.

– Haha, you're so shy.

I seriously don't understand what type of face to make in front of her. And it doesn't look like to change no matter how many days pass.

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Yet, one Friday evening...

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By the way, she is also frivolous and famous. She probably knows of the rumors herself. As she doesn't get angry at being called a bitch, perhaps some part of the rumors is true. She always makes fun of me calling me virgin, but if it turns out that she is a maiden, I can later use it as a material for jokes.

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It's not that I think anything of it. Every woman born as a beauty is surely like that. Well, I don't know if I will be a virgin forever. The so called "Eternal Virgin Emperor". It sounds so cool, just like a title in Japanese chess world. Such a contrast of name and meaning.

– ...ki!

Hah, everything is just so troublesome. It would be so good if the school trip was cancelled due to the bad weather.

– Aniki!

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Unintentionally, a miserable cry left my mouth. Grand failure.

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– Mm? Sense?

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Eh? 20,000 yen!? Is she and idiot!

– No, no, there is no way I can take it. Not like this.

– Taking a girl out costs money. You can pay when you start working.

– No, it's not like that... I am truly going to have fun with friends.

– In that case, you can return the money when you come back. But if you end up using them... If it is a date, I expect so much from you! Oh you, naughty boy!!

Aunt Arika punched me in the shoulder with a bang. It hurts, you hear?

– Ah. You should definitely go buy a condom in the convenience store. Things like that, you have to do them properly.

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Alright, I'm a damn genius. Tomorrow, I'll go wearing track suit. I'll do just that.

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By the way, she is also frivolous and famous. She probably knows of the rumors herself. As she doesn't get angry at being called a bitch, perhaps some part of the rumors is true. She always makes fun of me calling me virgin, but if it turns out that she is a maiden, I can later use it as a material for jokes.

I remember how once, some of my classmates had a chat like this:

- Well then, what do you think of Tachibana? She is cute, has a fine chest and nice personality.
- I heard she has a working middle-aged boyfriend. We have no chances.
- Really? I heard she dates Takase from class C.
- She probably eats any guy she takes interest in. Sounds good.

Haa...

It's not that I think anything of it. Every woman born as a beauty is surely like that. Well, I don't know if I will be a virgin forever. The so called "Eternal Virgin Emperor". It sounds so cool, just like a title in Japanese chess world. Such a contrast of name and meaning.

Eternal Virgin Emperor

– ...ki!

Hah, everything is just so troublesome. It would be so good if the school trip was cancelled due to the bad weather.

– Aniki!

I... was so spaced out, that I haven't noticed anything until my little sister pulled my cheek. Fue?

Unintentionally, a miserable cry left my mouth. Grand failure.

Fue?

– My miserable face. What happened?

Seemingly, Keyaki was honestly worried about me as she looked at my face. At that time, aunt Arika has finished dish-washing. Wiping off her hands, she came from the kitchen.

– Come on, Keyaki-chan. You're his little sister, you have to sense some things.

– Mm? Sense?

– When a boy suddenly starts to space out one day, it is so obvious that there is now a girl he likes, right? What kind of girl is she? Tell me, tell me!

Romcom shoujo manga artist, wild as always. She looks very excited.

On the other side, Keyaki was intently observing me. She even added a jiii~ sound to her stare and glared at me with squinted eyes. So scary.

jiii~

– Mating season. Turns out my brother is a monkey, huh? It was an eye-opener.

– Ha!? Lies! Don't take seriously everything Aunt says!

– Let me ask then, Jun-kun. Are you staying home tomorrow? Or do you plan to go outside?

Ugh, she precisely stabbed right at my weak point.

– ...I was planning to go to game center with friends from middle high.

– Foolish brother. That is not an explanation for your spacing out. You were more troubled than that.

– Gununu...

Keyaki saw through the main point of my lie. With that, she snorted and turned away.

However, seeing my situation, my aunt became happy saying "Oh my". Then she took out a bill from her purse and gave it to me.

Oh my

Eh? 20,000 yen!? Is she and idiot!

– No, no, there is no way I can take it. Not like this.

– Taking a girl out costs money. You can pay when you start working.

– No, it's not like that... I am truly going to have fun with friends.

– In that case, you can return the money when you come back. But if you end up using them... If it is a date, I expect so much from you! Oh you, naughty boy!!

Aunt Arika punched me in the shoulder with a bang. It hurts, you hear?

bang

– Ah. You should definitely go buy a condom in the convenience store. Things like that, you have to do them properly.

It is absolutely not a date, shit. Just because I have a duty to go shopping, now everyone is misunderstanding.

Brain parliament, voting concluded. "Tomorrow is not a date". That is why, there is no need to think about what clothes to wear. This is so uncommon. I absolutely need to become nonchalant again. I should try to go with nonchalant clothes.

Tomorrow is not a date

Alright, I'm a damn genius. Tomorrow, I'll go wearing track suit. I'll do just that.

Hensachi is the ranking of Japanese universities based on percentile admission of students. The less the share of admitted students is, the higher the ranking of university. . Basically, his goal is to be better than almost everyone.

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c8

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It appears that she has absolutely no intention of laughing off my first-class century blunder. "It's not funny at all, virgin" - I can see it in her eyes. I'm sorry for being alive.

– ...Forgive me, please...

Having as much spirit as I would need to kowtow, I dropped my shoulders.

How should I explain it to her? Everything is the result of me being foolishly fixated on the thought "This is certainly not a date, I'm just going out to do my job". Now that I think about it, I was worrying myself like a brat. I think that even second year students of junior high trouble themselves over more important things. Obviously, there is no way I can tell this girl that I had such thoughts. After all, she will just make fun of me calling me a virgin.

– You... I knew from the beginning that you can be saddening, but not that it was to this extent.

– ... I have nothing I can say, that is true.

Contrary to me, Tachibana had a refined outfit, making me feel excessively guilty. When I first saw her today, I shivered at how smart she looked.

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– What? Figure?

– Money, do you have some with you?

– Ah, yes. Ah, I hope you can leave me some for travelling expenses.

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– Well then, keep me a company for all of today...
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– Ehehe... Come here.
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– Oi, let's walk with a small distance between us... It's probably embarrassing for you, that others consider you to be together with me.

– It's okay. All the embarrassment will be gone in a bit. So excited!

– Ah, come again?

– Also...

Tachibana smiled at me with a grin.

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c9

Chapter 9 - First Date \$a

– Look, now that it has come to this, I will diligently choose your clothes.

With this announcement from Tachibana, our long tour of clothes shops commenced.

Just so you know, I am clothed, but walking in this place called mall wearing a track suit, I feel as if I am committing a crime of walking here naked. It's almost the same as my aunt saying "Hey, Jun-kun, quickly put on some clothes" when I come out of bath wearing only a pair of underpants.

However, this time I'm not in a situation where I can quickly put on some clothes.

On the contrary, I have to try clothes one after the other with no end to see, so I got tired of it. I was continuing without putting much thought into anything and completely forgot about lunch midway.

Moreover, it's one of those places called select shops¹, which I would never go into alone. The interior is so calm and fashionable, I want to become invisible and immediately hide in a place with no human presence.

On a third such shop there was an exchange like this:

– Hmm. Horizontally striped shirt absolutely doesn't suit you. Why is it so?

On the other side of the opened curtain of the dressing room Tachibana stood with her hand put on her chin looking troubled.

– Perhaps, that is because bookworm himself is a bit otaku-ish?

– No, I don't want to be told about my human nature just because some clothes do not match me!

The fact that I can't deny the point about being an otaku is so frustrating.

Well, whatever I say. Right now I am dressed in black and white stripe shirt and white pants. By the way, I even have hand watch on my arm with the sleeves slightly rolled up. Girl's thoughts are not something to be comprehended. Fussing over details, didn't we come here to buy clothes?

Still, if I were to choose clothes myself, this is certainly not a choice I would make.

I tried to see myself in mirror, and noticing that my whole body had a bright color, I shuddered, not believing that it was me in front. Who the hell are you, you rotten herbivore sociable guy... But before that, as expected, there is a part inside of me that keeps saying "It doesn't suit you, kekeke". I could have sunk through the floor from embarrassment.

Nevertheless, now that I know that it really doesn't suit me, what will? I have absolutely no ideas about that. I started getting suspicious of how much will change if I try something else.

– Isn't this one okay? They are all the same, anyway.

I spoke without saying what I was saying, truly.

And it is actually true, all the plain clothes I have at home are few and not that various in types. Track suit that I have on me, two pairs of jeans, several T-shirts with prints of unknown meaning, that's about it. To sum up, essentially, I only have clothes that I wear at home. I am not someone who goes out on days off, so those clothes were always enough.

It seems my last few words made Tachibana feel displeased. Dissatisfied, she stretched out her neck and looked me into the eyes.

– Hmmm...

– Wh-, What?

– Hmmm...

– It's scary, I'll apologize if I hurt your feelings, okay? Well, all I've been doing today is apologize...

– Ichijou-kun. You said that you will do anything today yourself, right?

– Ah, that's right...

– Okay... Well then, next ooone &j

Hearing the "next", shop assistant, who was waiting with clothes under his arms, handed them over with a faint smile, making me want to run away.... Really, I seriously want you to stop making that smiling face. That is, we are not really close friends, okay? Rather, can't you make some guesses after seeing me come in wearing a track suit? I have special circumstances, you hear?

Haa... Turns out, fatigue piles up during outings.

However, with no one caring about circumstances of a gloomy guy, "Pretend you're a mannequin" game continued.

I have always thought that women's shopping being long was just an urban legend. Even though my brusque sister would always want to return on the rare occasion of us going out... That was an absolutely terrible fallacy.

Yet, when we were choosing clothes in the next shop.

Tachibana, who was sifting through the clothes on the hanger, suddenly said this quietly:

– Bookworm, you have an earnest part to you, huh?

What are you saying obvious things for? I shrugged my shoulders.

– I wonder... Well, being a bookworm itself makes you belong to a sub-category of earnest guys, isn't that so?

– It's not like that...

At that moment, she turned to me with a tender smile. It was not the usual one, where she makes an idiot out of a person and grins, but a genuine little smile...

Or should I say, it felt like her smile was pure.

You know... When you pass by sports ground after school and baseball club is doing 1000 ball hits, and there is a girl manager who shouts seeing that. It is that kind of beautiful look.

Usually, I would turn away feeling shy, but right now, as if seeing something unbelievably dazzling, I stood motionlessly. Young and sparkling, or something... What is it, truly? For some reason, I'm feeling sorry for being nonchalant.

Apparently, Tachibana has sensed my confused state. She hanged the clothes and when the atmosphere started to soften, she suddenly said "A, Ahem!" and faced me.

– Err, choosing clothes, is actually a veery serious matter. Nature of the person who will be wearing the clothes is important, yes. That is to say, from my, long-time fashion otaku's, point of view.

– And that is why we should choose something that is like me. That is, if it exists.

– Umm... that's not exactly what I meant?

And then, there was once more seriousness in her eyes. She turned her face to the row of clothes again, and with a calmed voice and dignified view of her profile, continued.

– I will try to choose for what I want you to be, just a little bit. And I will take that, and with what you are now... will mix just a little bit.

– ...

Blonde girl, as of now, is a wee bit in a serious mode. I haven't noticed until now, but her gaze wandering the inside of the shelf is seriousness itself.

I thought all the girls like clothes, but it seems that this girl is a special case. In the first place, right now she is totally choosing clothes for another person. Even though it is not for the sake of becoming cute herself.

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Chapter 9 - First Date \$a

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c10

Chapter 10 - First Date \$b

Now that we have finally finished choosing my outfit, it was my turn to stand blinking. Standing in the dressing room in front of the mirror I was dumbfounded.

– What, bookworm, turns out you can do it if you try... &j You're looking rather cool and smart, huh? Tachibana was saying that from behind me.

– Ye-, yeah.

Fuu, unintentionally, I spoke in a strange falsetto. But this time, it is not as simple as me being shy from praise.

Right now, my reflection in the mirror, while still giving me a dreadful "This is not me" feeling, seemed slimmer and taller than usual. Moreover, I'm surprised by how composed my image is.

– Haa...

No way... My mental age seems so high with this outfit...

It is almost as if a 5th year student of elementary school with a dripping nose suddenly had a class change to a 3rd year university student with high self-awareness. One of those who study abroad.

Overall, it was a monotone outfit put together from plain colors. Just like proper outfits that mothers of the world choose, these clothes have no patterns of annoying random colors.

For example, the white T-shirt was loose, making me look a bit taller. Also, I feel like the black skinny pants make my legs seem longer than they are. I never wore anything except seemingly oversized jeans, so I'm amazed how close-fitting they are. And the most remarkable, the one I would never wear myself, is this khaki long coat. I may call it a coat, but it has wrinkled and thin fabric, the one you would wear in spring. It resembles wearing a cardigan. The hem is reaching my knees.

By the way, wearing a long coat, my chuunil heart is raring to go. Like, I would be so strong in a net game. A really powerful character breezing through the endgame content going by the name Dual-sword Demon. Just the thought of wearing it is making me thrilled... Ah, seems like my mental age is truly low. Reeely low.

Of course, if I say it, I will be acknowledged as saddening once more, so I barely controlled myself...

But...

– It's because you're tall. Unexpectedly, this style suits you... Isn't that so?

Realizing that she has unusually chosen the clothes seriously, I felt shameful about my excessively childish thoughts.

Although, exactly as she says... overall there is a cool and smart impression. Earlier, everything didn't suit to the point where she laughed, but now she doesn't. If there is nothing unfashionable, then it is already stylish.

But that is too perfect and I think there's something off about it. If I have lived my life in a different way, I may have thought I look good myself. If I think that something is wrong, then something inside me is out of sync with the outside me. And that something is part of me, which firmly stays home on days off.

It suits me, but not exactly. The me, which could perhaps be like this. It feels just like that.

– You... are incredible, huh...

I felt embarrassed that is strangely suited me, even so impression-wise, I feel like another person. Feeling mysteriously impressed, I said so. I would've never chosen such an outfit myself.

And this time, Tachibana was finally satisfied with my answer.

– Ehehe. Did I leave some of the serious bookworm-like feel there?

– Well, yeah... Now that you say it.

– A somewhat adult-like feel.

– ...Adult? Me?

– Is that not so?

– Uh... If you think of me like that, I'll feel weird...

While saying so, I was looking at the mirror, and the more I looked, the more her words seemed true. I felt embarrassed. Uh, I have an urge to turn away... but if I really look back, I will meet eyes with Tachibana and there will be no actual change.

– Overall... Somehow, I feel a little bit embarrassed...

– Of course. I made it flashy, just a little bit.

– Uh... Why?

Then, Tachibana pinched my sleeve from behind. Turning around, I saw her grinning, her expression filled with strange happiness.

– Didn't I say? When choosing clothes, I wanted to try mixing in a bit of what I want you to be.

In that case, aren't you basically saying that you want me to be a bit flashy? I just do not understand her. It's really embarrassing.

In the end, I used up all the money given by my aunt, even though she gave me a lot.

Well then. Leaving the clothes shop behind, I suddenly had a need to go to the toilet. We should have met at a nearby bench, but Tachibana was absent when I returned. It was a situation like that.

Anyway, she should be around here. If I go to look for her and we miss each other it will become a serious matter. As I don't have neither smartphone nor cell phone, there are no means of communication. And that's why I relaxed on the bench.

There was a big game corner not far away, it was a noisy place filled with bam! bam!

With this and that, it was already 4 p.m. Didn't we come here to buy ingredients for self-catering? On the contrary, we haven't even had a lunch. After noticing that, there was now a feeling of hunger. To add up, there was also tiredness from going around.

It seems like date is a process of hard labor that completely wears down your mind and body. It was an important lesson. Will it let me stay alive next time is still under question though.

I might say so, but... It was quite fun...

Recently, I've noticed something. Talking with a girl, having her happily sitting next to you is somehow... I feel cheerful from the bottom of my heart.

At the same time, there is a part of me that stubbornly refuses to admit it... Ah.

Haa... Every loner in the class certainly has one or two inner reasons to be one. I think that in my case, my mind has probably had no real progress since the summer of second year of junior high. Even now my main philosophy is "I've no interest in women, let's study lololol".

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Huh? Okamura? It seems I made a regretful mistake. It's not Oomura, it's Okamura. I was almost correct. Okamura is about 80 percent Oomura.

Not remembering the names is my bad habit. Bad enough to be alone, I guess.

On the other hand, Tachibana... Seemed to be in quite bad mood. Her face is smiling but eyes are screaming "kill". As expected, your angry face is scary.

kill

She tramped towards me and strongly grabbed my arm.

– Jun... let's go.

– Eh, hey...

– Quickly. I'm serious.

"Hey, calm down. Stop that showy behavior."

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I was expressing that with my face, but for a little while we didn't make an eye contact.

Google

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– You know, after all, I cannot accept it. Even if you will feel annoyed, I'm planning to do something about it. About how you are treated in class. It's not only Okamura from today, is it?

Heavy luggage was about to tear off my fingers of the left hand. I wanted to walk further without answering, but Tachibana's angry face rooted my body to the road.

– ... Not really. Why do you care?

– Haa? If someone important to them was being bad-mouthed, anyone would hate it, right?

It was too sudden and I was obviously startled. Important...? Me? It hasn't been long since we started talking like this, you know?

There are probably several possible explanations. Among them, there is an unthinkable wide in its range "important". It is especially understandable type of explanation for a sociable girl like her. All the more for a girl that is frequently a part of rumors concerning different men. Well, even if I deduct it like that... Just like always, I turned away from her eyes and sullenly replied:

important

– Um... that. The disliked guy¹ certainly has a reason to do what he does. It's just that you are not aware of it.

¹

¹

– Surely so, but I really hate it that in spite of being able to say such words, you are not trying to reveal yourself to others. I didn't think that you are a person who builds invisible walls around yourself.

– That so... You're quite frank, huh...

– But... Even if you are like that, I know so many positive things about you. You're so good at taking care of others, you may act cold, but you are never angry and occasionally you slyly act lovestruck, also... when we first met, do you remember?

– What?

When we first met. Does she mean our first conversation in the library? Honestly, I don't remember anything special that happened. First conversation probably has a special meaning, but compared to our recent exchanges, I can't say that it was something memorable.

– Hmm, so you don't remember. Well, maybe it wasn't a big deal for you.

– What are you talking about? Now I am curious.

Tachibana intentionally turned her face with a "Humph!".

Humph!

Still... making a face like that, she is now in a good mood, right?

– Haa... Come on, let's go. How far is it? My fingers are hurt, you know.

– Ah, err... It's here...

– Hm?

Here, you mean here?

here

There was quite a mansion before my eyes. I wouldn't call it a residence, but it has a splendid terrace on upper floor and a verdant garden at the entrance. There is also a long garage, that seemingly is big enough for three cars.

Seriously... This girl, just what is her social standing? Is it one of those where you think she plays around till late, but actually there is a strict curfew?

– Ah, err... A pretty cool house, huh?

– Yaa! So shyyy!

Ooh, this girl, showing a rare red face. I thought to get back at her for always making fun of me, but...

Regretfully, today I'm tired. It was a difficult day for a gloomy guy. Even though it is a day off, I feel like I spent two weeks' worth of energy.

And yet... It wasn't so unpleasant...

– Should I bring it to the entrance? It's quite heavy, you know.

– It's okay... It's somewhat embarrassing. Thank you for today.

– From my perspective, it is I'm sorry for today. I was feeling guilty from the very start.

I'm sorry for today

Handing over the bag, I started to walk as it was. I thought it was a logical closure for today, yet... My sleeve got slightly pulled.

"W-, What?" I turned around.

W-, What?

Unexpectedly, Tachibana had a shy look on her face,

– Um, er... I mean, today was really fun, even though you're a virgin, and some things were surprising, um... Thank you. Let's have some fun together again. About a hundred times.

– Are you planning to waste all my days off! Well, it was actually fun...

Grabbing my sleeve and poking me when I was just about to go home. Somehow, it feels the same as our usual parting time in library. It was a bit funny, so I smiled a little.

Tachibana still hasn't released my sleeve. I already know what that means.

– ...Do you want to say something?

– Let me see... Umm...

– We will meet at school on the day after tomorrow. You can tell me at that time.

– No, it has to be now. Look, here...

Having said that, she pulled out a small paper package from her bag. I reflexively took what was handed over to me, but Tachibana was glaring at that package. Seems like I have to open it. And inside was a

– Eh? Necklace?

– Yes, I bought it while you went to the restroom. With today's final outfit, your neck was a little lonely, that's why. I arranged it with monotone in mind, and your T-shirt is pure white.

Something resembling a golden ring is tied to a black string. Huh? Isn't this...? Am I not just like Frodo with a hanging ring...

– Ah. Right now, you thought of something sad again, for sure! That face,

– It was not. It was better than usual. By the way, won't it be too flashy? It would be a little embarrassing to...

– It's okay, for you to wear that much. You'll get used to it, surely.

– And yeah, money. How much was it?

– Fufu, don't mind.

Then, Tachibana lifted the heavy plastic bag on her shoulder and went to the gate,

– Take it as thanks for teaching me every day! Well, see you on Monday!

– Ye-, yeah...

You've gone too far with your thanks, jeez. And just when am I supposed to put it on?

That was the day's end. I went home in a good mood. Well, maybe it isn't bad to do this from time to time... I thought like that.

Important person, huh?

Just how long will I be able to remain important?

Meaning Okamura.

Meaning Okamura.

c12

Chapter 12 - Colleague

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Naturally, I was sitting alone at the rear part of the bus. Rather, there was never anyone that would sit next to me at times like this. It hurt my feelings when I was little, but I am used to it now. If you arrive late and have to sit next to someone, it will feel strange... and now that I consider the risks, it's still better as it is than giving a shot to coming late. Sometimes loners have to stay positive, I need a break.

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"Let's feign a terrible illness and skip it altogether!". You right there, the one who thought of it, you're my comrade. You are my fellow colleague, let us get along together in the future.

Well, of course I want to skip too, but... In my case, it is more complicated than that. My guardian aunt Arika will firmly not allow it and see through any simple act. On the contrary, she is one of those who checks all of the details on the printout I bring from school and reads it until she grasps full understanding of the schedule.

"Jun-kun. You do remember how to start a fire, right?" "Ah, yes."

Haa...

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I was idly looking out the bus window. Eventually people started gathering and it became cheerful and noisy. I can see boys with baseball gloves and footballs, they are showing off outside the bus. Seems like they are going to play during free time.

Yaaawn... Present season is what they call interval between spring and summer. I'm sleepy. Seriously.

Behaving like this in a place like this, at times it can backbite you with people saying "He's a cynic". But even with all of that, I still try my best. To not stand out and feel invisible. At least, I won't prevent others from having fun.

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Komatsu-kun, is bewildered too. Somewhat embarrassed he wants to say something, but it seems that second line isn't coming out of him.

Haha... You don't really have to push yourself.

Well, I'm not about to behave strangely in front of a weak guy. If it is like this, maintaining a conversation should not be difficult.

– If you're a loner, you should have lots of free time. I just use it effectively.

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– That way, being a loner becomes your strength. Don't you think so?

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– He-, Hey? Um... Together, let's do our best together, on the school trip.

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With everybody around being so noisy, just how pessimistic are we? This event conducted right after class shuffle is designed with students getting accustomed to each other in mind. The teachers likely haven't even imagined that there are such pessimistic guys like us.

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Well, of course I want to skip too, but... In my case, it is more complicated than that. My guardian aunt Arika will firmly not allow it and see through any simple act. On the contrary, she is one of those who checks all of the details on the printout I bring from school and reads it until she grasps full understanding of the schedule.

"Jun-kun. You do remember how to start a fire, right?" "Ah, yes."

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c13

Chapter 13 - A Group of Muddy Hands, Appears!

It was a bright morning with no clouds to obstruct the brilliant rays of light.

We have arrived at whatever mountain. It took us 90 minutes to get here and my body is tired. The light is not coming from the sky only, it also gets reflected off the nearby river, so it is really dazzling.

– Alright... YOU LOT! We are starting self-cooking right now!

We started activities right after our arrival. Teacher in charge¹ of our class, Shiraishi², made this announcement with her self-amplified loud voice that can tear atmosphere. Still, I don't understand this person. She is always acting strict, but it seems no one has ever had a heart-to-heart talk with her. It would be interesting to know what kind of impression she could give during an individual interview. Should I say as expected, a cheerful mood peculiar to school events is all around.

It seems that today, even this female teacher, that would pass as instructor in US Marine Corps, is not capable of calming down the noise spread among the whole school year. I can hear people talking here and there while she is speaking. And then when the speech was concluded and groups dispersed, everyone was more or less smiling.

Under the blue sky, breathing clean air, I feel like my soul wants to hop lightly. "World is in the era of Big Picnic! Gong!!" that sort of feeling.

...Well, um, it was exactly so, but...No, because of that...probably.

I was poking the cooking stove that was just assembled from stone blocks with tongs and earnestly setting a fire.

With a blank face, I became free of thoughts. Silent and solemn, I concentrated on the fire before me. Taking the opportunity, I escaped the reality.

At times like this, I am really grateful for being assigned a simple work. If you ask why, that is because for a certain reason I have to maintain my mind in pure blank state. I needed to feign ignorance, as the atmosphere around me was too delicate.

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Chapter 13 - A Group of Muddy Hands, Appears!

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It was a bright morning with no clouds to obstruct the brilliant rays of light.

We have arrived at whatever mountain. It took us 90 minutes to get here and my body is tired. The light is not coming from the sky only, it also gets reflected off the nearby river, so it is really dazzling.

– Alright... YOU LOT! We are starting self-cooking right now!

We started activities right after our arrival. Teacher in charge¹ of our class, Shiraishi², made this announcement with her self-amplified loud voice that can tear atmosphere. Still, I don't understand this person. She is always acting strict, but it seems no one has ever had a heart-to-heart talk with her. It would be interesting to know what kind of impression she could give during an individual interview.

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Should I say as expected, a cheerful mood peculiar to school events is all around.

It seems that today, even this female teacher, that would pass as instructor in US Marine Corps, is not capable of calming down the noise spread among the whole school year. I can hear people talking here and there while she is speaking. And then when the speech was concluded and groups dispersed, everyone was more or less smiling.

Under the blue sky, breathing clean air, I feel like my soul wants to hop lightly. "World is in the era of Big Picnic! Gong!!" that sort of feeling.

World is in the era of Big Picnic! Gong!!

...Well, um, it was exactly so, but...No, because of that...probably.

I was poking the cooking stove that was just assembled from stone blocks with tongs and earnestly setting a fire.

With a blank face, I became free of thoughts. Silent and solemn, I concentrated on the fire before me. Taking the opportunity, I escaped the reality.

At times like this, I am really grateful for being assigned a simple work. If you ask why, that is because for a certain reason I have to maintain my mind in pure blank state. I needed to feign ignorance, as the atmosphere around me was too delicate.

Well, even if I say delicate, it is delicate only for me... Komatsu-kun has been standing behind me with a wry smile for a while now, dodging me. Help me.

– Hee, surprising, huh. Ichijou-kun, you're good at outdoor stuff like this!

Tachibana Karen-san, immediately started meddling with a bookworm. She's a little blunt.

While I was regulating the fire, she was bluntly crouching near me. Today we had to come wearing clothes that can get dirty during the trip, so she is not wearing expensive clothes like she did for the shopping. She is dressed into bright colored frilly clothes. I feel that this one matches her character better than the previous.

Ha-ha. I predicted that you will come to mess with me. It is a matter of course that we will speak to each other as we are part of the same group, rather, it is the same as usual. However, exactly on this day, the

situation is obviously different.

...Hmm...

Owner of the deep voice crouching on the other side of the stove is another person from our group. The one who always hangs out with Tachibana at the classroom... Yeah, the girl called Hyoudou Yayoi.

Actually, before the trip I checked the list of names and memorized all of the members of our group. In order to get through today. I am now continuing to live fully reflecting on the case of Okamura.

Hyoudou had good-looking black hair with stylish permed bob haircut, cool and refreshing, characteristic eyes. But in addition to that, she has an ice-cold gaze that makes you shudder.

– How's that Yayoi? It seems like we can start using fire in a bit.

– Hmm... It certainly is a bit surprising. Even though this person doesn't have anything on his face resembling camping.

Contrary to the way she speaks, the way she looks is very scary, so I am absolutely not looking in front of me.

Exactly. Today, Tachibana has the specs of muddy hands³, so to speak. As long as I am sitting in silence, she continues to call her friends like this:

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3

0 Gyarū A calls for backup! 0 0 Gyarū B appears! 0

Ah, by the way, loners have only one skill "Check the Situation", so I have no way to deal with them right now. Seriously, what should I do? Right, what about this...

0 Loner A calls for backup! 0 0 Things like that do not exist! 0

That's a bug, I say, a bug! Turns out, A from Loner A stands for A from Alone, so annoying. I have even started to have a one-man comedy act inside my head, my mind is close to collapse. And it is only a matter of course that I want to concentrate on the fire in front of me. But it seems that this difficult to deal with young lady named Hyoudou is hell-bent on mercilessly attacking me.

A

Alone

– Hmm...

She said this with ice-cold eyes,

– Ichijou, what do you do on days off? Despite being a bookworm, do you practice mountain seclusion or something?

.....

Eh, what the hell is this idle comment? Sarcasm? Joke? I'm lost here!

I didn't have any suitable words to reply, so I started panicking and saying nothing comprehensible.

– Eh, Aaa....

As if seeing my state, Tachibana, that was crouching on the side, lightly pushed me with her elbow. Blonde girl, smiling at me with her face and cutting me with her eyes. As if saying "Hey, quickly say something to Yayoi, you virgin. If things go like this, it'll become weird".

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Lately, I can understand what Tachibana is meaning to say without words. Oh my God, what is happening?

– Err, I excessively study in the mountains on days off... or something?

– Hmm, is that what they call bookworm of the wild? Hilarious. Do you come to this mountain too?

Eh, she's having fun. Still, she isn't smiling nor is there laugh in her voice. Pushing me with her elbow again, Tachibana is conveying "See, you can talk". It appears that I barely passed just now. What was the evaluation criteria, I wonder?

See, you can talk

– Ahaha, so weird! A bookworm like this, on a mountain like this.

– Haha, unreal.

Right after a rough follow-up (?) by Tachibana, Hyoudou made another idle comment. Somehow, from their exchange I feel that there is a gap between them, but right now I couldn't care less.

However, aren't your friends too hard to deal with for a loner? You're way of making an opportunity for a

conversation is too peculiar...

If it is assumed that Tachibana is a gyaru who belongs to an "upper" group, then this aloof young lady belongs to a "downer" group. It doesn't change the fact that it is hard to deal with both, so please, just let me concentrate on fire, thank you.

"You know, after all, I cannot accept it. Even if you will feel annoyed, I'm planning to do something about it. About how you are treated in class."

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Ugh... It's none of your business...

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That day, would it have been better if I just said so? I too think that it is bad even though she is worried about me, but having a girl being concerned about me so much is embarrassing. Since I have met with this girl, my male instincts have been often unstable.

And why do you want me to be on good terms with your friends, I see no future in it.

At this time, we were approached by Gyaru C, who was, to my relief, more ordinary compared to B.

– Karen, how is it? We have finished the preparations for cooking, stove is the only thing left.

– Ah, look, Momoko! Fire looks so good!

The one who came tying the string of an apron is Tenjuin Momoko. She is our class representative, and has red eyeglasses that match her long black hair. She has good grades and is an ace of the archery club. She is the so-called perfect superhuman

From what I have seen today, Tachibana's best friend is Hyoudou-san from before and number two is this Tenjuin-san. I feel like there are often situations where this honor student forces herself into the pair's conversation.

– Ichijou-kun. Can we use the fire yet?

– Ah, yes... In just a bit, I think...

– That's great

My usual half-hearted reply to a usual comment.

Exactly, let me engage in a conversation with no substance, so that I can get through today. You are the one conscious among this group of gyarus. I almost see the image of this fine girl calmly handling the merry pair, for example during lunch break. I now feel sorry for giving her a Gyaru C setting...

– However. It seems like we are considerably fast in setting up a stove.

– Eh?

Looking behind me, I found out that other groups seem to have difficulties. Like fire going out shortly, unskillful burning of the newspaper with strips flying away. The circumstances were resembling Pandemonium a bit. Concentrated on fire, I haven't noticed until now. Shiraishi-sensei is walking around there, but it seems that helping students is not her objective as a teacher. As if saying "You are a class, so do something by cooperating."

You are a class, so do something by cooperating.

– Look, bookworm. Seems like you're a capable kid when you try!

Tachibana-san is frantic about bookworm's age. So pure.

But seriously, stop it. My face is starting to feel hot.

Well, things like arranging the firewood or rolling up a newspaper. There are many things that you can't understand unless you do it yourself... I'm used to it because by chance, every year I do camping forced by my aunt, yet it seems that guys like that are not all around.

Looks like our group will be comfortably having our lunch.

I guess excluding Tachibana's unacceptable plans, I almost got used to these girls as a loner. Besides, groups are disassembled for the free time. It appears I will have an unexpectedly safe sail to the end.

At this point, I had a peace of mind.

I forgot. Still, even I couldn't imagine that muddy hand can summon an arch-demon.

While I wasn't paying attention, a voice came from behind.

– Hee... Karen's group, your fire is very good, huh?

... This super cool voice, I know it. The one who often hangs out with three girls during lunch break, that

something guy from soccer club.

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Call for help

c14

Chapter 14 - Escape from Reality

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Still, I'm glad it turned out like this. Compared to looking at human faces, gazing at fire in the stove is more relaxing for my heart.

Somehow, I sound as if I am soon-to-be arsonist. Although, the one who brought me to this mental state is having fun as always, so it can't be helped.

Tachibana Karen and merry friends. As long as I'm there, the only possible scene is being endlessly messed with by Tachibana in front of the other girls and Komatsu-kun. Just imagining it makes me irritated.

Don't think deeply about her, lately I've been often telling it to myself. I feel I'm at my limit. Thinking like that, I decided to escape at least until the lunch is ready.

But why is it that after all, this group turned out to be the same...

– Eeh! You're incredible Ichijou-kun! It's burning really good!!

– Uh... Don't be too eager, it's dangerous.

– Wow! Wow! I'm impressed! Incredible!

The guy who is crouching near me and making noise is the buddy of the good-looking guy that came to our group not so long ago. Having a face that has a monkey-like charm, he is an excessively highly energetic guy.

He is gazing at the flames with gleaming eyes just like a grade schooler, but his hairstyle is on the contrary flashy, as if he is a graduate. Specifically, he has dyed brown hair with great volume achieved via wax. You know, his hairstyle looks as if he was very good at card games. As if he had the three God cards¹.

However, to my regret I can't remember his name. As a person from another group, he was unobserved. And with that, let's temporarily name him noisy one.

And the good-looking guy that previously came to our group, cool one. Different from the noisy one, he is leaning against a tree nearby with folded arms.

He was a guy with thin eyes. Likewise his ruffled black hair were waxed. He looks cool just standing here, the world is an unequal place. His hairdo looks more natural than noisy one's, it really looks damn good.

– Hmm...

Suddenly, he had a happy expression on his face. Smiling as if understanding something, he looked at me.

– W-, what?

– You know, despite doing nothing but studying, you're quite interesting.

– Not really... Anyone can do this much...

Bookworm Jimmy just happened to be fire attributed for some reason, that's all. Rather, look here, you guys observe it too. Remember how to do it at least this much. You are sociable guys, don't you do lots of BBQ? Aunt said that summer vacation is approaching too, yeah. But you don't need a stove for a BBQ, huh...

Well, I did feel more at ease considering that the other party was not a girl. The topic brought up by the cool one seems to be a troublesome one.

– I'm not talking about that. I was just wondering why Karen became interested in you.

– Huh? What are you suddenly talking about?

– Before the group arrangement, I was indirectly told that there is a boy she wants to make a group with. So I was thinking, maybe it was you Ichijou-kun?

– No way. Didn't she come to us having no one left to join with them?

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likely soon end, I feel like can't we, by chance, keep doing this together for a long time?
 In any event, since our recent date, I feel like I have been desperately running away from something.
 However, at that time, wind blew. Komatsu-kun, who was supposed to be a mannequin behind me, smashed me with a few quiet words,
 – Now that you mention it, Ichijou-kun, you were having fun with Tachibana-san just now, right?
 Uh... Has it been like that today?
 Ah. Has this young loner, who was standing behind me, seen how that girl stealthily poked me earlier?
 – ...Nah, that's not true.
 – But Tachibana-san looked very happy. Have you always been chatting like that?
 – If it is Komatsu-kun, then he should know it, as a fellow loner.
 Cool one is now having an even broader smile. He looks delighted.
 – Hee... I ended up hearing something interesting. Karen and Ichijou-kun, huh?
 – What's with the weird laugh... There is really nothing going on.
 – Well then, I'll ask the opposite question. Ichijou-kun, do you have interest in Karen?
 – It is not a problem of my interest! Just as you said, all I do is nothing but study. There are almost no points of contact between us or something, um...
 – But Karen showing interest herself, now that is something rare.
 This guy is completely ignoring me. Still, rare? Wasn't the main rumor about how she eats any guy she takes interest in?
 But this is coming from a friend whom she calls by his first name. He should probably know much more than the ones circulating the rumors.
 And I did what I always do. I didn't look into it deeply. If I have asked more, then it would mean that I really have an interest in that blonde girl. It's not that I didn't want others to think so. I didn't want to admit it myself.
 And that is how I... activated Continuous Spell card "Escape from Reality" and ended my turn. With that mood, I kept silent.
 – Well, whatever. Thank you for the stove.
 – Ye-, yeah.
 After that, cool one kept happily making a suppressed Fuun laugh. By the way, noisy one kept saying "Incredible!" while gazing at the fire. It seems that he is a latent pyromaniac, so I am a bit worried.

Like these , and this hairstyle.

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– Well then, I'll ask the opposite question. Ichijou-kun, do you have interest in Karen?

– It is not a problem of my interest! Just as you said, all I do is nothing but study. There are almost no points of contact between us or something, um...

– But Karen showing interest herself, now that is something rare.

This guy is completely ignoring me. Still, rare? Wasn't the main rumor about how she eats any guy she takes interest in?

But this is coming from a friend whom she calls by his first name. He should probably know much more than the ones circulating the rumors.

And I did what I always do. I didn't look into it deeply. If I have asked more, then it would mean that I really have an interest in that blonde girl. It's not that I didn't want others to think so. I didn't want to admit it myself.

And that is how I... activated Continuous Spell card "Escape from Reality" and ended my turn. With that mood, I kept silent.

– Well, whatever. Thank you for the stove.

– Ye-, yeah.

After that, cool one kept happily making a suppressed Fuun laugh. By the way, noisy one kept saying "Incredible!" while gazing at the fire. It seems that he is a latent pyromaniac, so I am a bit worried.

Like these, and this hairstyle.

Chapter 14 - Escape from Reality

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Supporting my own group's fire, and touring other groups. It was supposed to be fun and enjoyable school trip but all I keep seeing is fire. Vibrant green scenery under the sun, and a bookworm silently adding wood to the fire. What a plain picture. Speaking of what I am doing, it is being an errand boy of a member of sports club as an outcome of my own suggestion. It's nothing but miserable.

Still, I'm glad it turned out like this. Compared to looking at human faces, gazing at fire in the stove is

more relaxing for my heart.

Somehow, I sound as if I am soon-to-be arsonist. Although, the one who brought me to this mental state is having fun as always, so it can't be helped.

Tachibana Karen and merry friends. As long as I'm there, the only possible scene is being endlessly messed with by Tachibana in front of the other girls and Komatsu-kun. Just imagining it makes me irritated.

Don't think deeply about her, lately I've been often telling it to myself. I feel I'm at my limit. Thinking like that, I decided to escape at least until the lunch is ready.

Don't think deeply about her

But why is it that after all, this group turned out to be the same...

– Eeh! You're incredible Ichijou-kun! It's burning really good!!

– Uh... Don't be too eager, it's dangerous.

– Wow! Wow! I'm impressed! Incredible!

The guy who is crouching near me and making noise is the buddy of the good-looking guy that came to our group not so long ago. Having a face that has a monkey-like charm, he is an excessively highly energetic guy.

He is gazing at the flames with gleaming eyes just like a grade schooler, but his hairstyle is on the contrary flashy, as if he is a graduate. Specifically, he has dyed brown hair with great volume achieved via wax. You know, his hairstyle looks as if he was very good at card games. As if he had the three God cards¹.

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However, to my regret I can't remember his name. As a person from another group, he was unobserved. And with that, let's temporarily name him noisy one.

noisy one

And the good-looking guy that previously came to our group, cool one. Different from the noisy one, he is leaning against a tree nearby with folded arms.

cool one

He was a guy with thin eyes. Likewise his ruffled black hair were waxed. He looks cool just standing here, the world is an unequal place. His hairdo looks more natural than noisy one's, it really looks damn good.

– Hmm...

Suddenly, he had a happy expression on his face. Smiling as if understanding something, he looked at me.

– W-, what?

– You know, despite doing nothing but studying, you're quite interesting.

– Not really... Anyone can do this much...

Bookworm Jimmy just happened to be fire attributed for some reason, that's all. Rather, look here, you guys observe it too. Remember how to do it at least this much. You are sociable guys, don't you do lots of BBQ? Aunt said that summer vacation is approaching too, yeah. But you don't need a stove for a BBQ, huh...

Well, I did feel more at ease considering that the other party was not a girl. The topic brought up by the cool one seems to be a troublesome one.

– I'm not talking about that. I was just wondering why Karen became interested in you.

– Huh? What are you suddenly talking about?

– Before the group arrangement, I was indirectly told that there is a boy she wants to make a group with.

So I was thinking, maybe it was you Ichijou-kun?

– No way. Didn't she come to us having no one left to join with them?

Right now, I barely forced myself to say it. It was an awful try at self-deception.

Same as ever, one side of my mind is saying "That cannot be possible" while the other one is saying "Face the reality". Recently, it has been the same during study sessions. Thinking that our sessions will likely soon end, I feel like can't we, by chance, keep doing this together for a long time?

That cannot be possible

Face the reality

can't we, by chance, keep doing this together for a long time

In any event, since our recent date, I feel like I have been desperately running away from something.

However, at that time, wind blew. Komatsu-kun, who was supposed to be a mannequin behind me, smashed me with a few quiet words,

– Now that you mention it, Ichijou-kun, you were having fun with Tachibana-san just now, right?

Uh... Has it been like that today?

Ah. Has this young loner, who was standing behind me, seen how that girl stealthily poked me earlier?

– ...Nah, that's not true.

– But Tachibana-san looked very happy. Have you always been chatting like that?

– If it is Komatsu-kun, then he should know it, as a fellow loner.

Cool one is now having an even broader smile. He looks delighted.

– Hee... I ended up hearing something interesting. Karen and Ichijou-kun, huh?

– What's with the weird laugh... There is really nothing going on.

– Well then, I'll ask the opposite question. Ichijou-kun, do you have interest in Karen?

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Fuun

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hairstyle

c15

Chapter 15 - Pessimist's Football

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After receiving my portion, I sat at the edge of the blanket to eat. With three girls of our group having a friendly chat behind me, I was checking out other groups of our class.

I got a little tired. Or should I say body feeling heavy is characteristic of school events.

There is a space between me and Komatsu-kun, because if I speak with him now, my weariness will accumulate. My brains are tormented even when I speak with people I know, but today in particular, I had too many of what I would call almost first meetings. Anxiety, that weighs on the back in its entirety at times like this, is the painful part of a pessimistic person's existence.

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My shoulder was suddenly rubbed by a soft hand. Startled, I turned around,

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Smoothly approaching us, was the football club pair from before. Ogino, the cool one, kicked the ball in our direction and I received it semi-confused.

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– Hey, Ichijou-kun, let's play football! Komatsu-kun too!

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– Other guys went to play baseball. Besides, having two more is just right. As a... thanks for earlier?

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– Oi, just play football. I'll go back if you don't stop.

– Sure, sure, lol

I just ran without thinking. With intention of speeding up my digestion and forgetting about all troubles, I continued running for several tens of minutes.

It has to be said that both Komatsu-kun and I suck. I can't decently run with the ball, so whenever I have it, the first thing I think of is giving pass in one touch. If I can receive the ball at a good position, I'll try

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– ... Stop making weird misunderstandings. Let's quickly start.

– Come on, don't be angry. Didn't you two get along very well just now? Tell me what kind of interactions you have next time, okay?

– Oi, just play football. I'll go back if you don't stop.

– Sure, sure, lol

I just ran without thinking. With intention of speeding up my digestion and forgetting about all troubles, I continued running for several tens of minutes.

It has to be said that both Komatsu-kun and I suck. I can't decently run with the ball, so whenever I have it, the first thing I think of is giving pass in one touch. If I can receive the ball at a good position, I'll try to shoot. It's doesn't get inside though.

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– Bookworm, go for iiiit!

Ugh, so annoying. Cheer the other guys!

However, while I was grumbling in my mind, I felt like my body got lighter. I concentrated for once. I became unusually fired up.

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Shit, make it! Make it!

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Haa... What am I trying so desperately for? So foolish...

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Chapter 15 - Pessimist's Football

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I returned back to my own group after helping others, and waiting for me was delicious paella made by Tenjuin-san.

It has moderate amount of salt with paprika and zucchini in it making it colorful. It turned out to be extremely delicious. Multi-talented super class representative, who appropriately prepared an apron for the trip. But it doesn't end here.

Right after I and Komatsu-kun returned, she gave us the paper plates saying,

– Good work, you two

– Th-, Thank you...

With a slight smile she made a comment that can be easily replied to by gloomy guys.

Whoa, whoa, aren't you perfect? With this, the chat can be finished with a casual reply, so I can feel easy. The fact that rather than getting kindness as big as an ocean, it is more comfortable for loners to receive just enough concern, is not well-known in the world.

After receiving my portion, I sat at the edge of the blanket to eat. With three girls of our group having a friendly chat behind me, I was checking out other groups of our class.

I got a little tired. Or should I say body feeling heavy is characteristic of school events.

There is a space between me and Komatsu-kun, because if I speak with him now, my weariness will accumulate. My brains are tormented even when I speak with people I know, but today in particular, I had too many of what I would call almost first meetings. Anxiety, that weighs on the back in its entirety at times like this, is the painful part of a pessimistic person's existence.

Well, I will just think that class representative's paella was worth it.

...I continued idly gazing what was in front of me.

Under blue sky, clear air. Smell of wet earth. I let all of the clamor created by loud voices of my classmates pass by my ears. There was a good atmosphere. I didn't dislike it. As long as I wasn't part of it. Haa... What should I do after lunch?

It may be called a group, but we are only cooperating for lunch. After it is the free time. Honestly, I have absolutely no plans... Should I find a bench somewhere and study alone? Luckily I have vocabulary flashcards with me.

Above all, I felt a bit like returning to the usual me, but...

There is a girl who can magically sense loner's subtleties. A girl who is not kind nor considerate, but is just like a natural disaster.

My shoulder was suddenly rubbed by a soft hand. Startled, I turned around,

– Ehehe, thank you for your efforts earlier&j Are you... tired a little?

Yes, but you know, your existence itself is the main cause of my fatigue!

Tachibana Karen was massaging my shoulders with her whole face smiling. It's good that she's happy, but my shoulders are usually not touched by anyone, so I was really surprised... Also, her long blonde hairs are touching the nape of my neck, so I want her to let me go... But I just turned around.

– What are you doing? My heart will go bad.

– Those guys, weren't that bad, right?

– They were normal, I guess...

Wasn't stuff like this only for the times when we are alone? Or is her way of paying attention to the surroundings is shown by whispering?

However, just earlier it was confirmed that we were seen. See, isn't Komatsu-kun glancing here? I also feel two girls' gazes on my back, I feel as if my limbs are getting tied. Oh school trip, please end faster.

Tachibana finally released my shoulders and sat near me. It appears that she is in unusual happy mode. Showing her teeth, she grinned.

– As expected, you're good at taking care of others. Like going to help others in that situation.

– It's not like that. It's just that there was nothing to do after I started the fire for our group.

– If bookworm befriends Suguru and others, I could smoothly join too, right? In classroom or other places.

Thanks to listening to Tachibana, I now know that cool one is called Ogino Suguru, while noisy one is called Iidzuka Shouta. Apparently, they are the only members of the football club from our class....

Somehow, today is full of new names. I have confidence in forgetting them all tomorrow, seriously.

– So... if it turns out like that, wouldn't you triumph over the boys who badmouthed you?

– You still care about that? Just forget about it.

Clenching her fist, Tachibana pressed it onto my upper arm. As if saying "absolutely not" she laughed - Nihhihi

absolutely not

Nihhihi

But I... don't think that Okamura-kun and gang are especially bad or anything. They are not worse nor

better than others. I have my own problems too. It is true that I only study without a care about others, and it is natural that there will be people displeased by it.

A small conflict like that, I'm certain that it was not the first in our class.

Still, for some reason, this girl is strangely supporting me. In that case, what makes her do it? I've been trying to guess it for a long time, but I still don't have anything resembling an answer.

Just because I help her with studies? Just that, really? But apart from that, have I done anything?

Depending on the situation, there was enough possibility for Tachibana and her friends to hate me.

Haa... Somehow, being with this girl, I am too occupied with being embarrassed, being melancholic or reading too much into things.

While we were idly spending time,

– Yo, merry couple.

Smoothly approaching us, was the football club pair from before. Ogino, the cool one, kicked the ball in our direction and I received it semi-confused.

– ...Nice catch

– Hey, Ichijou-kun, let's play football! Komatsu-kun too!

Iidzuka, the noisy one, had an innocent look to him. Rather than a football player, he looks more like a baseball boy. Speech-wise, it sounds more like an invitation to baseball too.

Baffled, Komatsu-kun and I looked at each other. Why us? Guessing what we wanted to say, Ogino shrugged his shoulders.

– Other guys went to play baseball. Besides, having two more is just right. As a... thanks for earlier?

– Playing football together as thanks? Haha, what's that...

Tachibana, who standing near me, poked my back and smiled as if saying "You should just go!"
You should just go!

Well... It's easier than having to chat with a girl like this... It wasn't so bad that I would refuse to play. I didn't have anything to do anyway.

There was a big gravel field in this park. Looking around I could see people playing catch or kicking the ball like us, various types of games. Nevertheless, there is a sports ground at school, so they are doing the same thing as usual. What was truly not usual, was that a pair of loners like us were about to play sports game during free time.

Two on two game. Obviously, as the other party had two football club members, we mixed the teams. Me and Ogino, Komatsu-kun and Iidzuka. It may be called football, but we just put cones to designate the goals.

Before the game started, Ogino, who was walking by, whispered

– Ichijou, you have to show Karen something good.

Haa, I made a puzzled face. Isn't it just football. Ah. Looking carefully, aren't that Tachibana and the other two standing at the edge of the field and looking here? I can see the complacent smile on the face of that blonde girl from here.

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c16

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Even so...

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Unusually, it lingered till the next day.

Most of my worries go away after a night's sleep, so it is really unusual. Even during grade school when I returned home almost crying from bullying, it would be all gone in one night.

Yesterday's events don't go out of my head. Intense pent-up feeling spread inside my chest with no signs of disappearing. This is an emergency. Still, strangely enough, I can see this worry as trivial too. Well, there is still the question if it can be trivial when I am obviously worried. However, thinking about it with a calm head, there is only so much important stuff in my worry.

Is it something to care about? That was simply a game after a meal. It wasn't a competition or anything, but why...? If it is really unimportant, then I should throw it out of my head from now on. Do you hear me, Ichijou-kun? Tests are coming soon. You cannot afford to worry about such things.

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Though, what did she say? Love? I couldn't digest that one point, so I asked with an uninterested voice.

– Well... Now this is weird. Love, is it...

– Exactly. That person is surely in love.

That person. Naturally, I wouldn't come asking for advice telling it was for myself. After all, I said that it was about my friend, so I ended up being that person. However, as I have no friends in the first place, this chat over the dining table was covered in downright lies.

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– Haa... Then I will tell this to my friend. With an early diagnosis, it can be cured.

– Oh, it absolutely should not be cured. It is a necessary illness.

Aunt's eyes were bloodshot. It seems she is very interested in my consultation, so she started to talk rapidly.

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decent answer.

Still... Love, huh? I, and that frank girl?

It's not funny at all. At least for me, it is impossible. For argument's sake, if by any chance it is true, according to my aunt's words, I'm still at Stage 1. It can still be called early diagnosis. It has to be cut off, even if I have to rip my internal organs out. Well, this one is really impossible though.

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– Come on, you have to change it. Right, fall in love, even if you have to force yourself to! Second year of high school is a privilege. If you stay passive it will disappear just like that! Humph!

My breakfast cannot continue like this. It was a mistake to ask for advice. Also... A morning conversation like this is a template of how to make my little sister sitting on the side to look at you with the coldest of gazes.

– I have something to ask.

Keyaki was grinning and giving me a cold look. Looking into her eyes, I understood everything. Sensing my useless lie, she is one of those who will draw the truth out of you by asking leading questions.

Seriously dangerous little sister. I immediately started doing my war preparations.

– Your friend, that is to say, isn't that obviously about yourself? I feel like everything connects with how you were covered all over with sand, don't you think so?

Of course. What leading questions, this is a damn straight punch. This is a damn straight fireball.

– You... I just fell down a bit grandly, that is all! Didn't I say so...

– Haa...

– What's with that shitty intentional sigh! It was really not like that.

– A girlfriend for my brother, huh? I'm now all alone, huh? Ah, so lonely.

– Stop that monotone speech. Am I not implicitly telling you that even if I wanted, there is no way I could get a girlfriend?

– Nihhi. What, so you do understand, lol

Hah, ain't she a rascal. However, after our conversation, aunt Arika put her hand to her chin seemingly thinking of something. Glancing at me she said,

– Jun-kun... The other day, it was a date after all, wasn't it?

– That is not true.

I don't know anything more. Sorry for asking strange things. I'll think of it by myself from now on. Ignoring them, I started stuffing my mouth with food. I have to eat faster and go to the second floor, otherwise this interrogation will not stop.

Ah, by the way, after returning home from the previous pseudo-date, I quietly went straight to my own room, so nobody has seen the newly bought clothes. I ended up spending both the absurd amount I was given and my personal savings, so I can declare that I made no mistakes in my stealth mission.

– So I went to Jun-kun's room to take his clothes for the laundry... and found some unfamiliar clothes, aha&j

– Argh...!

Quickly gulping down the water, I pushed the food stuck in my throat down into stomach. I failed... I mixed them with usual clothes. I was so tired that day that I only roughly hid them, it's a disaster.

– Fufu... They looked quite fashionable. Just who has chosen them? No, what kind of girl is she!?

– Huh... What is the meaning of this, brother?

– I use the right to keep silent! Yeah, our conversation ends here! Thank you for the meal!

After all... that day, I deceived my aforementioned pent-up feelings by studying. They will disappear sooner or later anyway, it was too early to rely on doctor (lol). I think I will observe how it progresses a little more.

Also... that. I have two weights on my legs called "loner" and "bookworm", so I have to follow both of their rules. As a loner, if there is a chance for love I could do whatever I want with it, but in the world of bookworms there is a love ban, the same as in the worlds of Jedi and idols. Like in sports world, result is everything, so one should be careful not to play too much. It would be too late if my test marks get worse. One should be careful to not fall to the dark side.

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Ouf. What leading questions, this is a damn straight punch. This is a damn straight fireball.

– You... I just fell down a bit grandly, that is all! Didn't I say so...

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– What's with that shitty intentional sigh! It was really not like that.

– A girlfriend for my brother, huh? I'm now all alone, huh? Ah, so lonely.

– Stop that monotone speech. Am I not implicitly telling you that even if I wanted, there is no way I could get a girlfriend?

– Nihhi. What, so you do understand, lol

Hah, ain't she a rascal. However, after our conversation, aunt Arika put her hand to her chin seemingly thinking of something. Glancing at me she said,

– Jun-kun... The other day, it was a date after all, wasn't it?

– That is not true.

I don't know anything more. Sorry for asking strange things. I'll think of it by myself from now on. Ignoring them, I started stuffing my mouth with food. I have to eat faster and go to the second floor, otherwise this interrogation will not stop.

Ah, by the way, after returning home from the previous pseudo-date, I quietly went straight to my own room, so nobody has seen the newly bought clothes. I ended up spending both the absurd amount I was given and my personal savings, so I can declare that I made no mistakes in my stealth mission.

– So I went to Jun-kun's room to take his clothes for the laundry... and found some unfamiliar clothes, aha&j

– Argh...!

Quickly gulping down the water, I pushed the food stuck in my throat down into stomach. I failed... I mixed them with usual clothes. I was so tired that day that I only roughly hid them, it's a disaster.

– Fufu... They looked quite fashionable. Just who has chosen them? No, what kind of girl is she!?

– Huh... What is the meaning of this, brother?

– I use the right to keep silent! Yeah, our conversation ends here! Thank you for the meal!

After all... that day, I deceived my aforementioned pent-up feelings by studying. They will disappear sooner or later anyway, it was too early to rely on doctor (lol). I think I will observe how it progresses a little more.

Also... that. I have two weights on my legs called "loner" and "bookworm", so I have to follow both of

their rules. As a loner, if there is a chance for love I could do whatever I want with it, but in the world of bookworms there is a love ban, the same as in the worlds of Jedi and idols. Like in sports world, result is everything, so one should be careful not to play too much. It would be too late if my test marks get worse. One should be careful to not fall to the dark side.

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So to speak, I am a Jedi knight, protector of the world of the bookworms. Shitty diligent fellows of the world, may the Force be with you...

Chapter 16 - Stage One

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I am a man, so of course I would hate losing in a competition. That is, when I admit it is a competition myself.

What I mean specifically, is that I think that any place other than first during the tests is bullshit, but I don't care if I don't get passes during PE. A human being cannot win in everything at the same time.

Besides, one of the important parts of victory is not getting involved with a lost battle.

Even so...

The frustration from not being able to stop Iidzuka's shoot right before the goal during yesterday's trip. Tachibana's cheerful voice "Go for iiii!" reaching me from the side. And the mysterious urge for my whole body rising from the depths of my chest.

Go for iiii!

Unusually, it lingered till the next day.

Most of my worries go away after a night's sleep, so it is really unusual. Even during grade school when I returned home almost crying from bullying, it would be all gone in one night.

Yesterday's events don't go out of my head. Intense pent-up feeling spread inside my chest with no signs of disappearing. This is an emergency. Still, strangely enough, I can see this worry as trivial too. Well, there is still the question if it can be trivial when I am obviously worried. However, thinking about it with a calm head, there is only so much important stuff in my worry.

Is it something to care about? That was simply a game after a meal. It wasn't a competition or anything, but why...? If it is really unimportant, then I should throw it out of my head from now on. Do you hear me, Ichijou-kun? Tests are coming soon. You cannot afford to worry about such things.

And because of that, I asked for advice from a nearby adult. Hey, hey, hasn't a certain Skywalker-kun had an interview with a Jedi big-shot right after seeing a slightly weird dream? There's nothing better than nipping a calamity in the bud.

After my explanations, our Master Arika's round eyeglasses shined for a moment.

– Love. That is certainly love, Jun-kun!

It was breakfast time on Saturday. There are magnificent articles on the dining table, just as always. It seems that state of her latest manuscript is very good, so today she is in high spirits. Today, she looks very excited again.

Well, I've been thinking when idea about the nearby adult came up. I do think that she is a good person, but I believe it is more or less a matter of course that we would turn into saddening children when there are no other adults around apart from this very eccentric person.

Though, what did she say? Love? I couldn't digest that one point, so I asked with an uninterested voice.

– Well... Now this is weird. Love, is it...

– Exactly. That person is surely in love.

That person. Naturally, I wouldn't come asking for advice telling it was for myself. After all, I said that it was about my friend, so I ended up being that person. However, as I have no friends in the first place, this chat over the dining table was covered in downright lies.

– Even so... At that level, he is still at Stage One.

– You're describing it as if it was an illness.

– The real fun starts at Stage Two. It doesn't end at taking a light interest in that girl. Having noticed her, he can't take his eyes off her. But, overconfidence can be very dangerous. You have to pay special attention when it gets to Stage Three as he can't stop thinking about that girl and even starts writing poems! Seeking too much of her attention can make her hate you.

– Haa... Then I will tell this to my friend. With an early diagnosis, it can be cured.

– Oh, it absolutely should not be cured. It is a necessary illness.

Aunt's eyes were bloodshot. It seems she is very interested in my consultation, so she started to talk rapidly.

– Of course you would want to show something good in front of a girl you like! Do you get it? Boys and girls and all of the humanity are protagonists of a romcom. To each person his own personality, but you can't change what is unchangeable.

Anything you ask from this person, you will get a reply connected to love. I was a fool, expecting a decent answer.

Still... Love, huh? I, and that frank girl?

It's not funny at all. At least for me, it is impossible. For argument's sake, if by any chance it is true, according to my aunt's words, I'm still at Stage 1. It can still be called early diagnosis. It has to be cut off, even if I have to rip my internal organs out. Well, this one is really impossible though.

– Besides, Jun-kun, why are you asking that kind of questions now? Even if it is you, there is something of a boy left in you, so you have at least some experience, right? Right? Right?

– N-, no... I... do not.

– Come on, you have to change it. Right, fall in love, even if you have to force yourself to! Second year of high school is a privilege. If you stay passive it will disappear just like that! Humph!

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Midterm tests are a month away. For a person like me, who studies with exams in mind, a fresh start is very important. This time I will get the first place, I'm sick of the bullshit rank like 4th place. I have confidence in my foundation being stronger than anyone's due to diligent preparations for the test. I feel that if I study more than this, I will become overqualified for the tests.

But it is exactly what I need. If I really want to gain superiority, I have to make it so that there are no doubts about who is the winner. Otherwise, I will start making excuses amidst my great effort. I don't even want to imagine such a weak me.

I have to concentrate on myself. I have been doing it up to now, and it has to be so from now on.

And about Tachibana... It's okay if I mind her only when we are together. Only when she needs me, only at times like that...

Recesses, lunch breaks, homerooms, on train during daily commute. No needless thoughts during the time I'm not looking at study material.

There are always scribbled notes spread over my desk, already worn-out textbooks and workbooks are covered in dirty marks and creases. The more I concentrate on studies, the more my worries fly away. I entered the zone and cannot even hear Okamura and party's ridicule.

Thinking about it, lately, I haven't led a life of a loner. Teaching class queen, going on a date, worrying about it.

And now, at last I feel like I returned to my original, strong self. I can do it like this. I can get the first place. Still, what if hypothetically, I can make it to the top of the ranking table, what would Tachibana say?..... Ah.

I strongly bit my lip. Forcefully, to the point where I could taste my blood.

That right now, in my history, was the shittiest thought coming from the heart. I kicked it out at that exact moment. Not before and not in the future, never again will I study for the sake of someone else. It is always for myself. So you really have to reflect on what you thought right now, shitty small fry NPC virgin.

Right when I was having stupid worries. A good nuisance came at a right time. It was immediately after the end of second period.

– Ichijou-kun.

Looking up, I saw a familiar young face with freckles. It was Komatsu-kun. Sounds of the heavy rain outside reverberated inside the classroom. Somehow, the atmosphere in the class is heavy despite it being during break.

– You know, I want you to teach me this... Is it okay?

Saying that, Komatsu-kun showed me his notebook.

Hmm... It was me who told him to concentrate on studies as a loner. It's okay, I guess.

– Where, which one?

Probably because every day I teach a certain someone, my responses were smooth. Expressing his thanks, Komatsu-kun returned to his seat.

Aha! He too embarked on the path of a bookworm. If he learns the joy of getting results, that lonely youth will not be able to get off this path, without a doubt.

Though, isn't the number of bookworms in this class getting too large lately?

Both Tachibana-san and Komatsu-kun within two, three weeks. At this pace, it would be no surprise if there will be one or two more, yeah. Sooner or later the classroom will be packed with diligent students, wouldn't it?

That way, I will turn this classroom into a bookworm campground! The name will be "Jimmies' Boot Camp". Seems absolutely hardcore from the name alone... And that is not the end. With a "This class is get the First Prize or die" slogan, we will at least take the silver. But... But with a classroom packed with bookworms, I would like to see Okamura's crimson face a bit. The thrill of looking at something scary. Still, if the previous encounter was this unexpected, then the next one was that unexpected. I don't know

why, but exactly that day was strangely different from all the others.

No, from this day, something started to change. Anyway, it was during the lunch break. When I was maintaining my concentration, someone poked me in the back.

Who is it... Or should I say, aha, it's probably her, suddenly doing something like this. Thinking that it was certainly so, I turned around, but someone unexpected was standing there.

– Yo. Good job.

– Ah, hi...

Standing there, was the guy from football club, Ogino Suguru. Cool guy with a nice haircut, with his mouth being the only loose part of him. With the sudden entrance of a guy from a different genre, I was startled for a moment.

– Can I?

He pointed at the seat next to me and I shrugged my shoulders.

– It's not my seat anyway...I don't care.

– That so. Then I'll sit.

What did you come here for? By the way, all the other members of the sociable company are being noisy at the window side as usual. Kyahaha. I can hear Tachibana's laughter from here. This guy Ogino, should have certainly been together with them as usual.

There was a delicate two second silence between us. This, is it okay if I to go back to studying? Just as I thought so, he murmured.

– Ichijou, you're always studying, don't you?

Extremely abrupt... Also, he started his speech the same way as Komatsu-kun did at that time inside the bus. In the end, it seems I don't give any impression other than that.

– Well... Tests are soon.

– Last time, weren't you at the fourth place?

– Exactly, it was fourth. That is, not first. On top of that, who knows if the three above me engage in club activities every day. In that case, a member of the go-home club... cannot allow himself to lose, right?

– Oh, really?

Just as he released a voice of apparent admiration,

– So, do you have a girlfriend...?

– By what logic has it come to this?

Both Hyoudou from before and Ogino have slightly peculiar way of making a pause. Seems like even if I collectively name them sociable guys, in reality there are different types of people among them.

– Well, despite involving yourself with Karen, all you do is study. So I was wondering if you have some other girlfriend.

Uh... So this was his real motive. Just say so from the beginning. How should I explain it to him... In the first place, is it okay to disclose that I'm helping her with studies after school? Though I am one of the concerned people, I don't know what kind of circumstances she has, so just what should I say?

As an individual, I didn't want other people to know about the after school matter. I didn't know the reason myself, but I just felt that I wanted it to stay as a secret. So I decided to somehow evade his questions, but...

– From the very beginning my first priority was studying. Just why do you assume that love is foremost...

– I see...

– What, what are you grinning for?

– So you don't have a girlfriend. Then, does that mean that it's okay to get intimate with her?

– You're jumping between different questions too much. Stop asking yes-no questions. There are lots of things in the world that are in between.

– Eeh... Well then, Ichijou, do you swing the other way?

– NO! How the hell did you come up with that sort of between!? Also, do you sociable guys have only love on your minds? Oh my God...

So we had a slightly annoying conversation like this. It's so absurd. And I was even desperately studying. It was an excessively unexpected occurrence. Ignoring whatever contents of the conversations, being talked to by someone during a break is a major event. Not to mention, today it was done twice.

If it continues like this, I'll go out of business as a loner. What the hell should I do?

But seriously, what's happening today? While I was thinking so,

– Most likely, Suguru has an interest in you. Komatsu-kun too.

That is a theory provided by Tachibana. The usual after school library. Of all things, as an outcome of our chat, I ended up asking this girl who sat next to me.

And after having this talk, the face of this girl, who looked sad because of the studying and sounds of the rain, started getting visibly brighter. Seeing such a beautiful smile so close, my heart started beating faster, but... Of course this girl hasn't noticed my situation, and continued talking while constantly spinning her raised index finger.

– As expected, a person doing his best at something appears very attractive, don't you think so?

Bookworm... is always a bookworm, right?

Having turned on the whispering mode and losing all the concentration Tachibana put her face against the desk and turned it my way. With a grin.

– Hmm, a person doing his best, huh.

– Isn't it alright to be friendly with people, for example during the lunch break. If it is now, I can join you too.

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– Huh, whyyy?

She puffed out her cheeks. She is lightly angry. It is a sly move and I'm troubled for response. There is no way I can say something like "That's so cute" like her friends, and it makes me feel tormented.

And by the way, learn how to treat loners already. I was just diagnosed by a romcom psychiatrist and it turned out that I'm at Stage 1. Well, I am absolutely not admitting it though. Who am I, a patient with a fever?

– It's like this. When you come, study hours will just disappear.

– Fuun?

– What fuun! I'm serious here! Test will be soon, so restrain yourself.

– Eeh. Well then, is it okay to go when tests are over?

– It's just nitpicking. Whenever you come, if you come to me, it will look unnatural.

– Boo!

Well, summer break is right after tests, so I will manage to hold on.

But... it seems this girl want to recreate the same scene we had just now in the classroom.

Ogino started poking his nose into my affairs just because of the matter from the school trip. If the same thing was shown to the whole class, my head would explode from headache. Who knows, maybe some guys have already seen us. At this point, my loner lifestyle is under a threat.

That is, I think I know that she is worried, but...

And yet, I feel like me not speaking with anyone during lunch is like my last stronghold. A feeling, that if it is broken through, there will be no going back anymore.

Perhaps I started to be fearful of something. And all of that despite conveniently boasting that I don't care what others think of me.

Anyway, I continued to help her with studies.

With the sound of rain getting louder, the empty library started to slowly darken.

Tachibana is so close to me. Side of her white face is right there. At a distance where I can clearly smell her pleasant fragrance. Her breath and bright hairs touch my skin from time to time. Without me noticing, we were left alone in the silent room.

Today is not the first time all of it happens, but I perceive it much more than usually.

That is why different from usual, each time I notice such thoughts inside me... I bite my lips. The only thing I should do is teach Tachibana what she needs. That is to say, I should not be spoiled by her kindness or sense of duty.

As if seriously trying to become a teaching pro, I suppressed my emotions. I was practically operating only on my sense of responsibility. Probably, it has been the easiest way.

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No, from this day, something started to change. Anyway, it was during the lunch break. When I was maintaining my concentration, someone poked me in the back.

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– Yo. Good job.

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Standing there, was the guy from football club, Ogino Suguru. Cool guy with a nice haircut, with his mouth being the only loose part of him. With the sudden entrance of a guy from a different genre, I was startled for a moment.

– Can I?

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– It's not my seat anyway...I don't care.

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As an individual, I didn't want other people to know about the after school matter. I didn't know the reason myself, but I just felt that I wanted it to stay as a secret. So I decided to somehow evade his questions, but...

– From the very beginning my first priority was studying. Just why do you assume that love is foremost...

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Hahaha... Feeling a bit weird, I ended up having a wry smile on my face.

Somehow, this is turning into a standard signal between us. When Tachibana has some final words to say, she always does this.

That is why when I turned around and asked "What?" with my face only, ... unusually, she turned her face away as if she was shy. After glancing at me and turning away several times,

– Um, you know... I'm really happy. I just wanted to say this.

– Happy? What is it all of a sudden?

– I'm happy that you have made a friend again! Why don't you understand...

Angry, Tachibana pursed her lips. Haven't we talked about it just earlier, what are you bringing it up for once more?

However, there was one question..... Again? What does she mean again...?

She said it as if I originally had a friend. Well, it is an extremely delicate matter if I can call Komatsu-kun and Ogino friends after what happened today. That is why without giving it a proper thought... I messed up and let the honest doubt leave my mouth.

– Again... what does it mean...?

Several seconds slowly passed. That flat-toned one line right now, has it somehow made her angry? For some reason, Tachibana sternly squinted her eyes.

– Hmm...

– Wh-, what...?

– I. Am your. Friend

– Eh, ah... so that's what it was. This is the first time I hear it....

– Virgin idiooot....

Virgin... She often said it to me when we first met, but now it is a bit different. Lately, Tachibana has been calling me using only you or bookworm, and using that word only when she playfully teased me or was angry. Was she holding back? Not that I really care.

That is to say, right now she is angry, and not a little bit.

No, really, I'm not looking down on her or anything. It's just that... what is a friend? Just where does a friendship start and where does it end?

If I remember correctly, we never made such a declaration. There wasn't an instance where we went to have fun. The previous stuff had a job to do as a pretext, so it doesn't count in my book. In the first place, there hasn't even passed a month since we started decently talking to each other.

Rather, was it okay for someone like me to claim to be Tachibana's friend? To be perfectly honest, I cannot help but feel somewhat annoyed. But it seems that this time the blonde girl decided to not show this pessimist any of her usual restraints and grasped my sleeve even tighter.

– Just now... I was really hurt.

– Haa!? It's not like I hate you or something, alright? No, what I mean is that someone like me...

– I. Was hurt...

– It was my fault, alright? We are just normal friends, so for now, please let me go.

– Not a chance! Really, that right now is unacceptable...

Tachibana turned away in a bad mood, and yet she didn't release me. Having said that, she isn't speaking at all, so there was only tick-tock sound coming from the clock. In an empty library, the two of us were standing still.

Still, what do you want me to do? I'm running out of patience here... Dropping my shoulders,

– Haa... So, what should I do? For you to forgive me?

I was amazed myself. I just tried to please someone other than my little sister.

Tachibana was still keeping silent, but turned to me with a displeased look in her eyes. Pouting one of her

cheeks, she murmured,

– ... Apology date.

– Don't say something resembling "Hand over an apology Magic Stone"! Do you mean to say that I am shitty administration constantly on maintenance!?!1

– Shitty virgin full of sad parts...

– Haa... Alright. So, is it okay this week?

Satisfied at last, Tachibana released my sleeve.

– Not okay. Let's go right now...?

– Yeah, yeah...

– Alright, then... I forgive you!

And that's how today... All of a sudden an overtime started.

Outside, the rain was completely over. Having appeared from the gap between thick clouds for just a moment, an orange ray of light disappeared again.

In such an evening, the two of us were walking the path to the station. It may be close to the station, but it is by no means a lively street. Rather, atmosphere around us gives a desolate and gloomy feeling. On the road from the school to the station decaying apartment buildings and condominiums were standing in row with occasional convenience stores between them.

Still, Tachibana's expression is so bright, as if her previous anger was just an act. She's even humming a song. It seems she has returned to her usual happy mode. A mystery of how her face is even brighter than during the school trip if you like.

... No, it was really a mystery. Usually, your mood is not that good.

– Ehehe... I, am having a school uniform date with virgin&j

– Stop that, do not expressly put that into words...

– Oh, don't feel shy! Come. Here, here.

Blonde girl who skillfully jumped over the puddle. What are you, a grade school student?

– Oi, wait. I say, you're being too enthusiastic.

It felt really weird. I was always going home alone after school, so going together with someone at this period of time is a fresh experience for me.

Additionally, it is with Tachibana Karen. If we go by aunt Arika's words, I am an object suffering from "Illness of Love: Stage 1". Having this girl walking so happily with me, of course I will feel restless...

Feeling reluctant to smile looking at her, I turned my gaze away from her. Getting to Stage 2, the subject's eyes will unconsciously follow the one he loves. How terrifying. However, my seat in the classroom is on the front row close to the corridor, while hers is at the back on the window-side. There are still no worries about that.

But right now, I am in a position where I can see her from behind...

At least, I can say this. I am conscious of that girl to some extent. The fact that I am trying to not look at her, is probably an unshakable proof.

Walking unsteadily like that, poke. Tachibana's index finger suddenly poked my right cheek.

Blonde girl's smiling face is close to me. But a little different from her usual grinning face, there was a gentle smile. Still... Is she even a little bit considerate?

– A, aa... Sorry, sorry. Rather, put your finger away already.

Just as I said it, her smile returned to the usual one, when she makes fun of me.

– Uh-uh. Hey, guriguriguri~

– ~! You!

– Kyahahaha. Here, chase after me!

Saying that, Tachibana ran off. Seriously, I guess you're a grade school student.

... Yeah. It's not like my heart is beating or anything. Aunt... After all, yours was a wrong diagnosis.

Absolutely.

Magic Stone is a in-game currency in Puzzle & Dragons game. Originally, when the game went on maintenance or there were crushes, administration would promise bonus Magic Stones and give them later. After some time, it became a phrase used at any services that went on pause, maintenance, hiatus or

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That is why when I turned around and asked "What?" with my face only, ... unusually, she turned her face away as if she was shy. After glancing at me and turning away several times,

– Um, you know... I'm really happy. I just wanted to say this.

– Happy? What is it all of a sudden?

– I'm happy that you have made a friend again! Why don't you understand...

Angry, Tachibana pursed her lips. Haven't we talked about it just earlier, what are you bringing it up for once more?

However, there was one question..... Again? What does she mean again...?

She said it as if I originally had a friend. Well, it is an extremely delicate matter if I can call Komatsu-kun and Ogino friends after what happened today. That is why without giving it a proper thought... I messed up and let the honest doubt leave my mouth.

– Again... what does it mean...?

Several seconds slowly passed. That flat-toned one line right now, has it somehow made her angry? For some reason, Tachibana sternly squinted her eyes.

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– Wh-, what...?

– I. Am your. Friend

– Eh, ah... so that's what it was. This is the first time I hear it....

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Virgin... She often said it to me when we first met, but now it is a bit different. Lately, Tachibana has been calling me using only you or bookworm, and using that word only when she playfully teased me or was angry. Was she holding back? Not that I really care.

That is to say, right now she is angry, and not a little bit.

No, really, I'm not looking down on her or anything. It's just that... what is a friend? Just where does a friendship start and where does it end?

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Rather, was it okay for someone like me to claim to be Tachibana's friend? To be perfectly honest, I cannot help but feel somewhat annoyed. But it seems that this time the blonde girl decided to not show this pessimist any of her usual restraints and grasped my sleeve even tighter.

– Just now... I was really hurt.

– Haa!? It's not like I hate you or something, alright? No, what I mean is that someone like me...

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– It was my fault, alright? We are just normal friends, so for now, please let me go.

– Not a chance! Really, that right now is unacceptable...

Tachibana turned away in a bad mood, and yet she didn't release me. Having said that, she isn't speaking at all, so there was only tick-tock sound coming from the clock. In an empty library, the two of us were standing still.

Still, what do you want me to do? I'm running out of patience here... Dropping my shoulders,

– Haa... So, what should I do? For you to forgive me?

I was amazed myself. I just tried to please someone other than my little sister.

Tachibana was still keeping silent, but turned to me with a displeased look in her eyes. Pouting one of her cheeks, she murmured,

– ... Apology date.

– Don't say something resembling "Hand over an apology Magic Stone"! Do you mean to say that I am shitty administration constantly on maintenance!?!1

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Satisfied at last, Tachibana released my sleeve.

– Not okay. Let's go right now...?

– Yeah, yeah...

– Alright, then... I forgive you!

And that's how today... All of a sudden an overtime started.

Outside, the rain was completely over. Having appeared from the gap between thick clouds for just a moment, an orange ray of light disappeared again.

In such an evening, the two of us were walking the path to the station. It may be close to the station, but it is by no means a lively street. Rather, atmosphere around us gives a desolate and gloomy feeling. On the road from the school to the station decaying apartment buildings and condominiums were standing in row with occasional convenience stores between them.

Still, Tachibana's expression is so bright, as if her previous anger was just an act. She's even humming a song. It seems she has returned to her usual happy mode. A mystery of how her face is even brighter than during the school trip if you like.

... No, it was really a mystery. Usually, your mood is not that good.

– Ehehe... I, am having a school uniform date with virgin&j

– Stop that, do not expressly put that into words...

– Oh, don't feel shy! Come. Here, here.

Blonde girl who skillfully jumped over the puddle. What are you, a grade school student?

– Oi, wait. I say, you're being too enthusiastic.

It felt really weird. I was always going home alone after school, so going together with someone at this period of time is a fresh experience for me.

Additionally, it is with Tachibana Karen. If we go by aunt Arika's words, I am an object suffering from "Illness of Love: Stage 1". Having this girl walking so happily with me, of course I will feel restless...

Feeling reluctant to smile looking at her, I turned my gaze away from her. Getting to Stage 2, the subject's eyes will unconsciously follow the one he loves. How terrifying. However, my seat in the classroom is on the front row close to the corridor, while hers is at the back on the window-side. There are still no worries about that.

But right now, I am in a position where I can see her from behind...

At least, I can say this. I am conscious of that girl to some extent. The fact that I am trying to not look at her, is probably an unshakable proof.

Walking unsteadily like that, poke. Tachibana's index finger suddenly poked my right cheek.

Blonde girl's smiling face is close to me. But a little different from her usual grinning face, there was a gentle smile. Still... Is she even a little bit considerate?

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Chapter 18 - Overtime \$`

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There is a closing time for the library, so we had to get out before we pass it. Yet when I tried to stand up from my seat, my sleeve got pulled from behind.

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Virgin... She often said it to me when we first met, but now it is a bit different. Lately, Tachibana has been calling me using only you or bookworm, and using that word only when she playfully teased me or was angry. Was she holding back? Not that I really care.

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you

bookworm

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tick-tock

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poke

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Chapter 19 - Overtime \$a

It may be called after school date, but it is already dusk. That is why we naturally decided to have an evening meal together. I was dragged by highly spirited Tachibana.

After all, we arrived to the central station via train. And the place we arrived to is a café inside the department store in front of the station.

The café's interior felt quite clean, its white walls adorned with wooden borders had different lovely miscellaneous goods and pictures set upon it here and there. Indeed, it has an atmosphere popular with ladies. Actually, present customers are office ladies on the way home from work or women finished with shopping, I had such an impression.

We sat at the corner of this café facing each other.

Just as the previous clothes store, this is once again a stylish choice. But unlike her, I'm feeling completely out of place here. If I am negligent, my back becomes unnaturally straight...

– Kaa. I'm tired from today's studying again.

Tachibana is languidly lying on the table. While others are feeling nervous, she is acting just like a middle-aged man coming back from work.

Served before her were pancakes with strawberries and cream on top. It seems like this is a specialized café, I can only see articles like blueberry pancake or vegetable pancake in the menu. I can't understand which of them are meals and which are snacks.

By the way, the one I chose is a plain pancake with cream on the side. I only ever spend the pocket money on nutritional food, so it was quite shocking for me to spend an amount close to 1,000 yen to have only one meal. I ordered the cheapest one, which costed 800 yen.

However, looking at my plate, for some reason Tachibana pouted with displeasure.

– You don't really eat much, do you? And you didn't have anything for lunch...

– Uh, so you've seen it...

– You're gonna have a malnutrition, you know? Should I, share a little with you during lunch?

– Don't mind it. It's good for health to not eat in excess.

After I said that, my shoulder was poked with a finger while I was cutting the pancake with a knife. Looking in front of me, blonde girl's face with a puffed out cheek was close to mine, so my body became stiff. Hey, it's dangerous.

– Hey, show some more reaction. A girl is saying that she will prepare a handmade bento for you!

– That is... Yeah, um. If you bring me lunch every day, there will be a question of money. I can't just receive it for nothing, right?

– Hm! I haven't asked that to get a cold response!

What's this... We are having a relatively normal conversation...

It's weird, but I was taken aback a little because of that. Usually, I only help her with studies. Otherwise, she would at most playfully poke me with her finger when her concentration reserves are spent.

An insignificant thread called studies should have been the only thing that weakly connected the two of us. I thought so. But that just now... Was really normal. As if we were really going out... Ah.

Noticing my own thoughts, I bit my lips. There will soon be a wound there, for God's sake.

Still, should I say naturally, but without a reason to let Tachibana know about my wicked thoughts, I continued to have an empty conversation with her.

I don't think that my replies were that fun, but Tachibana was smiling, showing me her teeth. Out of all the times I have seen her up to now, this might be the best mood she had. Despite being so mad earlier, just what in the world has happened?

Having finished eating, she ordered some dessert called parfait, but it seems she has no interest in finishing it immediately. Even though two hours have already passed since we came to the café.

Well... It's okay with me. Yeah, it is an apology date, after all. And it will continue until Tachibana is satisfied.

She put her head onto the table with a bump. Although there is still half of the parfait left, she went into lazy mode.

– Haa... My tests results are under risk.

"Hm", I frowned.

I feel like I spent considerable amount of time teaching her, but it is still risky? I think she is progressing normally, yet it is not sufficient?

– Are you threatened by you parents or something? Like, your smartphone will be taken back if you do not place first on test, or something?

Completely casually, I ended up saying these words.

– Umm, so it's like this. In truth, Tachibana-san has a big dream...

With her face against the table, Tachibana said this in a listless way. And after saying it she defenselessly yawned "Fuwaa", appearing carefree.

– Um... For a very long time now, I wanted to enter the company that was founded by my mom. But she said "I won't hire an idiot, idiooot" I was so pissed, but... I couldn't have demanded a special treatment, could I...?

– So that's how it was...

And so, I have ended up giving a detached reply. But this... I thought it was something that I would never ask. I'm not helping her to get along with her, so give up useless enquiries. This principle that was protected by my tiny pride was easily demolished just like that.

Rather, I have just found out that we were friends today. Originally, it was a frail wall that I have subconsciously created.

Being together with her, I would naturally find out more about her. As I do not dislike her, I got along with her better than I could have imagined. And all of that is not unpleasant to me at all. Feeling like that, I could only have a sullen expression on my face as always. Because I didn't understand if it was okay for me to smile.

– Is, is that so. ... Then, you absolutely cannot fail. Do your best.

The best reply I could squeeze out of myself was that. Yet, it seems that Tachibana was satisfied with it. Still lying on top of the table, she had a brilliant smile.

– Ehehe... That's why, I feel grateful to you, you know?

– Don't mind it. Even if I was asked to help by someone else, I would do it...

– Even so. I will seriously return it hundredfold, so be ready for it.

– ... Rather, eat faster. It's already 8 o'clock.

She... really changes her expressions too fast. Despite foolishly smiling several seconds ago, she is now making a desperately pleading face.

– Nooo, I still want to stay here. Please...

...Please stop, don't show me such a spoiled look...

I couldn't look her in the eyes for even a second. Looking at her shiny eyes for just a moment, I felt as if my heart was squeezed by a hand.

– ... I'm, not really in a hurry. I just thought of your curfew....

– It's okay. My curfew is loose. That's why... Let's stay here for a bit more?

– O-, okay.

In the end, we left the café at about 9 o'clock.

However, we haven't immediately gone home, but had some random talk on the bench near station. Like, Tachibana's friend's someone had a quarrel with a boyfriend and what I think about it. And it's not like we were waiting for the train. We could've got onto one if we wanted to. Thinking back to it, mysteriously, it was really an empty talk.

But sincerely, today, I may have been a bit weird... Why does having Tachibana so happy next to me makes me so happy?

Although I was so tired when we were walking earlier, even if I'm tired, I'm feeling somewhat comfortable. It's okay to stay together a bit longer. If it is for a bit longer, it's okay even if I feel tired. I felt so.

And yet, time advanced very fast. By the time when there was nothing left to talk about and there was a mood to return home, my sleeve was pulled just as usual.

– Hey... After this... what are you going to do?

– What, of course I will go home. If I return too late, I will get under house arrest.

– Is that so? Well, it is, isn't it?

... ..

It was a dead silent, strangely oppressive atmosphere. Tachibana glanced at my eyes several times, but turned away as if feeling guilty.

Hey... Seriously stop having that subtle downhearted look on your face. My chest is feeling prickly inside. But, I mostly understood what she was trying to convey. Probably, I will be lectured by my aunt when I return. Still, this is her teaching too, somehow. It is troublesome, but I know the answer for times like this.

– Haa... Should I walk you home?

For a moment Tachibana was surprised and blinked several times, but before long she had a gentle smile. "So you knew what to do" she smiled, seemingly in admiration.

– Amazing. As expected, you understand some things even if I don't say them...

– Not really...

– But, I might... feel shy. There are often times when I can understand things that you want to say... Don't we have a good compatibility?

– Oi, don't expressly put it into words! We're going back right now!

– Ah, wait for me...!

And then...

We returned with me always walking in front of her. Having already said everything there was to say, we were both silent. And yet, having my sleeve pulled while walking on a street at night wasn't unpleasant. My body felt slightly buzzy during our walk.

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The café's interior felt quite clean, its white walls adorned with wooden borders had different lovely miscellaneous goods and pictures set upon it here and there. Indeed, it has an atmosphere popular with ladies. Actually, present customers are office ladies on the way home from work or women finished with shopping, I had such an impression.

We sat at the corner of this café facing each other.

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c20

Chapter 20 - New home caught on fire

Position in the classroom is a mysterious thing.

For example, if you make something like a poll among all of the students, most probably, number one popular seat would be window-side seat at the back. This region, where you can always look outside when you are tired during lesson, is an everlasting workshop for creating pictures of a protagonist and a heroine sitting next to each other. It is written so in the work of my great aunt.

However, in reality, it is a place where students as popular as the place itself tend to gather, so special attention is required.

For example, if my seat was at window-side and there was a sociable guy sitting close to me, and during lunch break there is sociable guy B who came to have a chat with him, he would pressure me with silence as if saying "Move". I had that experience. Yet at that time, I haven't moved and without a word we had a threatening mood between us thereafter. It was too absurd.

Well, all that glitters is not gold. Therefore, I'm not a fan of window side. Rather, as a loner, my ideal is the corridor side.

The fact that there is a wall beside me, that alone gives me a mysterious sense of security. Also, I can easily go in and out of the classroom. Moreover, my seat is at the front row, so as long as I don't look around there will be no one in my view. Despite about 40 people being stuffed inside the classroom, it feels as though I am alone.

In other words, no matter where your seat is, it has both pros and cons. Different people have different preferences. Well, I'm not deciding it by myself, so after all I have no choice but to get used to it wherever it may be. Don't they say home is where you make it, yeah.

... ..But....That is excluding the case where that Tachibana Karen is my neighbor.

So, at the long homeroom during the last period on Friday, Shiraishi-sensei quickly entered and announced change of seats, exciting the class. Swiftly conducting the lottery, new seats were decided...

And then, my new home (lol) caught on fire before I even started living in it.

Even though lately things got delicate, just what should I do now?

– Eh... This is amazing... I'm soo happy...

Blonde girl sitting at the desk in front of me said so in a low voice, while turning around. With an ever cheerful smile, while looking me in the eye.

– Just as always, we'll be getting along extremely well. Now that we are neighbors, it's only natural, right? Bringing her face close, she almost whispered. Even she pays attention to the surroundings?

–... It's not like we always get along well...

– Hmm. Then... should we get along even better? But in that case... we will draw everyone's attention, you know? Although I am okay with it.

– Hey, you ...

– Fufu... Bookworm, you're acting too suspiciously.

Still... Seriously, stop this. You're emitting a happy mood a bit too much. Something like that can be easily noticed even if it is not me...

– Haa... Am I not too lucky?

Watching Tachibana's smiling face, I had no choice but to keep silent and freeze my body. In front, there were still many people who haven't finished leaving their place. Class was full of clatter coming from desks and chairs being moved.

But, she is right in front of me? Not next to me, not behind me, of all things she is one seat ahead of me. Even if it is an adjacent seat, it wouldn't have mattered as long as it wasn't a seat in front of me. Whenever I study, I always obstinately face only what is in front of me, so what is at my sides or behind me can be ignored. But now that Tachibana is in front of me... ironically, if I do what I always did, she will now enter my field of vision instead of being out of it.

As an understatement, I can say that with this, a lethal wound left on my previous deluxe loner life. It is definitely clear that immediate measures must be taken.

Sick of facing the reality, I reached out my hand towards the vocabulary flashcards,... no. Haa... Calm down, let's sort out my state of affairs.

There are two rows between my new seat and the corridor, it is also last seat in the line. Taking into account only the position, it is actually not that bad. Just as before I can smoothly go in and out of the classroom, and there is not much danger of getting threatened out of my seat during breaks.

Also, my other neighbors are...

To the left is that class head, who made a delicious paella at the school trip. Heave-ho, she put down her desk. It is Tenjuin-san. Speaking of the neat and clean aura of diligence gushing out of her red eyeglasses, there is probably three times a normal person's diligence and it is awesome. Despite all of that, she is sociable and popular, so having her sitting next to me, I feel like I lost as a human being.

– Oh, isn't it Karen?

– Ah, Momoko. Yay!

Superbly grinning once again, Tachibana stretched her hand towards Tenjuin-san.

I see... yet, what is this? This girl look like a quiet person, but perhaps, she can draw Tachibana's attention to herself. And she should get along with her much better than me, yeah.

Magnificent main tank. With this, victory is mine... or is it? Honestly, I have doubts, but if I do not grasp everything in a way convenient for me, I'll go mad and die.

– Oh, isn't that Ichijou-kun!

Hm? I turned around. And there was a guy who makes me think "So it was you"

Iidzuka, member of the football club with a duelist-like hairdo, apparently has a seat to the right of mine.

– Hehe... Well, please treat me nicely.

– Y-, yeah...

Iidzuka patted me on the shoulder with a pop. He brightly smiled, showing his malocclusion like a youth. You sociable guys like to make body contacts, don't you?

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c21

Chapter 21 - Random Event Bomb

Has it become like this after the seats change or after the school trip ended?

Well, it doesn't matter since when, but my school life has started to slowly change the direction in which it is going. Maybe I'm already out of business as a loner, but it doesn't change the fact that my original nature is that of a gloomy person... What the heck am I supposed to do?

Anyhow, some things were a riddle for me. For example, my position in the class.

Last desk two rows away from the corridor. It turned out that this seat itself was a nasty random event bomb. Though, the main cause is still my flashy neighbor. Are you King Bomby?!

Now then, it's not surprising or anything, but Tachibana has a disposition to gather people around her. She can gather other people just by sitting in one place, so I have a strong feeling that she is a person from another world. I think that sociable guys should all gather at the window, but it seems that Tachibana has no interest in doing so, rather she is trying to indirectly drag me into conversation and I have a stomachache because of it.

Several days after seats change, on one of the lunch breaks...

– Hiya, Karen. Momoko.

Apathetic-looking Hyodou Yayoi tottered towards us was.

During the school trip we were in the same group, she holds the position of Tachibana's close friend. Finding an empty seat to the left of Tachibana, she sat there. Right behind is Tenjuin-san's seat, so like this the merry trio made an L-shaped block and started to eat. Since the seats change, this has been the standard pattern.

– Tests are too haaard, I'm dying. Miss Momoko, help. Super help.

Exhausted and prattling, girl with stylish black hair lied on top of the class head's desk.

– Hey, like this, you'll end up taking supplementary tests again, you know?

– Ugh... If it turns out so, I'll weather it with my girl. Right, Karen?

After it was said, I heard Tachibana's nihihi laughing voice coming from my front. What I mean by "I heard" is that I was looking down with my eyes glued to the workbook, but I feel that if I raise my head our eyes will absolutely meet, so I won't move even if I die. More precisely, I have raised my head a few times, and about 70 or 80 percent of them our eyes met perfectly. It is a fossilized matter.

– Eeh... But I appeared on the ranking table this time&j

– Haa? You've gotten into the top 50 even though you're Karen? Now that is ridiculous, I'm gonna dye your hair back to black right now, oraaa!

– Kyaa, Momoko, save me. This supplementary exams loner!

– Ufufu... Maybe you will be infected by the supplementary exams if I touch you.

Like that, the energetic group of girls started their chit-chat.

What they are doing is ordinary, but... My seat is located at the hollow part of the L-shaped gyaru block, so I am half surrounded at the point-blank range. I have an unusual feeling of alienation. For a sociable guy this would be a paradise, but for someone like me who can't say a single word, this is nothing but hell.

Of course, there's no way I can study like this. I need a plan on how to concentrate with a bunch of three gyarus at my side, ASAP. While they continued with their "Kyakya, ufufu" on the side, I started utilizing my grey matter at full power.

Alright, let me show the real worth of the bookworm loner with great experience.

Well then, how about this...

Mister bookworm's, Super Illusion Show Inside the Brain!! Right now, I will drink this cola within my mind in one breath and will recite all the names of emperors of ancient Rome without burping! Ready, set, go! Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero-

– Karen, don't you think that you rarely hang out with us lately?

...Buee!! I burped inside my brain. But that right now, were a few words with that much destructive power.

– Ehehe... Is that, so...?

Tachibana spoke ambiguously.

I totally forgot... It should have been obvious, but this blonde girl spent her after school hours with me for

the last several weeks now, that is to say, she hasn't spent much time with other people. Basically, I am totally a concerned person too. It's Tachibana, so usually, she should have been going to karaoke or something with her friends. Now that it has noticeably stopped, it is only natural that she is asked about it. Huh, it suddenly feels so difficult to stay here...As expected, for me, who kept being fixated on the Big Loner Principle of "It is very important to not leave your seat" all the way until now, it feels difficult to stay here.

– Is it a guy? Someone new? Ow, ow, my dear Karen-chan.

– Come on, stop... Other people will end up hearing.

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Exhausted and prattling, girl with stylish black hair lied on top of the class head's desk.

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Aha, by some chance, is she paying attention to her surroundings... Or so I thought. I was proved wrong that day after school.

– Bookworm, it's difficult to get you involved. And you just study all the time... Isn't it okay to look my way from time to time? And our eyes don't meet at all...

In the usual library illuminated by the sun, Tachibana turned away. She looks displeased. What's up with that?

– Perhaps... Is it really unpleasant in the classroom? You don't want to speak there, or something? If that's the case, I'll stop doing it...

If she talks to me with such a concern, I'll feel like running away.

... Yet, why? Am I thinking that I do not want to hurt her? It is unpleasant in the classroom. I'm sorry, but it is true. It's not that Tachibana makes me feel unpleasant, but studying is the most comfortable thing for me and I am used to it.

But... For some reason, I can't say that. Even though up till now, I have always ruthlessly said my true thoughts no matter who the other party was.

It was probably the first time I have ever cared about another person's feelings. Not knowing what to do, I simply shrugged my shoulders.

– It's not that I feel unpleasant. It's just that, I was always like this.

– Then, it's alright if we do it little by little... Is it okay if do it a bit like today for the starters? Join us from time to time.

– Uh... You don't pay attention at all. I'm happy by myself.

– Haa? I'm saying that I want you to get involved with me. It's just a... simple wish? I want to talk with you... And we finally have close seats...

Tachibana is a girl who can skillfully change her expressions. A smile when she makes fun of me or, conversely, a gentle smile or an angry face. But lately, there is one more... She started showing me this somewhat earnest look of a spoiled child. For some reason, for me, that was the most difficult to deal with expression. I can't meet her eyes for even a second.

– Tomorrow, even if it is for a little while, raise your head, look into my eyes. That way, wouldn't we mostly understand what both of us want to say?

– ... Well, I guess I'm okay with that...

And then, when her expression changed to a smile, I finally had a peace of mind. It is the same as my position in the classroom, but our relations are gradually changing in a mysterious direction. We, are just

friends... right?

– Ehehe... Thank you. Well then, today, I will let you take me on a thank you date...

– Oi, didn't you make quite a leap right there!?

– Isn't it okay? That's for not caring about me in the classroom, alright? I want to go on a date 4 times a week.

– Ugh... Two times!

– Alright, alright. I'll let you off for three times&j

In the end, going by the logic that a girl should be escorted on the road at night, it became 5 times a week. Apology date, thank you date, good work date... There is an excuse for every day.

Recently, my school life started to become something I do not understand at all.

in Momotaru Densetsu game series.

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At times like when we walk together outside the school after studying, I still start acting weirdly when there is no distance between our shoulders. Our bodies already touched each other many times, but it seems she doesn't notice. When we walk together, she sweetly whispers.

– Don't we get along ten times better when we are alone compared to when we are in the classroom...?

– Stop... Don't say that.

– If somebody saw us being together. It could be... a bit risky...&j

– There is probably no need to worry. Even if club activities are over, surely nobody will come to the central station.

– But if someone does see... seriously... what shall we do...?

I am about to feel dizzy. You are one of those who tease others, aren't you? That painful expression... please stop it.

– You'll take me home today too... right? Let's slowly walk?

– Ye-, yeah.

I would've taken her home even if she hasn't said it, but feeling worried, she did. I'm not running away anywhere, okay?

Since the change of seats, Inside the classroom and outside of classroom, I spend more than half of the day close to Tachibana. Although I sit at the rear, she is sitting right in front of me. When she ties her hair, I can see her beautiful nape, so the lesson, may be ongoing, but I can only look in front of me.

I am certainly conscious of this girl. Unfortunately, I can no longer deny it. However, I'm still at Stage 1... right? Auntie...?

Moreover, concurrently with this grave problem, the way I behave in class was, without a doubt, also changing. The conclusive event happened not during the lunch break, but during the short recess between lessons.

Naturally, I was amidst studying without a worry, so everything was a surprise attack for me. Still, as expected, I was really surprised. That is because someone unexpected suddenly tapped me on the shoulder.

– Hey, Ichijou-kun. Could you...

My neighbor to the left, Tenjuin. Opposite to her stood another girl from our class having a worried expression. Long haired class head shyly handed me a notebook.

– This, I want to hear your opinion about it. I don't feel confident enough about it.

– Ah, okay...

– I thought, you should know it better. Is it, okay...?

It appears that this female honor student was lightly helping other classmates with their studies. And not having enough confidence, she decided to use me, who was by chance sitting next to her.

All of these is happening after that Hyoudou established a bad precedent with that exaggerated shitty argument. We started talking a bit, it is probably a big matter even for Tenjuin. Besides, it hasn't stopped with one time.

– Sorry, Ichijou-kun. Could you help again... please?

– It's okay, it's okay. Show me.

To add up, those who seek Tenjuin's help are not only girls, but boys too. Because of that, some guys who started asking me directly appeared. Moreover, season is season. With only a week left before tests, there came a day when I had to handle everyone.

And by the time I noticed. The ridicule I was supposed to hear during the lunch break, was no more.

Instead, when I met eyes with that Okamura, the guy directly turned his gaze away from me. With an expression just like a frightened puppy's...

Something's weird. I started feeling like that. But the nature of that uncomfortable feeling, I still had no adequate explanation for it.

Something's weird

c23

Chapter 23 - A Game

– Hey, Ichijou, you're free this Saturday, right? We're all planning to gather at my place!

I think that this was the apogee. After several days of being busy interacting with my classmates, the amount of people I had a contact with started to become large.

The one who spoke was Iidzuka sitting next to me. He is a merryman member of football club having characteristic face with corners of his mouth pointed upwards. First impression he gives is that of a sports youth... Actually, he always plays outside during lunch breaks, but occasionally, he comes to have a chat with Tachibana's group. I first thought so, but he also pesters Komatsu-kun one seat ahead of him and makes him scared, so I can't really comprehend him.

Yet when I was helping him with a problem yesterday, I found out that we are both very enthusiastic about that popular fighting game "Crash Brothers". Not only that, turns out we had same tastes in some of the core genres. Things like western PC video games, I thought that I was the only one in the class who plays them. I was excited to talk with someone about games for the first time in a long while.

I was a little happy. It's not like I didn't want some otaku friends. But there one big problem.

– Nope... Test are five days later. Invite me for next week instead.

– Haa? So bookworm-ish!

Iidzuka made an annoying exaggerated retort. Yeah, that's right, I am a bookworm. Shouldn't you know it, sitting next to me? Somehow, he is an easy-going fellow, so I am feeling annoyed. It probably means that compatibility is not decided only by having tastes match or not match.

– Oh, I've got it. You're just pretending and actually you want to go, right?

– Pretending? What pretending? Yesterday, haven't I taught you about the trigonometric functions? In any case, I will have you left with some results from my teaching.

– Che... You're so diligent, ugh...

Still, the reason that this useless talk didn't end with this, is because this seat is a minefield. Tachibana has returned to the classroom. She probably felt surprised that I was talking with Iidzuka, so she blinked at us with big eyes.

– Iidzuka, and Ichijou. What's happening?

– Ah, hear me out, Tachibana-san.

While listening to Iidzuka's explanation, a complacent smile started spreading on the face of the blonde girl.

This is bad... A storm is coming. Sensing danger, I turned my body towards the corridor. The probability of sneaking out from this seat should not be zero. The entrance is miraculously close, if it is from here...

– Aa, that is absolutely a pretense! This person has a tsundere side to him.

– Just who is tsundere! Don't say irresponsible things!

Unusually, I ended up raising my voice.

Although erasing my presence was always my strong point... It's no wonder that only Tachibana can absolutely notice me.

I can see Tachibana saying "Ehehe... your amount of friends increased once again&j" with her face only. Did you start to have me having friends as a collection hobby? Most likely, she wants me to go to Iidzuka's place. Judging from her recent behavior, it is as if she wants to drag me onto the path of a sociable guy. It's not funny at all.

– But seriously... there are tests. Are you really planning to play...?

– Well, yes...

Iidzuka with his flashy hairdo held his tongue. He is probably self-aware that he is in a risky situation. According to what I heard yesterday, he will have to take supplementary exams for eternity, so the class is a kind of a hell for him. And that's why I bother him and help him with this and that.

Nice, nice, with this he should have reformed...

– You can just gather to study. It wouldn't matter if you played a bit while you're studying.

– Tachibana-san, you're a genius. How did I forget about such a thing?

Wait a minute, that is absolutely a pattern where you do not study... First of all, a group study with everyone doesn't give a good impression. If someone is highly motivated, then he can make time to study

by himself. The only thing unmotivated people can do is killing time by chatting.

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– Oh, ain't that a funny name. But now Ichijou's presence is even more essential.

I have fallen for Tachibana's scheme again. What a terrible fixed game.

Alright, alright, I got it, I'll go... If I just said this, there would've been a much better conclusion. But Tachibana's hurricane-like style is unwavering.

– Hey, it sounds rather fun. I want to participate too...

Tachibana said so while playing with her hair.

– My ears have heard everything you just said, Karen! Hey, hey, if you're going to study I want to participate too. Ah, Ms. Momoko too. It's too much for bookworm by himself, right?

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Come on... It has now spread to the usual girls of the L. This is the worse course of events.

Also, from that point on... I couldn't even act blind.

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– You... where do you plan to gather more than ten people...?

– Let's use my home&j

Ah, that so. Your house, it did seem spacious.

Haa... Is all of this for real? Packing my days off with plans, gloomy me will become bald. Many of us of the loners' sect live during the weekdays only to have leisurely weekends.

I sat on my own seat. My neighbor Tenjuin has a wry smile just like me.

– Ahaha... Somehow, it's so sudden...

– Absolutely so. Tenjuin-san, do you always put up with this?

– Fufu... If you're always with them, you get used to it, you know?

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And yet, the two of us, curiously enough, met every day after school. In the room illuminated by rays of the setting sun. Among the languid and dusty space. Without anyone yet knowing.

– Ehehehehe~&j

And that day she suddenly was in a mood like this. She looks just like a drunken middle-aged man apt to sexually harass.

Is it okay to be like this despite being so diligent with your studies unlike others? I asked this but,

– Buuut... I'm so excited about Saturday, I have no motivation right now.

Saying this, she idly lay on top of the table right next to where I was studying. What did you come for if you're not studying? Is it not just having a chatter after school and me taking you home after that if it is like this?

Hmph... Just do what you want...

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Blonde girl pinched my cheek with her fingers. Angry, I turned towards her... Tachibana, with her head on the table, was mischievously smiling. Being shined on by the sunlight coming from the side, her face was slightly red.

She is completely in summer vacation mode. Weren't your dreams related to the tests?

– Not studying and hindering me... Why did you come here today?

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Lately... I feel like Tachibana is acting spoiled without any meaning. My heart is feeling itchy, so please stop... I seriously cannot get used to it.

Well, she is solving problems every day, so there is no need to worry. But then... being together without an excuse, somehow, this is just flirting. Just what should I think about it?

Not minding it, I continued. She hinders me every time I am about to get immersed in studies, but she will be happy if I just make a reaction.

The days are steadily getting longer. This dusty room that darkened when time was getting late is now bright even when it is time to leave. Reflecting off the white walls, faintly yellow light is being projected, and with it the atmosphere itself feels as if it is dyed with dusk.

The two of us were locked inside the lazily and slowly passing time. Abruptly, Tachibana opened her mouth.

– Hey... Do you, want to play a game...?

– A game?

– A little game, to make you and me more motivated.

Hmm, I cannot think about decent things. With me keeping silent, she continued.

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Whatever...? Hearing that, I frowned. This time, when I turned to Tachibana, she was indeed happily grinning. As if saying "Ah, bookworm got baited"

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– Well, I'll have you treat me with a juice.

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The days are steadily getting longer. This dusty room that darkened when time was getting late is now bright even when it is time to leave. Reflecting off the white walls, faintly yellow light is being projected, and with it the atmosphere itself feels as if it is dyed with dusk.

The two of us were locked inside the lazily and slowly passing time. Abruptly, Tachibana opened her mouth.

– Hey... Do you, want to play a game...?

– A game?

– A little game, to make you and me more motivated.

Hmm, I cannot think about decent things. With me keeping silent, she continued.

– The one who is worse at tests, will do whatever one thing the other says...&j

Whatever...? Hearing that, I frowned. This time, when I turned to Tachibana, she was indeed happily grinning. As if saying "Ah, bookworm got baited"

– Is it okay? Normally, I will win. I'm okay if you can win in just one subject.

– Oho, brimming with confidence, eh? I will really win like that, you know?

– Bring it on. If I can think that I will lose, then there will be at least some competition.

– Ehehe... Bookworm, what would you want me to do...?

Tachibana's eyes who said this, got slightly moist as she narrowed them, she gave a lascivious impression.

Ugh... A surprise attack. Devious, just what one would expect from Gryffindor, devious. Naturally, I turned my face away with a spinal reflex.

– Well, I'll have you treat me with a juice.

– No... Something dull like that is forbidden...

– You too, what are you going to make me do? Anyway, it's probably going to be something trivial. And as I said that, the blonde girl suddenly pushed her fist against my upper arm.

– Something like that, it won't be, you know...?

There was an impish grin on Tachibana's face.

Chapter 23 - A Game

– Hey, Ichijou, you're free this Saturday, right? We're all planning to gather at my place!

I think that this was the apogee. After several days of being busy interacting with my classmates, the amount of people I had a contact with started to become large.

The one who spoke was Iidzuka sitting next to me. He is a merrymaker member of football club having characteristic face with corners of his mouth pointed upwards. First impression he gives is that of a sports youth... Actually, he always plays outside during lunch breaks, but occasionally, he comes to have a chat with Tachibana's group. I first thought so, but he also pesters Komatsu-kun one seat ahead of him and makes him scared, so I can't really comprehend him.

Yet when I was helping him with a problem yesterday, I found out that we are both very enthusiastic about that popular fighting game "Crash Brothers". Not only that, turns out we had same tastes in some of the core genres. Things like western PC video games, I thought that I was the only one in the class who plays them. I was excited to talk with someone about games for the first time in a long while.

I was a little happy. It's not like I didn't want some otaku friends. But there one big problem.

– Nope... Test are five days later. Invite me for next week instead.

– Haa? So bookworm-ish!

Iidzuka made an annoying exaggerated retort. Yeah, that's right, I am a bookworm. Shouldn't you know it, sitting next to me? Somehow, he is an easy-going fellow, so I am feeling annoyed. It probably means that compatibility is not decided only by having tastes match or not match.

– Oh, I've got it. You're just pretending and actually you want to go, right?

– Pretending? What pretending? Yesterday, haven't I taught you about the trigonometric functions? In any case, I will have you left with some results from my teaching.

– Che... You're so diligent, ugh...

Still, the reason that this useless talk didn't end with this, is because this seat is a minefield. Tachibana has returned to the classroom. She probably felt surprised that I was talking with Iidzuka, so she blinked at us with big eyes.

– Iidzuka, and Ichijou. What's happening?

– Ah, hear me out, Tachibana-san.

While listening to Iidzuka's explanation, a complacent smile started spreading on the face of the blonde girl.

This is bad... A storm is coming. Sensing danger, I turned my body towards the corridor. The probability of sneaking out from this seat should not be zero. The entrance is miraculously close, if it is from here...

– Aa, that is absolutely a pretense! This person has a tsundere side to him.

– Just who is tsundere! Don't say irresponsible things!

Unusually, I ended up raising my voice.

Although erasing my presence was always my strong point... It's no wonder that only Tachibana can absolutely notice me.

I can see Tachibana saying "Ehehe... your amount of friends increased once again&j" with her face only. Did you start to have me having friends as a collection hobby? Most likely, she wants me to go to Iidzuka's place. Judging from her recent behavior, it is as if she wants to drag me onto the path of a sociable guy. It's not funny at all.

Ehehe... your amount of friends increased once again&j

– But seriously... there are tests. Are you really planning to play...?

– Well, yes...

Iidzuka with his flashy hairdo held his tongue. He is probably self-aware that he is in a risky situation.

According to what I heard yesterday, he will have to take supplementary exams for eternity, so the class is a kind of a hell for him. And that's why I bother him and help him with this and that.

Nice, nice, with this he should have reformed...

– You can just gather to study. It wouldn't matter if you played a bit while you're studying.

– Tachibana-san, you're a genius. How did I forget about such a thing?

Wait a minute, that is absolutely a pattern where you do not study... First of all, a group study with everyone doesn't give a good impression. If someone is highly motivated, then he can make time to study by himself. The only thing unmotivated people can do is killing time by chatting.

– A study group two days prior to the tests? What kind of overnight cramming meeting is that?

– Oh, ain't that a funny name. But now Ichijou's presence is even more essential.

I have fallen for Tachibana's scheme again. What a terrible fixed game.

Alright, alright, I got it, I'll go... If I just said this, there would've been a much better conclusion. But Tachibana's hurricane-like style is unwavering.

Alright, alright, I got it, I'll go

– Hey, it sounds rather fun. I want to participate too...

Tachibana said so while playing with her hair.

– My ears have heard everything you just said, Karen! Hey, hey, if you're going to study I want to participate too. Ah, Ms. Momoko too. It's too much for bookworm by himself, right?

– Ye-, yeah... That's right.

Come ooon... It has now spread to the usual girls of the L. This is the worse course of events.

Also, from that point on... I couldn't even act blind.

"There will be overnight cramming meeting" "What's that? Sounds fun." "Ah, I'll go too"

There will be overnight cramming meeting

What's that? Sounds fun

Ah, I'll go too

In the beginning, it was a festival meant only for people of the high caste, but by the time I noticed, about half of the class became participants. Tachibana and friends steadily promoted their program, and after all, little by little my participation became an established policy.

– You... where do you plan to gather more than ten people...?

– Let's use my home&j

Ah, that so. Your house, it did seem spacious.

Haa... Is all of this for real? Packing my days off with plans, gloomy me will become bald. Many of us of the loners' sect live during the weekdays only to have leisurely weekends.

I sat on my own seat. My neighbor Tenjuin has a wry smile just like me.

– Ahaha... Somehow, it's so sudden...

– Absolutely so. Tenjuin-san, do you always put up with this?

– Fufu... If you're always with them, you get used to it, you know?

Class head, was broadly smiling. I have a great impression that she is my senpai in life.

Rather, a person, partially a bookworm, rousing her classmates, what kind of Order of the Phoenix is this? Are you planning to practice invoking Patronus in the Room of Requirement? Ah, by the way, I myself... have passed a personality test at the official-like site and was safely assigned to Slytherin, yeah. Tachibana is a bit Gryffindorish so I think we are going exactly opposite ways.

And yet, the two of us, curiously enough, met every day after school. In the room illuminated by rays of the setting sun. Among the languid and dusty space. Without anyone yet knowing.

– Ehehehehe~&j

And that day she suddenly was in a mood like this. She looks just like a drunken middle-aged man apt to sexually harass.

Is it okay to be like this despite being so diligent with your studies unlike others? I asked this but,

Is it okay to be like this despite being so diligent with your studies unlike others?

– Buuut... I'm so excited about Saturday, I have no motivation right now.

Saying this, she idly lay on top of the table right next to where I was studying. What did you come for if you're not studying? Is it not just having a chatter after school and me taking you home after that if it is like this?

Hmph... Just do what you want...

– Eei

Blonde girl pinched my cheek with her fingers. Angry, I turned towards her... Tachibana, with her head on the table, was mischievously smiling. Being shined on by the sunlight coming from the side, her face was slightly red.

She is completely in summer vacation mode. Weren't your dreams related to the tests?

– Not studying and hindering me... Why did you come here today?

– Eeh, I want to have fun together...&j

– You!

Lately... I feel like Tachibana is acting spoiled without any meaning. My heart is feeling itchy, so please stop... I seriously cannot get used to it.

Well, she is solving problems every day, so there is no need to worry. But then... being together without an excuse, somehow, this is just flirting. Just what should I think about it?

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And as I said that, the blonde girl suddenly pushed her fist against my upper arm.

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There was an impish grin on Tachibana's face.

c24

Chapter 24 - Stage 2

Lately, weather has been kind to me.

Noise from the rain was coming through the window and resounding inside the house. This noise consoles my soul that has been downcast this past few days. Well, it is a rainy season and naturally, there is either rain or dark clouds outside. If it was a clear weather mismatching with the season, I would curse it for certain.

Recently, too many things have happened at once. Things regarding and things not regarding her. Because of it, I feel sweet and uneasy inside my chest, and I'm just simply confused. Therefore, after coming home I had absolutely no idea what to do.

Hey, you should study is a simple solution, but I just don't feel like it. By the time I make a comeback and want to open my notebooks, it is already bedtime, that's why my identity as a bookworm is already at the risk of collapse.

However, tests are still there, if I could just sit at the desk...I've just hit upon a great idea. Alright, how about this...

Go for it! Go for it! You can do it! You can do it! You can do it absolutely!! Go for it! you can do more!! You can do it! No, it's idle fear!! Go for it!! Go for it!! That's it!! That's it!! Don't give up! you must go for it aggressively and positively! Go for it! Go for it...1

Haa... Stop, stop, it's not effective. It seems impossible to get to top 8 at Wimbledon like this.

Last few days I've been getting home late. I simply got along with my classmate and am now playing till late. I explained it to my family like that, but I think that it is only 30% truth.

In truth. Even if I know that I'll end up dead tired by the time I return, I keep company with that incorrigible person. Every day I would be together with her till dinner, and after having an almost empty talk for eternity, I would specially take her home.

It would be okay to refuse her, but why have I never done it?

Just once, I did refuse as I really had to take care of some things. Tachibana's face from that time can't go out of my head.

"Is that so, I got it. Sorry..."

If she feels so dejected as if it was the last day of the world, there is no way I would refuse her another time...Hey, smile, or so I thought. "There's no way bookworm has things to take care of" tease me like you always do.

Although several days have passed since it has occurred, I still cannot forget it, ah.

I'm too worried about something that has already passed. There is no end to this. Lately, if I'm careless, my head becomes full of thoughts about the noon of that day, so I immediately erase them. But no matter what, I still end up remembering something, and this process repeats again and again with no end.

In such a case, to have a change of mood I turned on some mobile game and rolled over the sofa. Yet, just like when I catch a cold, recognizing that I was not in the mood, I ended up switching it off and leaving it on the table. In the end, I was just looking upwards doing nothing.

What's happening with me? Even though during the period of one year that I was thoroughly alone, my soul was brand new and calm.

And while I was pointlessly worried, a timely help came in.

– Hm-hmm... Huff, huff...

What's wrong with me, I have completely not noticed her... My little sister was hiding under sofa. Crouching close to my body, she was heavily breathing. So suspicious.

– W-, what...?

– Hmmm...

Same as ever, there are terrible bags under Keyaki's eyes. Even though originally, she has more than lovely, delicate facial features. But regrettably, her roots are being neglected. If she can be properly transformed, including her excessively blunt way of speaking, she could undergo an ultra-evolution into a talented super-bishoujo.

But the present little sister has her eyes sternly squinted and combined with her bags under them it results in a scary visage. Though I don't remember offending her...

- Aniki, that friend of yours... is it a girl?
- ... My dear young lady detective, do you have any evidence?
- Just like I thought! Humph!

I have specially made a reply like a shitty small fry criminal, but now her expression is even more full of hostility. Either way, it seems that for you, there will be no timely help.

- And here I thought you were unpopular bookworm loner... Hey, go explode.
- You can't limit the solution of this case to an explosion only, yet. I, am a bookworm. And the tests are close by... You cannot deny the possibility that I was simply helping my classmates with studying and among them was a girl.
- Nope... That is not true.

Keyaki said so seemingly full of confidence and readjusted her eyeglasses,

- Suspect is a rich person and is quite confident in her own appearance. Something along the lines of a sociable girl who is the center of the class? About 80% is clear.

- What Baker street did you come from? What is the number of your house?

Sudden emergence of shut-in great detective KEYAKI! She certainly belongs to the type that hates on-the-site inspections.

- Ha. Elementary, my dear Ichijou.
- Ugh... I'm not admitting it, but let me listen for now.
- That, is the smell of an expensive brand's perfume. Unless that person belongs to a rich family, it is not something a high-school student would use.
- Uh, seriously... I mean, why does a shut-in like you know about it?
- Hospitality of the shareholder or something. I get various things sent to me. Well, I'm not using them though.

My little sister proudly laughed "He-he". Despite being my sister, she is a simple person who can cheer up after playing just for a bit. Like a cat that was given a snack. Thus, she kept on proudly talking.

That's right. She is doing this out of excitement, there is no need to be scared.

- The fact that aniki is not aware of the smell that is smeared over him, just means you are that used to it. You are together frequently enough that you are used to the smell and you are close enough that the smell moved onto you. It points out the intimacy. Concurrently, recently, you were getting home late. Yikes... This is not gentle. Stop, stop that diligent reasoning, everything is about to be exposed. What's with her, is her current passion detective drama?

- There is no way, aniki would approach himself, so the other party has to be quite assertive. Also, if it was unpleasant for aniki, then he would've rejected her, so it has to be mutual. In addition to the perfume, the color of this hair... a considerably flashy appearance. Without a great self-confidence, she would probably not have it like this.

As she was grinning, Keyaki picked up a single long hair sticking to my uniform. Seeing me getting pale, her smile broadened even more.

This is not funny... Isn't my disposal of evidence too sloppy?

- Assertive and has a flashy appearance... Combining it with the above-mentioned matters, I can surmise it is a cheerful sociable girl.

– ...

- Ha, relationship where her hair gets stuck on you, so that's how it is. Also, you even chose clothes for you together.

What has my little sister been doing up till now? Or should I say, Q.E.D. which was to be shown. What kind of mind scanning is this?

–...

- Hey...? Come on, say something!

- I will go and explode myself in a bit.

I was about to escape to my room, when my little sister pulled me from behind.

- Wait! If you don't want me to tell all of this to aunt Arika, confess everything!
- Ha, we don't really get along!? And that's why I'm not interested in your inference!
- All of the criminals say that! Archetype!

In the end, I spat out practically everything.

Well, it is not the case where my sister's inference matches everything exactly. Mutual? As one would expect, you have assumed too much, Holmes. I do teach her and get along with her... That is a fact, while everything else is within the domain of interpretation. You cannot be a scholar if you don't strictly differentiate between facts and interpretations... Thus, I reminded myself.

– Hm, aren't you insensitive?

Keyaki glared at me. It's not only her. Lately, whoever the other party may be, they tend to glare at me like this. I, do I say something strange?

– Well then, let me ask. If you knew that she has such feelings, what would you do?

– ... Don't know. I have a lot of responsibilities...

– Haa... Hasn't that person caught a weird person herself. Whatever. Tell me if that person comes here. I don't want to meet her, so I will shut myself in my room.

– Not to worry, she will not come in the first place. We are not in a relationship where you would need to worry about that.

– ... Is that really so?

Concluding our conversation with these words, Keyaki pouted, seemingly slightly dissatisfied.

Though, up to now I have been spending my days off with her. Does she think that now it's going to change? Surely, things have been a bit strange lately, but it's not like my core has changed.

Rather, that type of usual spending of time became precious. During the days full of worries, I felt it was my last refuge.

Still, insensitive? My dear Keyaki, that is slightly wrong. Certainly, there are many unbelievable things happening. I probably don't want to accept me, who is greatly loved. Me, who can be depended on by class. Me, who is cared about by everyone.

With all of these being consolidated, I feel like my stomach is twisting inside me. That is not you. Or, embarrassing. Or, I have lot on my shoulders. This sense of discomfort that cannot be expressed in a few words is set on killing me.

... ..

Then, after my little sister returned to her room, I suddenly recalled just one more thing.

Before Tachibana's house. Completely late. It was the last stop on the road at night we were walking. It was cloudy today, but on clear days, stars shine in the sky.

"Well then, see you tomorrow".

The pause between me saying this and her actually releasing my sleeve, surely it was just a moment, but the time needed for her to release my hand was considerably long, three or four seconds.

The only thing audible was the chirping of the insects. Light breeze was drying the sweat.

And during that short moment, we were certainly conveying something. Just for that moment, blonde girl's happy smile was certainly not there. Also, with the delicate expression that she has been showing me lately, she appealed to me.

"Nooo, don't go. I want to be together a bit longer..."

"Haha. Aren't we going to meet tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, you'll be coming to school right...?"

"Of course I will, what are you worried for?"

"Come, okay? Diligently... Bye-bye"

"Bye-bye"

And then, the moment when she released my hand...

"Bookworm, XXXX..."

That is, there are some things that you can't understand from expressions alone. Reading too much into things is not good. It will be too late if I make an unthinkable mistake.

But having thoughts like that, just as if I was desperately running away from something. After all, such a frail me, I hate it. The me who makes a kind face while having all of these concerns, I hate it. The me who knows everything, but cannot face it, I hate it most of all.

In the end, no matter what I tried to set my mind on, I was blocked in every direction.

Inspirational speech (the part you need is at 0:36) by tennis player . He made it to the quarter-finals of Wimbledon in 1995.

Chapter 24 - Stage 2

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Concluding our conversation with these words, Keyaki pouted, seemingly slightly dissatisfied.

Though, up to now I have been spending my days off with her. Does she think that now it's going to change? Surely, things have been a bit strange lately, but it's not like my core has changed.

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The only thing audible was the chirping of the insects. Light breeze was drying the sweat.

And during that short moment, we were certainly conveying something. Just for that moment, blonde girl's happy smile was certainly not there. Also, with the delicate expression that she has been showing me lately, she appealed to me.

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"Tomorrow, you'll be coming to school right...?"

"Of course I will, what are you worried for?"

"Come, okay? Diligently... Bye-bye"

"Bye-bye"

And then, the moment when she released my hand...

"Bookworm, XXXX..."

That is, there are some things that you can't understand from expressions alone. Reading too much into things is not good. It will be too late if I make an unthinkable mistake.

But having thoughts like that, just as if I was desperately running away from something. After all, such a frail me, I hate it. The me who makes a kind face while having all of these concerns, I hate it. The me who knows everything, but cannot face it, I hate it most of all.

In the end, no matter what I tried to set my mind on, I was blocked in every direction.

Inspirational speech (the part you need is at 0:36) by tennis player . He made it to the quarter-finals of Wimbledon in 1995.

Chapter 24 - Stage 2

Lately, weather has been kind to me.

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Recently, too many things have happened at once. Things regarding and things not regarding her. Because of it, I feel sweet and uneasy inside my chest, and I'm just simply confused. Therefore, after coming home I had absolutely no idea what to do.

Hey, you should study is a simple solution, but I just don't feel like it. By the time I make a comeback and want to open my notebooks, it is already bedtime, that's why my identity as a bookworm is already at the risk of collapse.

However, tests are still there, if I could just sit at the desk...I've just hit upon a great idea. Alright, how about this...

Go for it! Go for it! You can do it! You can do it! You can do it absolutely!! Go for it! you can do more!! You can do it! No, it's idle fear!! Go for it!! Go for it!! That's it!! That's it!! Don't give up! you must go for it aggressively and positively! Go for it! Go for it...!

Haa... Stop, stop, it's not effective. It seems impossible to get to top 8 at Wimbledon like this.

Last few days I've been getting home late. I simply got along with my classmate and am now playing till late. I explained it to my family like that, but I think that it is only 30% truth.

In truth. Even if I know that I'll end up dead tired by the time I return, I keep company with that incorrigible person. Every day I would be together with her till dinner, and after having an almost empty talk for eternity, I would specially take her home.

It would be okay to refuse her, but why have I never done it?

Just once, I did refuse as I really had to take care of some things. Tachibana's face from that time can't go out of my head.

"Is that so, I got it. Sorry..."

If she feels so dejected as if it was the last day of the world, there is no way I would refuse her another time...Hey, smile, or so I thought. "There's no way bookworm has things to take care of" tease me like you always do.

Although several days have passed since it has occurred, I still cannot forget it, ah.

I'm too worried about something that has already passed. There is no end to this. Lately, if I'm careless, my head becomes full of thoughts about the noon of that day, so I immediately erase them. But no matter what, I still end up remembering something, and this process repeats again and again with no end.

In such a case, to have a change of mood I turned on some mobile game and rolled over the sofa. Yet, just like when I catch a cold, recognizing that I was not in the mood, I ended up switching it off and leaving it on the table. In the end, I was just looking upwards doing nothing.

What's happening with me? Even though during the period of one year that I was thoroughly alone, my soul was brand new and calm.

And while I was pointlessly worried, a timely help came in.

– Hm-hmm... Huff, huff...

What's wrong with me, I have completely not noticed her... My little sister was hiding under sofa. Crouching close to my body, she was heavily breathing. So suspicious.

– W-, what...?

– Hmmm...

Same as ever, there are terrible bags under Keyaki's eyes. Even though originally, she has more than lovely, delicate facial features. But regretfully, her roots are being neglected. If she can be properly

transformed, including her excessively blunt way of speaking, she could undergo an ultra-evolution into a talented super-bishoujo.

But the present little sister has her eyes sternly squinted and combined with her bags under them it results in a scary visage. Though I don't remember offending her...

– Aniki, that friend of yours... is it a girl?

– ... My dear young lady detective, do you have any evidence?

– Just like I thought! Humph!

I have specially made a reply like a shitty small fry criminal, but now her expression is even more full of hostility. Either way, it seems that for you, there will be no timely help.

– And here I thought you were unpopular bookworm loner... Hey, go explode.

– You can't limit the solution of this case to an explosion only, yet. I, am a bookworm. And the tests are close by... You cannot deny the possibility that I was simply helping my classmates with studying and among them was a girl.

– Nope... That is not true.

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– Ha. Elementary, my dear Ichijou.

– Ugh... I'm not admitting it, but let me listen for now.

– That, is the smell of an expensive brand's perfume. Unless that person belongs to a rich family, it is not something a high-school student would use.

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– Hospitality of the shareholder or something. I get various things sent to me. Well, I'm not using them though.

My little sister proudly laughed "He-he". Despite being my sister, she is a simple person who can cheer up after playing just for a bit. Like a cat that was given a snack. Thus, she kept on proudly talking.

That's right. She is doing this out of excitement, there is no need to be scared.

– The fact that aniki is not aware of the smell that is smeared over him, just means you are that used to it. You are together frequently enough that you are used to the smell and you are close enough that the smell moved onto you. It points out the intimacy. Concurrently, recently, you were getting home late.

Yikes... This is not gentle. Stop, stop that diligent reasoning, everything is about to be exposed. What's with her, is her current passion detective drama?

– There is no way, aniki would approach himself, so the other party has to be quite assertive. Also, if it was unpleasant for aniki, then he would've rejected her, so it has to be mutual. In addition to the perfume, the color of this hair... a considerably flashy appearance. Without a great self-confidence, she would probably not have it like this.

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– Ha, relationship where her hair gets stuck on you, so that's how it is. Also, you even chose clothes for you together.

What has my little sister been doing up till now? Or should I say, Q.E.D. which was to be shown. What kind of mind scanning is this?

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– Hey...? Come on, say something!

– I will go and explode myself in a bit.

I was about to escape to my room, when my little sister pulled me from behind.

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Inspirational speech

c25

Chapter 25 - School caste \$`

Today's last morning lesson is P.E. The event is softball. Of course, my partner in playing catch is the member of my union - Komatsu-dono.

By the way, various things have happened and I'm doubtful if we can still be called colleagues, but I don't know when I will return to active duty, therefore it would be wise to treat him with kindness. Moreover, with Iidzuka, who I suspect can't read the mood, pestering him from behind in the class, in his own way he has his worries maximized. Well, most likely that fake pharaoh is not doing it out of malice. Still, it has to be bitter for a gloomy person.

That's right. Distress of a pessimist will make him wither, even if there is not a single ill will in the surroundings. Occasionally, when I am together with someone, I feel sorry for being alive. Someone like me just deceives with a bluff, but when I walk in public together with Tachibana, I especially want to drop into a hole.

So to speak, the two of us became victims of the Youth World just by being born. For the sake of getting through the next two years of this class, despite being loners, at times, we have to help each other. There are still so many events that spread fatigue across a gloomy person's whole body.

It was a day where the blue sky could be seen here and there in the gaps between thick clouds. Sports ground's earth was slightly muddy. The ball rolling over the ground gets wet and our hands are inevitably covered in dirt.

Smelling strong scent of the earth, we were throwing the ball.

Still, the two of us haven't really talked about anything, and for whatever reason, I ended up letting something like an indifferent true thought slipping out of my mouth.

– Haa... Sorry, as expected, it is tough.

– Well, it is tough.

Whoa, that got through to me. Moreover, the contents of the conversation resembles a prince of some country¹ with his comrades right before a final decisive battle. As if there is going to be a campfire and his whole body has black clothes on it. Stand by me is about to play in the ending.

But it seems that Komatsu-kun had his own thoughts on this, so he replied to me like this.

– I mean. Lately, Ichijou-kun suddenly got popular.

– That is just me being used. It's only for the time before the tests.

– Even so. Every single one is saying "Ichijou, Ichijou". They rely on you.

I threw the ball in my hands to Komatsu-kun who was standing 20 meters away from me.

– I'm glad I heard it. That it is tough as expected. You suddenly became sort of a faraway person, so I felt a little lonely.

– I'm still, a loner.

– Really? You speak with girls from time to time. Right in the middle of the class, you exchange jokes with various people... That is absolutely impossible for me. Because I'm a loner.

– Ugh... I'm still a loner in my heart...

– Yeah, yeah, lol. Somehow, you're stubborn, aren't you?

Somehow, I can't help but feel the most comfortable when I'm with this frail boy. I still don't know anything about this guy. And he too, has never asked anything about me. We are just relying on each other a little and hold no interest about the other person. Otherwise, it is no different from being friends. Whenever I got to know someone, there was always a feeling of distance like this.

But since meeting Tachibana, I started thinking that maybe it was a slightly desolate way of living my life... maybe. I wonder. Like stuff about that girl, I haven't wished for it, but I already know this and that about her. Sooner or later, stuff about me will be known too.

I would've build walls around me, but isn't it meaningless with her around?

Haa... Stop, stop, it is plenty enough to worry only when blonde girl is around.

– Saturday, you come too, Komatsu-kun. I think you could save me there.

– Eh? Me...?

– Well, you can't get anything out of it anyway. You'll only get tired if you go.

Eventually, P.E. teacher's voice announced the end of practice time and we moved on to have a practice game.

Earlier we practiced with students from different groups, so now it is a contest between former partners. The match started and I was given the position of the left fielder. I may be supposed to defend, but this is nothing but standing in one place. It's not like I have a special eagerness to play. Well, it is a common condition where you want the time so slowly pass by, that gloomy people bad at physical exercises have to face during P.E.

Girls are away from here, playing tennis, while they chatter and giggle, yeah. Distance-wise, they are fairly far away from here, so it is not likely that Tachibana will watch here, ah.

Why are you worried about what she will see, virgin idiot?

Haa... So this is Stage 2. It's so bad being a boy in puberty. This shitty mental illness is steadily inflating inside my body. Which internal organ should I take out to cut it off, huh?

While I was having such foolish thoughts, an extra-large trouble came my way.

I was late for just a moment. To realize that a ball was flying my way, I was late for just a moment.

Shit, I started running with my legs covered in mud. I immediately caught up with the place it was going to fall, but when I looked up, sunlight pierced my eyes. Losing the ball out of my eyesight, bump, I received the hit with my forehead.

– Ouch

With my up becoming down, nearby voices seemed coming from far away. Sounds of the rushing footsteps, several people shouting "Ichijou!", reaching from far away a burst of laughter from... what was he called.. Okamura. Everything instantly mixed up. And the only troublesome thing among them is that guy's guffaw coming from the other side of the fence. It is okay when everyone laughs, but it is not so. It was only him who abandoned any ability to read the mood and was laughing. I felt that there will be troubles because of it.

For God's sake, don't behave in such a way that will provoke that blonde girl. And at that point, my consciousness abruptly went off.

This one.

Chapter 25 - School caste \$`

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That's right. Distress of a pessimist will make him wither, even if there is not a single ill will in the surroundings. Occasionally, when I am together with someone, I feel sorry for being alive. Someone like me just deceives with a bluff, but when I walk in public together with Tachibana, I especially want to drop into a hole.

So to speak, the two of us became victims of the Youth World just by being born. For the sake of getting through the next two years of this class, despite being loners, at times, we have to help each other. There are still so many events that spread fatigue across a gloomy person's whole body.

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Still, the two of us haven't really talked about anything, and for whatever reason, I ended up letting something like an indifferent true thought slipping out of my mouth.

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– Yeah, yeah, lol. Somehow, you're stubborn, aren't you?

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c26

Chapter 26 - School Caste \$a

Well, I may have lost consciousness, but I was awake in a few minutes. Desperately trying to protect the polished ranked four brains, snicker, it seems my damn hard skull has done a great job. Good, good, my aunt's wonderful breakfasts were effective for sure.

However, if I hadn't woken up fast, they would probably have called the ambulance. In any case, in order to keep an eye on my condition, I was lying in the infirmary since 4th period. This is a slightly fresh feeling. To think that I would be permitted to lie in bed in school. It doesn't hurt as much already, but I'll use this chance to cut classes.

Within the atmosphere of lunch break, my consciousness was weakly fluttering.

Curtains in the infirmary were swaying. Gentle breeze was touching the skin on my arm. I can hear distant clamor and sounds of ball from the half-open window.

I thought, this is so strange. At this time, I should have been in my seat, studying as usual. Relaxing like this, isn't it the first time for me? With my body loosened up, I felt like it was about to be swallowed by the bed. So quiet.

And while I was somewhere in-between being sleep and awake, suddenly, a single girl's face came before me.

With wet eyes, she stared at me with a serious expression. Healthy-looking white skin and long eyelashes. Thin lips and gentle line of her nose. And then, that long hair, with a bright golden color...

Oof... Oh my, what a beautiful young lady we have here. It seems I have discovered the Peach Blossom Spring¹ right here.

It's unfortunate, but it seems I have been so entranced it feels somewhat unpleasant. I've no words to say, so my desire to escape reality is strong enough to make me start thinking about today's dinner.

Ah, by the way, in "The Peach Blossom Spring" of Tao Yuanming it is written that "They encouraged each other and zealously pursued agriculture, and when the sun set, they went to rest", so in fact, Peach Blossom Spring is not really a bishoujo-land. Rather, saying that it is a tax-free idyllic slow life land is closer to the truth,² and it is ironic when I think that "Aren't loners more fit for it?" --

– Are you... okay...?

What is this... So it's you, Tachibana. Standing at the side of my bed, she was looking at my face from above. Noticing that, I blinked several times. This person, is like someone different when she is silent and has a serious face.

– I'm okay, like I normally am... Rather, I've been awake all this time.

– It's forbidden to make me worry... idiot...

Tachibana vigorously sniffled and wiped her eyes with her sleeve.

– ... Seriously, it's forbidden

– I'm sorry...

It was weirdly silent. Whoa, stop that please. Don't make a face like you're downhearted, say something. "Clumsy!" or "Virgin!", both are acceptable. You're always carefree and now that you suddenly behave in this way, I'm having much trouble with how to deal with it.

And then, I don't know what she was thinking, but she started patting gauzed part with her finger.

– St-, stop

– No... I thought maybe it will get better if I do this... Did it, hurt?

– It does hurt. Anyway, I'm already feeling better.

– I'm sorry...

– Ugh... It didn't, hurt that much...

And again the sour silence fell. Just what do you want me to do? You, recently you've been weird. Still, it is certain that at this point, the way we interact with each other is in the process of slightly changing. Maybe out of concern, but now there are almost no instances of Tachibana using profanities and cackling like it was in the beginning.

But, it doesn't suit you. I know that there is no ill will, and I don't even mind it.

Well then, would it help if I said "bitch"?

Ugh, it's a bit hard to say it... I'm feeling uneasy about what she would think if I do. That she will maybe

start hating me. Even though until now, I haven't cared about it.

It's so strange... both me and us.

– Sorry, I'm keeping silence even though I came myself... haha. It's just that I heard your head was hit and I had a bit of a shock...

It seems that my uneasiness was transmitted, so she made a forced smile. Seeing that, I feel pain inside my chest. Also, for some reason, I know of a very good method how to make her smile with a grin.

Well, it's somewhat embarrassing, but still...

– I don't mind... I'm happy that you are worried about me so much, or how should I say it... Thank you.

Blonde girl was blinking with widely open eyes, and before long she made cheerful face. As if she had a peace of mind, her face became less tense. Seeing that, I felt relieved.

It's too easy to understand what makes you pleased.

– Bookworm showed his dere side...3

– Stop, I say, that is not true.

– Fufu, somehow, I feel energized.

And so, I came to regret my own choice. As for the reason, it is because Tachibana shouted "Yaaa!" and joyfully dived straight onto my bed. I rolled away to the bed's edge right away and avoided difficulties, but -

– Ehehehehe~&j I'm lying next to bookworm.

Tachibana is right next to me. She is lying so close that her hair is touching my face. Her usual perfume is pleasantly fragrant. Naturally, she is in her usual happy mode with a complacent smile on her face. I have indeed not thought that she would do this. I want to turn my face same as ever, but with this posture, there are only two directions available: look up or in front.

Feeling relieved, feeling embarrassed... Still, she is happy, so I am happy too, or something...

My face is on fire. And as far as I can see, Tachibana's face is slightly red too. We, I feel like we are having some secret talk even in the pauses in our conversation.

– Uh... You, you're always too carefree.

– I am happy... It can't be helped, right? When you show your dere side, I become seriously happy. And you... Which of my actions make you happy?

– I don't really...

– Nooo, stay dere a bit more. You turn into tsun too quickly...

The pace at which her facial expressions repertoire increases is really too fast. Hey, don't act spoiled at the critical moment, it's a foul play. Pulling my shirt at this timing deserves getting a red card and leaving the field, seriously. I would love to leave in her place, but just as I show signs of doing so, the grip on my shirt gets even stronger, what an astute person.

Without a further wish to continue making an eye contact, I turned over. Hmph, If I do this, there is no way to can kill me with your expressions, you bastard.

– Nooo! Turn back here! Come on, come on.

And so, she lightly poked me in the back with her knee. There was quite an itchy feeling inside my chest, so I obediently faced her -

– Welcome home...&j

– I'm, I'm back...

What the hell is this exchange, I'm about to become silly. But on this day, blonde girl was truly merciless. She continues freely bringing out a wave after wave of ballistic missiles with an absurd firepower, so my chest keeps getting painful.

– Hey... Isn't it about time you stop calling me "you". I, hate it a little.

– Ugh... So that's how it was. I understand. Well then, from now on I will diligently call you Tachibana.

– Huh? These are not the words I wished for? It's okay to call me Karen... Jun

– Seriously, stop with the first name. That's, impossible no matter who the other person might be.

– No way... I will absolutely call you that. I will absolutely, absolutely call you that.

– Alright, alright... Tachibana-san

– Ah, that's unfair!

Good, good, this way I can force two choices. This girl can only choose between calling me by my first

name and being called by her first name. She will probably choose the latter, but it is hundred times better than the former.

– ~~!

Ho-ho, It's effective, effective. Biting her lip, the blonde girl is making some sort of a complain. "Stingy Jun!". Still, for this time, even if she asks cutely, it is futile. Because honestly, being called virgin is still better.

But while I was feeling elated like this... We received a severe surprise attack.

– You two. What are you doing...?

Startled, I turned in the direction of the threatening voice... where I found standing at the entrance, our teacher in charge - Shiraishi-sensei.

Basically it is a utopia in the ancient fable of the same name written by Tao Yuanming. The usage here is that of a paradise (or a garden of peaches with beautiful women strolling there).

You can read the translation. I am not sure, but I believe the part that is quoted by Ichijou is that of the remarks accompanying the original fable. Remarks describe the people leaving in the utopia. Check out the translation of the fable, it will become more clear.

I'm dropping my attempts of trying to localize the tsundere part of the novels. If for some reason you still don't know what it means to be tsun and what it means to be dere, is the popular article on the topic.

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Without a further wish to continue making an eye contact, I turned over. Hmph, If I do this, there is no way to can kill me with your expressions, you bastard.

– Nooo! Turn back here! Come on, come on.

And so, she lightly poked me in the back with her knee. There was quite an itchy feeling inside my chest, so I obediently faced her -

– Welcome home...&j

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– Huh? These are not the words I wished for? It's okay to call me Karen... Jun

– Seriously, stop with the first name. That's, impossible no matter who the other person might be.

– No way... I will absolutely call you that. I will absolutely, absolutely call you that.

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Chapter 26 - School Caste \$a

Well, I may have lost consciousness, but I was awake in a few minutes. Desperately trying to protect the polished ranked four brains, snicker, it seems my damn hard skull has done a great job. Good, good, my aunt's wonderful breakfasts were effective for sure.

However, if I hadn't woken up fast, they would probably have called the ambulance. In any case, in order to keep an eye on my condition, I was lying in the infirmary since 4th period. This is a slightly fresh feeling. To think that I would be permitted to lie in bed in school. It doesn't hurt as much already, but I'll use this chance to cut classes.

Within the atmosphere of lunch break, my consciousness was weakly fluttering.

Curtains in the infirmary were swaying. Gentle breeze was touching the skin on my arm. I can hear distant clamor and sounds of ball from the half-open window.

I thought, this is so strange. At this time, I should have been in my seat, studying as usual. Relaxing like this, isn't it the first time for me? With my body loosened up, I felt like it was about to be swallowed by the bed. So quiet.

And while I was somewhere in-between being sleep and awake, suddenly, a single girl's face came before me.

With wet eyes, she stared at me with a serious expression. Healthy-looking white skin and long eyelashes. Thin lips and gentle line of her nose. And then, that long hair, with a bright golden color...

Oof... Oh my, what a beautiful young lady we have here. It seems I have discovered the Peach Blossom Spring¹ right here.

It's unfortunate, but it seems I have been so entranced it feels somewhat unpleasant. I've no words to say, so my desire to escape reality is strong enough to make me start thinking about today's dinner.

Ah, by the way, in "The Peach Blossom Spring" of Tao Yuanming it is written that "They encouraged each other and zealously pursued agriculture, and when the sun set, they went to rest", so in fact, Peach Blossom Spring is not really a bishoujo-land. Rather, saying that it is a tax-free idyllic slow life land is closer to the truth.² and it is ironic when I think that "Aren't loners more fit for it?" --

– Are you... okay...?

What is this... So it's you, Tachibana. Standing at the side of my bed, she was looking at my face from above. Noticing that, I blinked several times. This person, is like someone different when she is silent and has a serious face.

– I'm okay, like I normally am... Rather, I've been awake all this time.

– It's forbidden to make me worry... idiot...

Tachibana vigorously sniffled and wiped her eyes with her sleeve.

– ... Seriously, it's forbidden

– I'm sorry...

It was weirdly silent. Whoa, stop that please. Don't make a face like you're downhearted, say something. "Clumsy!" or "Virgin!", both are acceptable. You're always carefree and now that you suddenly behave in this way, I'm having much trouble with how to deal with it.

And then, I don't know what she was thinking, but she started patting gauzed part with her finger.

– St-, stop

– No... I thought maybe it will get better if I do this... Did it, hurt?

– It does hurt. Anyway, I'm already feeling better.

– I'm sorry...

– Ugh... It didn't, hurt that much...

And again the sour silence fell. Just what do you want me to do? You, recently you've been weird.

Still, it is certain that at this point, the way we interact with each other is in the process of slightly changing. Maybe out of concern, but now there are almost no instances of Tachibana using profanities and cackling like it was in the beginning.

But, it doesn't suit you. I know that there is no ill will, and I don't even mind it.

Well then, would it help if I said "bitch"?

Ugh, it's a bit hard to say it... I'm feeling uneasy about what she would think if I do. That she will maybe start hating me. Even though until now, I haven't cared about it.

It's so strange... both me and us.

– Sorry, I'm keeping silence even though I came myself... haha. It's just that I heard your head was hit and I had a bit of a shock...

It seems that my uneasiness was transmitted, so she made a forced smile. Seeing that, I feel pain inside my chest. Also, for some reason, I know of a very good method how to make her smile with a grin.

Well, it's somewhat embarrassing, but still...

– I don't mind... I'm happy that you are worried about me so much, or how should I say it... Thank you.

Blonde girl was blinking with widely open eyes, and before long she made cheerful face. As if she had a peace of mind, her face became less tense. Seeing that, I felt relieved.

It's too easy to understand what makes you pleased.

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– Stop, I say, that is not true.

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Chapter 27 - School Caste \$b

So this is what it means to have you blood run cold. Abruptly getting off the bed, Tachibana and I stood with our backs straight like a new recruit hearing his name during a roll-call.

– What kind of thing is this...?

As the teacher in charge with long black hair said this in a low voice, the atmosphere in the room became freezing. It still hasn't been long since the class shuffle, so this is the first time having a decent conversation with this teacher. But what a sense of intimidation. This person is tall and her look is so excessively sharp, that it's scary how it seems that she can make you fall silent with one glance.

In addition to that, a pair of boy and girl were caught in a suspicious act in the infirmary by the terrifying demon teacher... Isn't this a terrible situation? I swear that I haven't done anything. It's just that by some course of events we were lying on the bed next to each other. But... Shiraishi-sensei probably will not be content with such an explanation.

I would rather it quickly ends with a punch, but in our times it will not be so. Rather, it's stressful that I have to wait for a more troublesome treatment.

– So... How is Tachibana in a place, like this...?

I gulped, while the silence was prickling my skin.

Or rather, her eyes, so scary! What kind of a male sergeant are you...!?

She seems like someone who makes hard harassments, yeah. "Before and after the shit oozes out of your mouth, say 'SIR!'" or "You bastards are not human beings, gathering the shit of amphibians is the only worth you have!"

I'm not only ready to shit myself, I'm ready to hand out everything I have in my wallet. Ah, the amount I have with me today is not even 1,000 yen, it doesn't seem I'll manage to bribe her. Oh that, are you okay with internal organs? Please eat my pancreas.

... It's impossible to say it for this tall female teacher, who unsteadily stepped closer.

She stood in front of Tachibana who was standing closer to the entrance first. Blonde girl wanted to deceive her saying "Weell..." and laughing, but sensei's cold iron-mask face hasn't relaxed, so the mood remained heavy.

– You were having quite a fun, huh...?

– Um... Umm..... I heard Ichijou was hit in the head, so I came to check on him, or something...

– Hmm...

Tachibana replied looking downward. Right, it was you who made the dive. I was simply recuperating here, so it is unfortunate, but I cannot take responsibility together with you. You will have to face the fall alone.

Yet... Because of the few words that Tachibana has put forth, sensei went crazy in a different direction.

– And then... We played for a bit...

What's this "played for a bit", I can't follow it at all. Rather, the verb 'play' itself has an uncertain meaning, so there is much room for imagination. In truth, she just said a few foolish words, but they are the words that can make you think in slightly wrong direction.

And practically, our Shiraishi-sensei too -

– What...!? You... played...?

While slightly trembling, her face became red.

– When you say played... You mean in a place like this infirmary, you two alone were doing some kind of wrong things like this and that...

...Mm? This appears strange... Somehow, the atmosphere has changed. I feel like the dignity of a sergeant that I sensed until now has vanished.

And by the way, this teacher, isn't she a bit too flustered? "We played", I don't know what she has imagined from that. Rather, what has she imagined?

However, at any rate this person is an adult woman. Being reminded about an unseemly thing just a little, and she already seems exaggeratedly surprised... I can slightly smell something sad. Beings of the same kind can be seen through, and I know it very well.

– Oi, Ichijou...!!

– YES!

– Give an explanation on the circumstances of this matter!

Dreadful Shiraishi-sensei was standing before my eyes with a frightening expression. And she's close, too close! Her breathing is heavy and her eyes are round open.

However, an explanation... How should I do it? I'm a little embarrassed...

– Eeh... We just spoke a little...

– Not true, Tachibana said you were playing! It seems to me you have conducted something you have a guilty conscious for in a place like this! It cannot be that she has called a simple chat playing. It's too good of a story if you say you only talked!

– No, no, nothing like that! It is entirely contrary to the truth!

– Truth? Speaking of the truth, you bastards were sle-, sle- sle- sle-... sleeping together!

– Well, it may have certainly seemed so...

– Awawa! So that was indeed sleeping together, what an insolence...!

Where has your usual cool impression gone? Letting out a "Sleeping in the infirmary... together...", sensei was constantly blinking.

Tachibana was just foolishly laughing with a troubled face and not making any objections. Well, she was lying next to me, but isn't there a context to everything...

– Fu, fufu, that is illicit sexual relationship! I'll be watching you bastards from now on...

After all, sensei tramped out of the infirmary with a bright red face. It's just as if we pissed off some really serious kid. What is our teacher in charge? This conversation had a slightly worn-out feeling to it. I ended up seeing a bit strange side of her.

And in the end, Tachibana scratched the back of her head, embarrassed.

– Weeell, we messed up, huh...

– Oh, shut up!

Unfortunately, the punishment of writing an apology has fallen onto me too. After the homeroom that day, I received 10 sheets of A4 blank forms even though there are tests next week. I desperately tried to make an excuse, but it seems one has to properly show one's point in written form. Shiraishi-sensei's eyes were bloodshot.

– Listen well, Ichijou. If you want to claim innocence to the very end, then elaborately describe the circumstances of the matter. In what way exactly have you played, what have you been talking about and what how much space was between you, what would you have done if I hadn't come?

– Sensei... Your breathing is very rough.

– It is not rough! This is very important, do you understand!

– Yes...

This person, even though she is an adult woman, she totally gives a virgin impression. I wonder if she is married... I was quietly thinking so, but anyway, such being the case, I had to write a statement of regret after school.

Still, Tachibana was in high spirits just as usual. Because of you, both of us have to write 10 A4 papers, why are you so happy? I have asked her this, but

– Because, you know, this is so absurd (lol). Even though we were scolded for getting along too much, aren't we still happily writing the apology together?

– Uh, from the viewpoint of how it looks, it is so...

– And that means that the more we get scolded, the better we will be getting along&j Therefore, I want us to do more things that will get us scolded.

– Stop... That is undeniably going too far.

– No... Don't say that that is going too far... That will cause me trouble.

What trouble, do you still want to escalate this? My head is about to boil just from that. Rather, that is exactly the reason why we get the attention. Up until now, I have been behaving like an honor student only in regard to the teachers and have been living peacefully, but what should I do now?

Chapter 27 - School Caste \$b

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– You were having quite a fun, huh...?

– Um... Umm..... I heard Ichijou was hit in the head, so I came to check on him, or something...

– Hmm...

Tachibana replied looking downward. Right, it was you who made the dive. I was simply recuperating here, so it is unfortunate, but I cannot take responsibility together with you. You will have to face the fall alone.

Yet... Because of the few words that Tachibana has put forth, sensei went crazy in a different direction.

– And then... We played for a bit...

What's this "played for a bit", I can't follow it at all. Rather, the verb 'play' itself has an uncertain meaning, so there is much room for imagination. In truth, she just said a few foolish words, but they are the words that can make you think in slightly wrong direction.

And practically, our Shiraishi-sensei too -

– What...!? You... played...?

While slightly trembling, her face became red.

– When you say played... You mean in a place like this infirmary, you two alone were doing some kind of wrong things like this and that...

...Mm? This appears strange... Somehow, the atmosphere has changed. I feel like the dignity of a sergeant that I sensed until now has vanished.

And by the way, this teacher, isn't she a bit too flustered? "We played", I don't know what she has imagined from that. Rather, what has she imagined?

However, at any rate this person is an adult woman. Being reminded about an unseemly thing just a little, and she already seems exaggeratedly surprised... I can slightly smell something sad. Beings of the same kind can be seen through, and I know it very well.

– Oi, Ichijou...!!

– YES!

– Give an explanation on the circumstances of this matter!

Dreadful Shiraishi-sensei was standing before my eyes with a frightening expression. And she's close, too close! Her breathing is heavy and her eyes are round open.

However, an explanation... How should I do it? I'm a little embarrassed...

– Eeh... We just spoke a little...

– Not true, Tachibana said you were playing! It seems to me you have conducted something you have a guilty conscious for in a place like this! It cannot be that she has called a simple chat playing. It's too good of a story if you say you only talked!

– No, no, nothing like that! It is entirely contrary to the truth!

– Truth? Speaking of the truth, you bastards were sle-, sle- sle- sle-... sleeping together!

– Well, it may have certainly seemed so...

– Awawa! So that was indeed sleeping together, what an insolence...!

Where has your usual cool impression gone? Letting out a "Sleeping in the infirmary... together...", sensei was constantly blinking.

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– Fu, fufu, that is illicit sexual relationship! I'll be watching you bastards from now on...

After all, sensei tramped out of the infirmary with a bright red face. It's just as if we pissed off some really serious kid. What is our teacher in charge? This conversation had a slightly worn-out feeling to it. I ended up seeing a bit strange side of her.

And in the end, Tachibana scratched the back of her head, embarrassed.

– Weeell, we messed up, huh...

– Oh, shut up!

Unfortunately, the punishment of writing an apology has fallen onto me too. After the homeroom that day, I received 10 sheets of A4 blank forms even though there are tests next week. I desperately tried to make an excuse, but it seems one has to properly show one's point in written form. Shiraishi-sensei's eyes were bloodshot.

– Listen well, Ichijou. If you want to claim innocence to the very end, then elaborately describe the circumstances of the matter. In what way exactly have you played, what have you been talking about and what how much space was between you, what would you have done if I hadn't come?

– Sensei... Your breathing is very rough.

– It is not rough! This is very important, do you understand!

– Yes...

This person, even though she is an adult woman, she totally gives a virgin impression. I wonder if she is married... I was quietly thinking so, but anyway, such being the case, I had to write a statement of regret after school.

Still, Tachibana was in high spirits just as usual. Because of you, both of us have to write 10 A4 papers, why are you so happy? I have asked her this, but

– Because, you know, this is so absurd (lol). Even though we were scolded for getting along too much, aren't we still happily writing the apology together?

– Uh, from the viewpoint of how it looks, it is so...

– And that means that the more we get scolded, the better we will be getting along&j Therefore, I want us do more things that will get us scolded.

– Stop... That is undeniably going too far.

– No... Don't say that that is going too far... That will cause me trouble.

What trouble, do you still want to escalate this? My head is about to boil just from that. Rather, that is exactly the reason why we get the attention. Up until now, I have been behaving like an honor student only in regard to the teachers and have been living peacefully, but what should I do now?

Chapter 27 - School Caste \$b

So this is what it means to have you blood run cold. Abruptly getting off the bed, Tachibana and I stood with our backs straight like a new recruit hearing his name during a roll-call.

– What kind of thing is this...?

As the teacher in charge with long black hair said this in a low voice, the atmosphere in the room became freezing. It still hasn't been long since the class shuffle, so this is the first time having a decent conversation with this teacher. But what a sense of intimidation. This person is tall and her look is so

excessively sharp, that it's scary how it seems that she can make you fall silent with one glance. In addition to that, a pair of boy and girl were caught in a suspicious act in the infirmary by the terrifying demon teacher... Isn't this a terrible situation? I swear that I haven't done anything. It's just that by some course of events we were lying on the bed next to each other. But... Shiraishi-sensei probably will not be content with such an explanation.

I would rather it quickly ends with a punch, but in our times it will not be so. Rather, it's stressful that I have to wait for a more troublesome treatment.

– So... How is Tachibana in a place, like this...?

I gulped, while the silence was prickling my skin.

Or rather, her eyes, so scary! What kind of a male sergeant are you...!?

She seems like someone who makes hard harassments, yeah. "Before and after the shit oozes out of your mouth, say 'SIR!'" or "You bastards are not human beings, gathering the shit of amphibians is the only worth you have!"

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Chapter 27 - School Caste \$b

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c28

Chapter 28 - School Caste \$c

I don't know if it is because we had such a foolish chat or because I was affected by the hit to my head, but I have somehow overlooked a serious matter.

As I became Tachibana's neighbor, there can be no rest for my mind. There is this relationship with blonde girl, but that is not all. It's the same with the class.

Nevertheless, I feel like in the past few days I have spoken with various guys. The amount of people in this classroom who look like they have finally opened the textbooks for the first time one week before the tests is too big. And what was surprising, was that I had to teach truly basic stuff. Like this, it is already at the point where I wonder if they will be able to avoid failing mark if they start learning from now on. Although, if I put this into words, they will probably give up.

And also, there was one feature that these super failure brothers had. And that is, even though we were supposed to have a study talk, our conversation would often deviate.

– Hee, so Ichijou listens to groups like ONE OK.1 Can I call you to karaoke next time?

– Eh, ah... yeah.

There were different guys. Busy members of sports club, gloomy members of culture club, lax members of go-home club who have going to game center as a daily routine. Flashy fellow, plain fellow, shy fellow, and fellow who is on the contrary frank. Of course it is not everyone, but I feel like I have made an acquaintance with fair number of people. It should be ten something.

– Dyufufu... So Ichijou-shi watches anime too. Let's go the comiket or something next time.

– Eeh... I don't want to, it's so hot there.

There are too many different people. And that's why there was a need to make an effort to remember the names of my classmates. In fact, every time I went home I had to check the list of names and recall the faces of people I have spoken with that day, otherwise I would forget them. Well, when anachronism plus slang are thrown at me like just now, there is no way to forget them, yeah.

Rather, you guys, you're saying too much of next time, next time. This is not a trial of me waiting for their invitations, so I end up thinking what kind of greeting is this?

As tests are right around the corner, the area around my seat was extremely crowded, perhaps because of the share added by Tenjuin-san. Apparently, this school is very strict in regard to failing marks. I didn't think that they can be so desperate even just before the tests. With this, I have a hunch that if I still call myself loner, real loners will be angry with me. This is only until the tests are over, probably.

– Ichijou, weren't you scolded together with Tachibana by Shiraishi-sensei, did something happen...?

Uncle, I hate brats like you who have a good perception. Or should I say, yeah, sooner or later the cat will be out of the bag. I don't know in which way we will get busted. For example, if people knew of the contents of the written apology, there would be a huge scandal. I have a stomachache just from thinking about it, so there should be complete control over this issue.

Well, far from being study talks, our conversations completely deviated. We talked a lot about trivial things, but this one was so sudden, I was surprised.

– Ichijou... There's no need to worry about someone like him.

One of my classmates has said so. Somehow, a serious tone was used, as if there was a concern about me. Still... someone like him? I asked for an explanation, but

– I'm talking about Nakamura!2 And he was laughing at you like an idiot yesterday. How can he do it, when you were injured... Previously he was constantly badmouthing you, just what is he displeased with? Honestly, I forgot. Even if I'm told to not to worry, I haven't cared about him from the beginning.

– Most likely, everyone is on your side. You're helping everyone after all.

– Haa... Thanks.

That's why, it's not unreasonable for me to make a unenthusiastic reply like this. However, thinking back, that guy was certainly guffawing at that time. Hahahahaha, he was holding his sides with laughter, as if his daily resentment was cleared up.

Yet, why has Nakamura become silent during lunch breaks in the first place...?

I couldn't even imagine that. And when I casually glanced in the guy's direction, I was taken aback.

He was at his own seat, the loner seat on the window-side at the very front that I was using before, lying

on top of his desk alone. All of the seats in the vicinity were empty. It gave an impression that the guy was left alone at the edge of the classroom.

No, no, didn't you have some friends? Did you have a falling-out? Two guys that were frequently by his side were part of another group gathered at the window-side. Anyway, the guy was alone. Though I don't know of any circumstances.

And on the contrary, I... can no longer be alone.

For better or worse, at least Nakamura is not in a situation where he is alone and is being made a fool of. Well, location of my seat and tests matter, but in any case, as a result it came to me speaking with different guys. And being relied on, and being thanked to the point it made me feel

embarrassed. However, putting aside how close we are, I haven't felt that I was looked down on at all.

Well, Nakamura too, was probably like that by some chance, and only for today. Tomorrow, he will for sure gather with the other two and play some game with them just as always - while I thought so, I was taken aback by what happened next.

It was during the fifth period - Math lesson.

... Answer is $\frac{1}{4}$

The guy simply made a mistake in his solution. Though, this kind of a mistake is very frequent. Even I make it from time to time. Normally, everything would smoothly continue.

And yet.

Giggle.

A kind of laughter that is held by a hand on purpose was steadily spreading inside the classroom. I cannot properly grasp who is laughing. However, from the front of the classroom and from its sides, I can hear people jeering.

The laughter didn't stop until the teacher shouted "Oi, stop laughing!"

I was baffled from the bottom of my heart. Just what the heck has happened. It wasn't exactly pleasant. It wasn't funny, nor was it something so amusing that it was funny.

By chance, does it have something to do with me? Assuming it is so for the time being, somehow, I felt my stomach twisting. Of course, I don't think that I am at fault, but... to some extent I am certainly the cause. That a rift is forming in the class because of me gives me quite an unbearable, subtle feeling.

And above all, I don't like when people gang up on someone like this. I felt awfully irritated inside my chest.

I... Recently, being overwhelmed by the matters concerning one girl, it seems I haven't seen my own feet.

Stopping halfway again, I haven't faced neither that girl nor the class at all.

Shortly after the laughter calmed down. Tachibana sitting before me turned around for a moment and having a downcast expression as if she was worried, asked "Did something happen?" with her eyes only.

ONE OK ROCK

Turns out he is Nakamura. From now on there will be only 50% of Oomura instead of 80%. Please blame Ichijou who has no sense of measuring the similarity between words (It's quite possible I'm wrong too, but for now 50% it is)

Chapter 28 - School Caste \$c

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Yet, why has Nakamura become silent during lunch breaks in the first place...?

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No, no, didn't you have some friends? Did you have a falling-out? Two guys that were frequently by his side were part of another group gathered at the window-side. Anyway, the guy was alone. Though I don't know of any circumstances.

And on the contrary, I... can no longer be alone.

For better or worse, at least Nakamura is not in a situation where he is alone and is being made a fool of. Well, location of my seat and tests matter, but in any case, as a result it came to me speaking with different guys. And being relied on, and being thanked to the point it made me feel embarrassed. However, putting aside how close we are, I haven't felt that I was looked down on at all.

Well, Nakamura too, was probably like that by some chance, and only for today. Tomorrow, he will for sure gather with the other two and play some game with them just as always - while I thought so, I was taken aback by what happened next.

It was during the fifth period - Math lesson.

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The guy simply made a mistake in his solution. Though, this kind of a mistake is very frequent. Even I make it from time to time. Normally, everything would smoothly continue.

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I was baffled from the bottom of my heart. Just what the heck has happened. It wasn't exactly pleasant. It wasn't funny, nor was it something so amusing that it was funny.

By chance, does it have something to do with me? Assuming it is so for the time being, somehow, I felt my stomach twisting. Of course, I don't think that I am at fault, but... to some extent I am certainly the cause. That a rift is forming in the class because of me gives me quite an unbearable, subtle feeling.

And above all, I don't like when people gang up on someone like this. I felt awfully irritated inside my chest.

I... Recently, being overwhelmed by the matters concerning one girl, it seems I haven't seen my own feet. Stopping halfway again, I haven't faced neither that girl nor the class at all.

Shortly after the laughter calmed down. Tachibana sitting before me turned around for a moment and having a downcast expression as if she was worried, asked "Did something happen?" with her eyes only.

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Turns out he is Nakamura. From now on there will be only 50% of Oomura instead of 80%. Please blame Ichijou who has no sense of measuring the similarity between words (It's quite possible I'm wrong too, but for now 50% it is)

Chapter 28 - School Caste \$c

I don't know if it is because we had such a foolish chat or because I was affected by the hit to my head, but I have somehow overlooked a serious matter.

As I became Tachibana's neighbor, there can be no rest for my mind. There is this relationship with blonde girl, but that is not all. It's the same with the class.

Nevertheless, I feel like in the past few days I have spoken with various guys. The amount of people in this classroom who look like they have finally opened the textbooks for the first time one week before the tests is too big. And what was surprising, was that I had to teach truly basic stuff. Like this, it is already at the point where I wonder if they will be able to avoid falling mark if they start learning from now on.

Although, if I put this into words, they will probably give up.

And also, there was one feature that these super failure brothers had. And that is, even though we were supposed to have a study talk, our conversation would often deviate.

– Hee, so Ichijou listens to groups like ONE OK. Can I call you to karaoke next time?

– Eh, ah... yeah.

There were different guys. Busy members of sports club, gloomy members of culture club, lax members of go-home club who have going to game center as a daily routine. Flashy fellow, plain fellow, shy fellow, and fellow who is on the contrary frank. Of course it is not everyone, but I feel like I have made an acquaintance with fair number of people. It should be ten something.

– Dyufufu... So Ichijou-shi watches anime too. Let's go the comiket or something next time.

– Eeh... I don't want to, it's so hot there.

There are too many different people. And that's why there was a need to make an effort to remember the names of my classmates. In fact, every time I went home I had to check the list of names and recall the faces of people I have spoken with that day, otherwise I would forget them. Well, when anachronism plus slang are thrown at me like just now, there is no way to forget them, yeah.

Rather, you guys, you're saying too much of next time, next time. This is not a trial of me waiting for their

invitations, so I end up thinking what kind of greeting is this?

As tests are right around the corner, the area around my seat was extremely crowded, perhaps because of the share added by Tenjuin-san. Apparently, this school is very strict in regard to failing marks. I didn't think that they can be so desperate even just before the tests. With this, I have a hunch that if I still call myself loner, real loners will be angry with me. This is only until the tests are over, probably.

– Ichijou, weren't you scolded together with Tachibana by Shiraishi-sensei, did something happen...?

Uncle, I hate brats like you who have a good perception. Or should I say, yeah, sooner or later the cat will be out of the bag. I don't know in which way we will get busted. For example, if people knew of the contents of the written apology, there would be a huge scandal. I have a stomachache just from thinking about it, so there should be complete control over this issue.

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One of my classmates has said so. Somehow, a serious tone was used, as if there was a concern about me. Still... someone like him? I asked for an explanation, but

– I'm talking about Nakamura! And he was laughing at you like an idiot yesterday. How can he do it, when you were injured... Previously he was constantly badmouthing you, just what is he displeased with? Honestly, I forgot. Even if I'm told to not to worry, I haven't cared about him from the beginning.

– Most likely, everyone is on your side. You're helping everyone after all.

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c29

Chapter 29 - Forgiveness

Of course, that was the topic of the conversation after school.

As soon as we entered the library, as expected, she showed her bad manners and sat on top of the desk illuminated by the sunlight coming from the window. But what was different from usual, was that despite always grinning and showing me her teeth when our eyes meet, today it was not so.

Timidly and carefully, she asked me with upturned eyes.

– That guy, did he do something again? Or, is it because I did something...?

– Do you have any ideas?

– I have, none at all...

"Annoying" - she has said so many times about Nakamura in my presence.

Has she done anything? As far as I know... yeah, if she hasn't pulled me into the class, it may not have happened like this. Most likely, even now I'm still alone at the end of the classroom, studying while receiving foolish slander. It's just that as a result of her actions I ended up more or less earning a standing in the class.

And yet, even that doesn't mean that Tachibana has done something wrong. It's just that I'm a bit tired because of it, yeah.

Well, there's no use in hiding it. I told her what happened yesterday. How incorrigible Nakamura laughed, and how several of our classmates declared that they are on my side.

– ...So complicated.....

Exactly matching her own words, as if sad, she downheartedly hung her head.

It truly doesn't suit her, this sort of face... It's the first time for such a mood to be during this time after school.

– There's no way you're at fault here, why do you look like you feel guilty?

– Because, you know, even though such a thing is happening, I still think that he is annoying. Is it, something weird...?

At times like this, when Tachibana cannot express something with words, she grabs the sleeve of my uniform just like now. Today her grip is fairly strong. I felt like I understood what she wanted to say just from that.

"Things like you being loathed even until now, are really unacceptable..."

"Why do you care about it so much?"

"Haa? You are an important person to me, isn't it obvious that I will dislike that."

And because of that I... If for argument's sake, Tachibana was bullied in the class or something, I tried to imagine that. Well, in the particular case of this girl, I can't imagine shit, that's just impossible.

I felt weird about myself. Because an unpleasant feeling that I usually hardly ever feel, boiled like magma and rose from the depths of my stomach. To be angry at something that hasn't even happened, I say there's something strange with it.

– Well, It's not weird... probably

– I know, right? Maybe it was an overkill today, but isn't it just reaping what you sow a bit? But still it was an overkill anyway, so I feel unwell or something... That's why, it's so complicated. I wonder what I want to happen?

Showing a despondent face once more, she gloomily loosened her grip on my sleeve. Should I say she is really pure... And the fact that I mostly understand what she thinks is most likely related to that pureness. Usually, I would feel like smiling when I look at her, but I too, have complicated feelings.

If Tachibana could forgive Nakamura, would she be broadly grinning again? And it's the same with the guys from my class. I'll take no part in something being done for my sake and making me feel bad as a result, not anymore.

I want my surroundings to be peaceful. I want them to be calm without a care for me.

Still, you reap what you sow, huh? As if a massive thunderbolt is about to strike. I Well... If you really reap what you sow, then I have a small idea. But to implement it, I need to step up myself...

Haa, can't be helped, huh. To face something, is probably something like that.

– It is now clear to me. But if it is reaping what you sow, then you have to forgive him all the more.

– Haa? I'm a little confused here...

– I've also done some shitty actions, but Tachibana has forgiven me. Isn't that so?

At this point, Tachibana gently smiled, so I felt relieved a little.

– Like coming in jersey on the first date ...

– Or somehow doubting that Tachibana was a friend

– Bu-, But. Aren't this and that different things... And Jun apologized immediately too.

– Well then, it will be alright if he apologizes to me. Also, stop with Jun.

– Ehehe... Jun.

You mean, if I'm frustrated, I should call you Karen, huh? You're not an imp anymore, you're an adult demon who causes mental disorders in loner bastards of the world. That, truly reaches my spinal cord, so I want you to stop. And the one who says it is Tachibana so the effect surpasses extraordinary.

"And you... Which of my actions make you happy?"

Just from a Tachibana's change from sullen face to a tiny smile, I become overwhelmed by feelings. I become... happy. This, this is seriously crazy. My head becomes hot and weird.

But now, this matter is settled. This is taking responsibility, according to me.²

Well then... As expected, during the next lunch break Nakamura was alone again. At that divine location that was previously my seat, sleeping or not, he was lying on top of the desk.

Hmm. There are actually about 40 people in the classroom.

That is to say, everyone has a shitty part to them, without exception. Though, if they had to receive a similar treatment whenever that part appeared, just how harsh would their school life become? If that way of doing things is reaping what you sow, then not being forgiven when your own faults are exposed is reaping what you sow too. But an equal mutual exchange where nobody forgives anyone, what kind of youth dystopia is that?

Therefore, this is neither pity nor kindness. That kind of suffocating classroom is simply displeasing, that is all. And it's not really for Tachibana's sake and of course it's not for Nakamura's sake.

So, before the eyes of the guys from the class I stood up and slowly walked to Nakamura's detached like a solitary island seat. A deep breath here. There's nothing to be nervous about here.

Ehem. I will forgive him, so you guys forgive him too, alright?

– Oi.

Saying so, I lightly poked Nakamura's back with rolled up notebook.

Nakamura... Male student called Nakamura Rento had long and narrow eyes, he was wearing fashionable black rimmed glasses. That is, I already knew his face, but... this is the first time I paid at least some attention to such a thing. Also, for me, my class was such a thing. If that changes, would it become more fun than it is now?

– Huh... Wh-, what is it...?

– Yo

Turning half his body in my direction, the guy had a frightened look. His eyes were even trembling. Like I care about that. Having my own reasons, I will have you restored in the class starting today.

Now that I think... When I first spoke with Tachibana, in the same way, there wasn't much coherence to it. Feeling amused from recalling that, my face relaxed a little.

Ichijou started a talk with Nakamura - classroom suddenly got silent, but I continued not caring about it.

– Your textbook, pull it out.

– Ha...? What is it, so suddenly? I don't get it at all.

– Come on, just pull it out. Yesterday, you messed up with that problem. What you shouldn't get at all is being laughed at because of such a stupid thing. We'll do something about it, from now on.

After restlessly checking his surroundings, he distrustfully squinted.

– What's your intention...?

– Nothing really. Even if I don't say it, you've probably realized most of it.

This is a chance for Nakamura. He likely understands it. He doesn't really need to apologize right now. And this is not deliberately reconciling neither. From the start, this problem was not that serious, I just need to show it to the class.

– It's just that somehow, you looked free. If you're reluctant, I'm going back...?

For a short period, silence fell. Seemingly troubled with something, he was avoiding my gaze, pouting as if there was something difficult to speak about.

However, hating solitude, he is the guy who shows his scorn just for someone being alone. Nakamura had no other choices left to him. I thought that maybe he will show some backbone, but as expected, compared to me, he is a different human being about such things.

– Er, Ichijou... I'm sorry.

– Haa? Haven't I said to pull out your textbook? And now you're apologizing all of a sudden.

– Ye-, yeah...

Well, that's it. Though, since that day, his two friends from before returned to his seat. We also stopped strangely bumping into each other.

It is so, but... Maybe that day I was in a good mood from successfully settling a troubling matter, but I have blurted out this.

– Nakamura, you... should come to overnight cramming meeting tomorrow. Right now, you can only fail the tests.

– Huh, haaa!?

Originally, it was written as 0,0'0ü0,0È0', which he says looks like a lightning.

The same responsibility from chapter 4, that is "Ichijou = SUN taking responsibility"

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"Things like you being loathed even until now, are really unacceptable..."

"Why do you care about it so much?"

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And because of that I... If for argument's sake, Tachibana was bullied in the class or something, I tried to imagine that. Well, in the particular case of this girl, I can't imagine shit, that's just impossible.

I felt weird about myself. Because an unpleasant feeling that I usually hardly ever feel, boiled like magma and rose from the depths of my stomach. To be angry at something that hasn't even happened, I say there's something strange with it.

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c30

Chapter 30 - UNO Tournament

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With more than 20 people gathered in the spacious and neat living room of Tachibana residence, it was an absolute chaos. Saturday afternoon did turn into a home party with pizza ordered, but when it came to choosing what a class full of people with scattered hobbies should do now that they gathered, this was the result...

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– Aaaaa!

An UNO tournament was commenced in the room. Rather, this house is huge! Ceiling of the living room is high and southern side is entirely built of glass, quite a modern construction. Perhaps, it is a fair match to Honekawa¹ residence, Kazama² residence or even Malfoy residence, isn't it not?

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However... This guy had always been talking louder in the classroom, but maybe he still feels guilty as impression he gives is a bit downhearted. And I don't like that. It's not like I want to get along with him, but I want to completely cut off all troublesome feelings on this occasion.

Suddenly, the rest of the group started laughing. The room was considerably lively. Taking advantage of the noise, I jokingly replied.

– Who knows. Even if I bear a grudge, it has a size of one round of UNO.

– Haha, what's that. I don't get it.

– That is to say, we're even with that draw 4.

Hearing that, Nakamura faintly smiled. After this, classmates in the vicinity who have seen our exchange yesterday, smiled as if feeling relieved.

The problem, however, is that our qualifiers group consists only of boys. Just as the atmosphere around us has more or less calmed after the chat right now, the topic of our conversation went in a strange direction.

– You guys... Who, is your target?

One of the guys nearby suddenly asked this. He looked towards a group of girls and for some reason grinned. Is he trying to say let's commence an evaluation?

Uhee... It may be common, but this kind of topic is outside my area of expertise. That's what my loner's heart wants to cry out. Even now when it is doubtful if I am still a loner, my contents won't change so rapidly. Looking over, isn't Mr. Komatsu making a wry smile? I say, a guy who doesn't even hope to have friends can have neither a target, nor anything.

However, virgin brothers toughened by the unity of blood triumphantly began to speak. As if the reason why they came here today, is to become acquainted with the girls.

– Actually, I... have once come to ask class head a question that I already understood the solution for. The feeling when she gently teaches you is irresistible.

– Hyoudou-san is also so beautiful. She gives a feeling of ennui and style.

– I mean, in this class, isn't girls' level unexpectedly high!? Others are...

Virgin B, who started reciting girls' names one after the other. This guys can perfectly say all of this without getting embarrassed.

– Having said that... What about Tachibana-san?

When that name came out, my body stiffened by itself. At the same time, I met eyes with Tachibana sitting in the distance... who lightly shook her hand my way and showed her usual bright smile. My heart is beating so fast, like it's about to jump out of my chest. Although it is not me speaking, but I'm worried that she will overhear and feel disgusted.

– Eeh, but that girl has a boyfriend, for sure. She's a bit too beautiful.
– Rather, this house is huge! She comes from a wealthy family and has such a flashy appearance...? Right now, aren't her parents here?
– The only rumors I hear about her are in regard to males... It seems number of people she experienced is unbelievable.

My heart skipped a beat. What is really true? That girl who is so pure? Or, exactly because she is so pure...?

Still, she is free to do what she wants. It's not something I have to worry about. Noticing that I do mind after all, somehow, I felt a little frustrated. Now that she became the subject of the conversation, I am all the more aware of it. If I lift my head, I will certainly meet eyes with Tachibana again.

– So, Ichijou. Who's your type?

Ugh... This question is outside my area of expertise as well. A guy who normally believes that there are no chances of having a member of the opposite sex to like him would not ponder such a question in the first place. I gave up in the very beginning. It's been so long ago, that I started doubting if there even was such a wish in that very beginning.

Girlfriend... is it? Even now, when I changed so much, what would happen if I did get one?

Still, type? I can only say that if I come to like someone, then that is my type.

The girl I like. Long bright blonde hair, nice flowery scent.

– Ah, he just recalled someone!

– Sh-, shut up! There is no such person, idiot!

That complacent smile of the blonde girl wouldn't leave my head. It's not that I like her, it's just that lately, we've been together so much, that's all... really.

Which reminds me, today, we haven't talked that much yet. Today, yet... Haa.

– Well, yesterday, Ichijou showed something good. Wouldn't girls be approaching you before long?

– Annoying, shut up for a bit, will you...

So, that sort of foolish inconsequential chat continued. These days I often feel strange and it is exactly so right now. As if I was accepted into the class, it seems. As if it is one of these night talks during a field trip, isn't it? It is unlike me, but I am honestly glad that I was accepted.

Well, the meaning of yesterday's talk is only known to the boys. Girls are not supposed to know what happened between me and Nakamura... except her.

So. There is always a surprise attack waiting for you when you feel completely at ease. Of all things, Nakamura the bastard, whom I have forgiven with so much trouble, betrayed me. He was broadly grinning. As if wanting to say "Caught you, Potter!"

– Ichijou. Some time ago, haven't you been in the city together with Tachibana-san.

~~! You!! Needless to say, I was closely questioned for a long time after that. However, it was really unlike me. I used to not say a word at school and go home, but now... it was entirely different. I feel like, probably since I have met Tachibana, something started to change.

The smell that comes when raindrops that fell onto the earth are dried by the sunlight... It feels like that. And then, by the time they agreed that it couldn't be helped as we had things to do for the school trip, we had to go home.

Let alone overnight-cramming, there was a mood to round off the party by the evening. The room was so messy, just like a certain town after Walpurgis Night³ came. Everyone wanted to help with tidying up, but Tachibana said that she doesn't really mind.

And yet... When I turned around thinking "well then, let's go home", my sleeve was pulled from behind. I was completely accustomed to that feeling. For some reason, I even felt relieved. When I turned around, blonde girl was happily smiling.

"Hey, help me with tidying up?"

"It's okay, but let's get everyone to help. There's a lot of garbage."

"It's alright, remain here alone. Please..."

If you make such a worried face, there's no way I can refuse, is there? I was about to start broadly smiling too. Just a little more and it would show on my face as "Alright, don't worry". Also, I myself... understanding that today I will speak with her again, felt relieved.

But, why do I feel like this...?

– Tachibana, can I borrow your toilet? You guys just go ahead.

Before giving it a thought, I called out to my classmates who were about to go home.

family

Kazama Clan

Witch

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– Eeh, but that girl has a boyfriend, for sure. She's a bit too beautiful.

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My heart skipped a beat. What is really true? That girl who is so pure? Or, exactly because she is so pure...?

Still, she is free to do what she wants. It's not something I have to worry about. Noticing that I do mind after all, somehow, I felt a little frustrated. Now that she became the subject of the conversation, I am all the more aware of it. If I lift my head, I will certainly meet eyes with Tachibana again.

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Which reminds me, today, we haven't talked that much yet. Today, yet... Haa.

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The smell that comes when raindrops that fell onto the earth are dried by the sunlight... It feels like that. And then, by the time they agreed that it couldn't be helped as we had things to do for the school trip, we had to go home.

Let alone overnight-cramming, there was a mood to round off the party by the evening. The room was so messy, just like a certain town after Walpurgis Night³ came. Everyone wanted to help with tidying up, but Tachibana said that she doesn't really mind.

And yet... When I turned around thinking "well then, let's go home", my sleeve was pulled from behind. I was completely accustomed to that feeling. For some reason, I even felt relieved. When I turned around,

blonde girl was happily smiling.

"Hey, help me with tidying up?"

"It's okay, but let's get everyone to help. There's a lot of garbage."

"It's alright, remain here alone. Please..."

If you make such a worried face, there's no way I can refuse, is there? I was about to start broadly smiling too. Just a little more and it would show on my face as "Alright, don't worry". Also, I myself...

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But, why do I feel like this...?

– Tachibana, can I borrow your toilet? You guys just go ahead.

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family

Kazama Clan

Witch

Chapter 30 - UNO Tournament

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With more than 20 people gathered in the spacious and neat living room of Tachibana residence, it was an absolute chaos. Saturday afternoon did turn into a home party with pizza ordered, but when it came to choosing what a class full of people with scattered hobbies should do now that they gathered, this was the result...

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– As expected, Ichijou... You're still bearing a grudge, for this and that.

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family

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"It's alright, remain here alone. Please..."

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family

Kazama Clan

Witch

family

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c31

Chapter 31 - The Two of Them

After that, the two of us were the only people remaining in the silent spacious living room. Just the two of us.

Standing close to her I could see that Tachibana was now looking well again. Just thinking about it, I felt light-hearted without any reason. As if my body was about to start floating in the air, that kind of feeling. At the same time, too embarrassed for having such thoughts myself, I couldn't directly meet eyes with the girl right before me.

– Ehehe... Thank you, for understanding me.

– Should I say there's no need for it at this point... Well then, let's clean up.

– Yeah...

I... We, why did we? For some reason, we felt a need to hurry. I wanted to quickly finish something unimportant like cleaning up and talk with just the two of us. I probably needlessly felt so as everyone's clamor had just stopped.

But speaking of that, don't we two meet every single day, so there shouldn't be anything that I would like to specially talk about and yet... as expected, something's weird, lately.

The more I think let's talk, let's talk, the more I realize that the talk wouldn't be decent. Like, what should the topic be? Or, even if there is something to talk about, wouldn't I start acting strangely? Or, wouldn't she hate me if I say something strange? And lots of that sort of worries get stuck inside my head. Usually, even if I want to talk, I unintentionally end up not saying anything.

- By chance, I met eyes with Tachibana, who was gathering cards in the distance.

Without even saying anything, Tachibana gently smiled. With only that, my heart almost stopped.

I don't know if this is what she wears at home, but today she has jeans and shirt put on, a fairly casual outfit. And yet, maybe because her figure is good or because the way she wears it is good, she seems so adult-like that I feel embarrassed.

Today as well... she is so pretty...

Noticing that my face felt hot, I looked down at once. That girl who lately worries me with her words or just with her gaze, this time she's about to kill me with atmosphere around her, so I'm feeling suffocated. No good, no good... I'll be affected if I don't calm my mind. Okay, watch me, how about this...

This here is a super advanced skill of a senior bookworm, that I comprehended after a long time of training, «Think about today's dinner», and it is time to use it. It is super effective, like at times when homeroom teacher is angry, so all of the good children, please imitate me!

Yeah, there are supposed to be quite a lot of SPAM¹ canned goods at home. Well then, how about today's main dish will be "SPAM, SPAM, SPAM, natt ÔÂ 5 AM, SPAM". Ah, but we're out of natt ÔÂ Then, instead, we will garnish it with SPAM... You fool!

Haa... If I talked like this, it would be simply exposing a shameful sight. Even if I say so myself, it is as pathetic as it can possibly be.

Thus, without thinking deeply, I continued working. With this and that, I completely finished cleaning up and fell onto sofa with a thud. Arbitrarily fighting windmills and arbitrarily getting tired, I dropped my shoulders feeling down.

I settled troubles with the class, so only the tests are left.

I should just quietly go home today... just as I thought so.

Neither from the right, nor from the left, it was a surprise attack from the rear.

– Yaaa!

Long blonde hair swooshed before my eyes - Tachibana leaped from behind the sofa, rolled over and buried her face in my lap. It was so sudden that I was scared. She turned around and faced up, meeting my eyes.

– Wh-, what are you doing...?

– I'm using bookworm's lap pillow...&j What are you doing?

Grinning, Tachibana showed her teeth. Silky blonde hair touched my arm, tickling it.

– ...Nothing, I...

– Ah, you didn't answer right away, here's your punishment game!

Saying so, she stretched her hand to my face and pinched my cheek. What's with this something-game. Unbelievably embarrassing...

– Ugh, let go... Or rather, get off!

– Nooope... Somehow, it felt like you'll go home if I get off...

– I'm not in a hurry in the first place...

Her expression softened and she took away her hand. As if saying that this is the safest place, she lied on top of my lap. Her whole body was languid. Warmth transmitted directly, so I wanted to turn my face to the side, but,

"No, don't turn away. Keep looking at me..." - she looked drowsy.

There was a strange atmosphere. Within the silent room, the two of us were alone. I was tensed, but my heart felt excited...

Thinking about it, there's no need to search for a topic when you're with her. Even if there were no contents nor purpose in our talks themselves, until now, there was surely something that we conveyed to each other just by being together. Something sweet and tantalizing.

– I want to talk a little. Today, papa and mama are not here, can you stay for a bit longer...?

– Uh... Only until dinner time. I've got no mobile phone, I can't get in contact with my home!

Uh huh, Tachibana downheartedly nodded on top of my lap. Amid the tension and relief mixed atmosphere, she started talking in a whispering voice.

– You, were kind... About yesterday's matter.

– Stop. That is not so...

– And I was angry about it for so long like an idiot... Ehehe, tsundere-san who is kind to everyone. That part of you, I like it very much. I like it too much.

Like -- I indeed lost any wish to make an eye contact after this word. Although there is not supposed to be that much meaning in it, but to me of now, these four letters' stimulus is too strong. My mind went off the course and then did it once more, so it didn't look like I could use the escape route of a fool. And yet... when I tried to promptly turn away, my chin was swiftly caught. Tachibana's white and soft fingers dug into my skin.

– No... You're not allowed to turn that way... Be kind

– So-, sorry...

– I want to know more, about you. Also, I want you to know, about me. Even though we get along so well like this, we don't know anything about each other, it's unacceptable...

The conversation we had after that... From a certain point of view, it was a useless conversation.

About how I live together with my aunt and little sister. How both parents have special circumstances and cannot even make a call. How my little sister is a shut-in. How somehow, despite everything, the three of us live an easygoing life. How it is nothing special.

Well, it was a silly story, but Tachibana's face as she listened to it was impressive. She had a relaxed, happy, relieved smile, nodding from time to time. She wanted to meet my little sister. I said how I wouldn't mind betting that my little sister wouldn't meet her, but Tachibana wouldn't listen to me saying that they would absolutely get along.

– So... I've told you all of my main stuff. Tell me about yours.

– Ehehe...&j

That, I've already guessed from her house, but... Apparently, both her parents are terrible workaholics. Her father belongs to the top management of a listed company. Her mother is a designer that started a fashion brand and last half year she has been staying in Milan. Right now, Tachibana practically lives together with the maid.

It was lonely, but for that part, she has been relying on friends,

– I did have a boyfriend, but... um... we didn't get along much? Please, believe me. It seems, different rumors are circulating. Rather, I get along with you so much better, or something...

With a pleading look in her eyes, Tachibana pulled around my chest.

You, why did you revealed that information now...? It's not like I'm doubting you ... Still..... she gets along better with me, huh?

That means, bookworm is closer than a boyfriend, which in short means... that bookworm is closer than a

boyfriend, doesn't it? Ugh, I just don't get it.

– I, I didn't ask about such a thing. Why are you explicitly reporting this to me?

– That's because, I thought, I want you to know...

– That's out of my jurisdiction. Not to mention it is about your past.

– But, aren't you too compatible with me...? I feel like we can get along just by being together or something, really...

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Chapter 32 - A male cat-like boy

End of Volume 1. Check the announcement if you still haven't. See you in couple of weeks.

Ichijou Jun -- I, was in love with that male cat-like boy.

Today as well, with a sulky face, and now that I'm recalling, sulky to the point it looked tormented, he was kind to me. Today as well, with an embarrassed face, he was laughed at by me. Also, today, he was looking into my eyes for such a long time. I love you...

Perhaps, this was my first love. I thought I was in love several times, but that was a mistake. Cause, this feeling as if my heart will melt from heat and disappear, I have it for the first time in my life... My head is about to go weird.

-- Bye-bye...

Tiny words of farewell, escaped my mouth.

Yet, he has already walked to the distance, where he couldn't hear it. On the dark evening road, his now rounded back was rapidly turning small -

Oh my gosh, what to do... I love you, today, I couldn't say it again. Every day, I make a resolution of "Today, I'll say it for sure", but... when will I be able to say it? I won't be able to meet him all the way to Monday... My chest is in pain, it's so lonely...

-

While he turned my way with his head only, embarrassed, Jun waved his hand. Telling from the distance "Don't worry, we'll meet right away". Everything that he wanted to say, I felt like I understood it all.

My feelings reached him once again. His feelings reached me too. No way... Like this, I feel like crying from being too happy. We seriously understand each other too much...

Love is about to overflow... But, God, isn't there a bit too much red string used on the two of us? It's taking previous lives on board and coiling round and round too much. Please remember being economical a bit when using that string.

However, if it is really so, please, God... convey it this time, my feeling. Three words of "I love you". If it reaches him, I don't even need to fall in love second time...

Immediately, with his face looking snobbish, Jun started walking once again.

Fool... Nothing has reached at all at the crucial moment. Insensitive guy. But, if you don't confess soon, some other girl will steal him, you know? I feel uneasy just from thinking so, yet even so, I couldn't say it with my mouth.

Well then, how about I run to that straight-laced bookworm boy right now, cling to him... and force my first kiss onto him?

... No no! He'll hate me for sure, are you stupid! Seriously, what's happening... to me? Although in the beginning I was making fool of him jokingly calling him virgin, it's so painful...

Dragging heavy, painful feelings together with me and returning to the house, I sprawled on the room's bed as it was. Pressing my face against the pillow and imagining that this was the chest of the person I love the most in the world, I tightly hugged that warmth.

I casually played with my own hair. Even though I tend to my hair every day without fail and take pride in it, right now I have no confidence at all. I wanted him to gently stroke it. I wanted him to say, how my hair is beautiful. So pretty, I wanted him to whisper this into my ear.

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Don't worry, we'll meet right away

My feelings reached him once again. His feelings reached me too. No way... Like this, I feel like crying from being too happy. We seriously understand each other too much...

Love is about to overflow... But, God, isn't there a bit too much red string used on the two of us? It's taking previous lives on board and coiling round and round too much. Please remember being economical a bit when using that string.

However, if it is really so, please, God... convey it this time, my feeling. Three words of "I love you". If it reaches him, I don't even need to fall in love second time...

I love you

Immediately, with his face looking snobbish, Jun started walking once again.

Fool... Nothing has reached at all at the crucial moment. Insensitive guy. But, if you don't confess soon, some other girl will steal him, you know? I feel uneasy just from thinking so, yet even so, I couldn't say it with my mouth.

Well then, how about I run to that straight-laced bookworm boy right now, cling to him... and force my first kiss onto him?

... No no! He'll hate me for sure, are you stupid! Seriously, what's happening... to me? Although in the beginning I was making fool of him jokingly calling him virgin, it's so painful...

Dragging heavy, painful feelings together with me and returning to the house, I sprawled on the room's bed as it was. Pressing my face against the pillow and imagining that this was the chest of the person I love the most in the world, I tightly hugged that warmth.

I casually played with my own hair. Even though I tend to my hair every day without fail and take pride in it, right now I have no confidence at all. I wanted him to gently stroke it. I wanted him to say, how my hair is beautiful. So pretty, I wanted him to whisper this into my ear.

So pretty

Until now, I thought I'm the most pretty in the class. I thought that I'm the most pretty even in the whole grade and with a gap. And yet, only he... only he, doesn't make a fuss of it at all. Annoying.

-- Is a girl like me not his type?

-- Is he kind to me just because he is kind to everyone, is that just it?

-- Perhaps, he even dislikes me a little?

Haa... This, isn't it me who is the virgin. I'm too worried. Even though we flirted so much today. But still, when I think that maybe Jun will reject me... No, you have to stop, Karen. I'm about to die just from thinking about it.

No no, I have to smile even if I have to force myself...! Didn't I see his face when I'm feeling downhearted many times?

At times like that, he always had a sad face. And then, as if a bit shy, maybe out of simple concern, but... he treated me kindly. He was so lovely, I wanted to embrace him right there. I like you...

However, how can someone say something like "I like you" ...?

I like you

No - why did those people say something like "I like you" ...?

I like you

.....

.....

"Tachibana, I like you. I want you to go out with me."

Tachibana, I like you. I want you to go out with me

I was honestly happy. I don't think there is a girl who can be not moved when she is told that she is liked.

At that time, my chest felt itchy and for a whole day I thought only about that.

"Al-, alright..."

Al-, alright

That happened exactly one year ago, the other party was a fresh, good-looking second-year senpai. He was the ace of the tennis club, and as he was always admired by everyone,

"You're well-matched, Tachibana-san is pretty too"

You're well-matched, Tachibana-san is pretty too

... Turns out, I'm pretty...

Since long ago, everyone has said so no matter if it were boys or girls. There probably wasn't a single day I wasn't told so. Thanks to that, I gained confidence and became cheerful. I also think that I have many friends because of that. Every day there are many people who gather in my surroundings.

"Well-matched, well-matched! Truly, a pair of a handsome man and a beautiful woman."

Well-matched, well-matched! Truly, a pair of a handsome man and a beautiful woman

Hmm, so pretty girls go out with attractive boys, huh... In that case, are we a good couple after all...?

Somehow, I was happy feeling for everyone's approval. It was like, I'm going out with that senpai.

Yet...

"It's okay, it's just a kiss. Haven't we been dating for a month already?" "St-... Please, stop.....!"

It's okay, it's just a kiss. Haven't we been dating for a month already

St... Please, stop

That look, it was a glare and it was dark. One look and I noticed that that was a wrong person. After that, I haven't spoken to him even once. It's not that started hating him, but I thought that if I haven't immediately run away, I would have lost something important.

Still, how exactly should I come to like someone...?

"I was always interested in you""It was a love at first glance""Tachibana-san, please go out with me"

I was always interested in you

It was a love at first glance

Tachibana-san, please go out with me

Attractive or not, it didn't matter, everyone was the same.

I like you, I like you, hearing that too many times, I couldn't understand what does it mean to like someone anymore. Let alone kiss, just from them trying to join hands... what I truly thought about that person, I couldn't understand at all. Finally, I couldn't even understand if it was alright to be glad when called pretty.

I like you, I like you

I, am I only pretty...? Are you really looking at me...?

In the end, there wasn't anyone who lasted even a month. And then, at some point I started rejecting all the confessions.

This is not love... right? Being praised too much, what everyone truly think of me, what I truly think of everyone... got mixed up just a little. Love just makes you tired. Making noise with friends is sufficient. It was at that time the I met that boy.

In the beginning, that person had a desperate look. He was very flustered. On the school route between station and school, he had a necktie of same school grade, but it was the first time I saw him.

"Hey, you... You'll be enough...! Mobile phone, do you have it...?"

Hey, you... You'll be enough...! Mobile phone, do you have it...?"

When I wondered what has happened, I saw that that person carried a limp cat in his arms. Blood was flowing from its arm. Was it ran over by a car? I understood most of it at a glance, so I immediately held out my smartphone.

"Hey, be quick!"

Hey, be quick!

"So-, sorry...!"

So-, sorry...!

That person forcefully snatched it. He was obviously flustered, had a serious look and his breathing was heavy. And yet, his tone when he was speaking to the person on the line was calm and I thought, somehow, this person is amazing.

"Please... Hang on, just a bit more..."

Please... Hang on, just a bit more...

And then... he had clear eyes.

At that time, I only thought how he was a normally good person and gave an adult feel.

Something started to change after that. I ended up in the same class with that boy, Ichijou Jun.

I thought about talking with him. I wanted to ask some things about the previous matter.

But he - was always alone. By himself, he was always studying. I asked about and apparently, he was famous as bookworm among our grade, but I didn't know. Anyway, I remember how it was hard to starting a conversation with him.

Actually, nobody talked with him. Nobody was even interested in him.

Despite that, I was the only one who was excessively interested in him... Why, I wonder? I thought, why is he alone if he is a normally good person?

Always with a serious look, seemingly diligent and with tensed shoulders... I couldn't take my eyes off that appearance. That person, what kind of voice did he have? What does he talk about? His hobbies?

And I was just having troubles with studying... Well, isn't it alright to ask him for help?

And that's how, library illuminated by the evening sun... came to be. When I first talked to him, with a

very troubled look,

"Wh-, what...?"

Wh-, what...?

While having a displeased look, he still kindly, earnestly taught me... Seeing such a boy, my heart started feeling ticklish.

His face crooked as if bothered, when I teased him, yet he never got angry. And when he looked tired, I started wanting to look after him... As much as he let be healed, I wanted to heal.

It became a habit, and we started naturally meeting every day.

"Hi-hi-hi... Virgin, teach me again&j"

"Shut up, bitch. Today, let's finish it quickly, OK?"

"Yay!"

It was not like that in the beginning and now I don't remember when it became so. When we are alone in the library together with him, my feelings overflow.

My troubles, all of them just get blown off. Memories that I can grin to when I get home, I've made lots of them. Just remembering Jun's embarrassed face, my heart throbs.

Shy, caring and earnest boy. He is distrustful, but dere dere when gotten used to a person, a male cat-like boy.

Most likely... this is genuine love.

I felt like puffing up with pride. That the person I fell in love with, that he, is such a person. There are more good-looking people, probably, there are people more smart and people just as kind as him. Still, this person... I cannot say it well, but everything was special about him.

He doesn't hate me for being too spoiled... right? Just a little... persistent?

My worries don't stop even now. Yet if I can meet him on Monday, my feelings will surely become calm again. I think I won't be able to stop grinning. I want to get along, a lot more...

When I'm by his side, I understand that this is the place where I should be.

... I'm in love. I want to date. I want to... marry him. I'm really glad that I gave up on the kiss that time.

Because it is with a pure heart and body, you bump into the person you truly love.

A-, also! I want him to call me pretty! Confession, kiss... Even if I'm not to Jun's liking, I will absolutely make him fall in love with me.

Seriously... I won't lose.

Recovering my spirit, I sat at the desk. Hence, first thing necessary to do is winning that bet on tests. And if I win... Something that makes you feel fun just thinking about it, I was secretly thinking of it.

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Chapter 33 - Smartphone Statue

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After all, I was intently gazing at the newly purchased toy. And apparently, my little sister felt disgusted by such an image of me.

– Hey, look at him, aunt. He is like this again all day again, this person...

– Oh, Jun-kun. Becoming all like nowadays' normie all of a sudden. Is this second year high school debut? Is this second year high school debut, oh, oh!

She questioned my present state and aunt Arika gave her an answer.

Still, of those two's responses are a bit contrastive. Opposite to the shocked glare of my little sister, aunt's grin was even broader than usual. And the thing which is the cause of this... ding. It made a random mechanical sound.

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However, ... wrong. This is absolutely wrong! This is merely being obsessed with a new toy. I'll have enough of it right away. I'll have enough and I'll return to the days full of games for sure... This is not me looking forward to getting a message from that classmate of mine. Probably, no, absolutely...

– Ara, ara, Jun-kun. Is that another reply from your girlfriend~?

– It, it's not true... She's not my girlfriend or anything!

– Yeah, yeah. Look, there's a message coming from that girl you're close with and who is not your girlfriend.

Flicking the screen before even thinking with my head, I launched a popular messenger app. And the one who sent a message is... no.

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"This Sunday, who is coming to buy swimsuit together?"

It came from Hyoudou Yayoi, who often hangs out with that Tachibana. It was just a message to everyone in the class, it wasn't a message to me in the first place. I... Why did I? Letting out a humph, I blocked the phone and dropped it shaking off the feeling resembling dullness.

These last few weeks, I have become unbearably effeminate. To be honest, I hate such me. Most probably, I look pitiful from the side. And actually, my little sister is not amused in the least. Turning thoroughly befuddled, I even stopped playing games together with her, so in the end, this became my name.

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I thought smartphones were foolish things. Although, in a sense, it was correct. Cause, isn't it so? The perpetrator of me buying this useless gadget, even if there is no important matter, day after day she...

Excluding the mandatory long talk before sleep, Tachibana contacts me frequently. In case there is a received message, it would be annoying if she thought I was waiting for it all along, so I wait for about 5 minutes before giving a reply. But all of this is so foolish.

– But Jun-kun, how come it turned out like this? Haven't you been refusing to listen every time I offered to buy one so far?

– That is, If I got one, even friends would inconvenience me. Just because it was abnormal up till now...

– Haa... Isn't it dazzling. Looking back, I might even want to relive my high school days. Time like this, there won't ever be another chance for it.

Is that how it is...? Right now, I can only think of myself as being ill. If I let my guard down, ... grinning face of that blonde girl, who is on the other side of the network, comes into my mind. What should I call

it, if it is not an illness?

– Hmm... Well, I've decided. I'll turn it off and this night, I'll accompany you for the games. Keyaki, you should be satisfied with that, right?

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– Keyaki-chan. You have to let him off for this. Though, it is understandable that you're burning with jealousy.

– Wh-, why would I be jealous or anything...

– But, you know... Keyaki-chan too... If you got a nephew, wouldn't you want to take a look at him?

– Eh? Nephew...? Nephew...

– Every year, you could give him New Year's gift, Keyaki-chan. Buy him a large PC and raise him into an elite otaku!

–Hmm. I want to meet him... maybe.

No, no! Rather, don't give up on me. Is that the one where you have "My Bro is dead. He's gone!" inside you?

Haa... I'm fed up with both my family and the smartphone. Let's turn it off. I pressed the power button, but..... mm? When I pressed the button, there was a message from just now displayed on the screen. Just as previously, the sender is Hyoudou. But this time, my interest was drawn to the short content of the message.

"So, what about Ms. Karen? This Sunday?"

She's going to buy a swimsuit and probably wants to invite Tachibana too. But this Sunday, that Hyoudou is talking about, if I'm not mistaken... Just as I suddenly remembered, Tachibana Karen's name appeared on the screen at last.

"Sorry... That day, I have plans, , ""Ok, roger. My regards to boyfriend-kun"

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"Yo, boyfriend-kun"

... There is, nothing at all. Yeah, I know what it is. Boyfriend-kun is just a post-evolution form of Sento-kun or something.

"Sunday date, I'm dying from anticipation. I want to meet soon"

There is no way that blonde girl can understand my delicate heart of the loner. Understanding too little, she even sent me a selfie right after the message.

On the phone's screen, Tachibana was displayed in her house clothes. Her chest could be peeked at through a pink colored thin negligee. I don't know if she was dissatisfied with something, but she had puffed up cheeks and complaining eyes.

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"Didn't we agree to meet on Sunday? That's already day after tomorrow""I want to meet! I want to call...""We always talk before sleep""Bookworm loss is too much. Please, , "

Inside my chest, something was noisily excited. I'm not thinking that she is cute or something. Yet, and yet, if she makes a request this way, then...

"Alright, I'll call you right now""Yeah, thanks. I'll be waiting"

However, voice from reality pulled me out of the electronics.

– Oh Jun-kun, smiling so gently... Yaaa, just what kind of girl is she! Kyaaa!

– Ugh... I... Did I make a strange face?

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– ... I will pay attention from now on.

– Humph... Rotten normie, Aniki has changed!Humph.

Having badmouthed me in a forced manner, my little sister left what happened just now behind. And as if out of consideration, with a smile on her face my aunt had her elbow on the table, propping up her chin,

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Between agitation that resembles happiness and obstinacy-like irritation. I lost the sight of my standing. That I was previously not a guy like this, I realize it myself. Even though we have met every day during the school term, since the summer vacation started we haven't met yesterday nor today. When I see her face once more, will I be able to not break into a smile?

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"So, what about Ms. Karen? This Sunday?"

She's going to buy a swimsuit and probably wants to invite Tachibana too. But this Sunday, that Hyoudou is talking about, if I'm not mistaken... Just as I suddenly remembered, Tachibana Karen's name appeared on the screen at last.

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And this time, there was a message delivered to me. With a notification of a personal message from Tachibana, my heart started beating faster.

"Yo, boyfriend-kun"

... There is, nothing at all. Yeah, I know what it is. Boyfriend-kun is just a post-evolution form if Sento-kun or something.

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There is no way that blonde girl can understand my delicate heart of the loner. Understanding too little, she even sent me a selfie right after the message.

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Inside my chest, something was noisily excited.I'm not thinking that she is cute or something. Yet, and yet, if she makes a request this way, then...

"Alright, I'll call you right now""Yeah, thanks. I'll be waiting"

However, voice from reality pulled me out of the electronics.

– Oh Jun-kun, smiling so gently... Yaaa, just what kind of girl is she! Kyaaa!

– Ugh... I... Did I make a strange face?

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– Humph... Rotten normie, Aniki has changed!Humph.

Having badmouthed me in a forced manner, my little sister left what happened just now behind. And as if out of consideration, with a smile on her face my aunt had her elbow on the table, propping up her chin,

– It's Jun-kun, so I'm not worried, but... Treat her kindly, okay?

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Between agitation that resembles happiness and obstinacy-like irritation. I lost the sight of my standing.That I was previously not a guy like this, I realize it myself.

Even though we have met every day during the school term, since the summer vacation started we haven't met yesterday nor today.When I see her face once more, will I be able to not break into a smile?

It is supposed to be this statue. Originally used by Japanese to describe people in the park who sit in the same pose and stare at their phones. Like this.

Nice cloak.

Chapter 33 - Smartphone Statue

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In order to avoid misunderstandings, I warn you in advance. This is by no means waiting for her.

This

Location is my usual place. At home, on top of the sofa.Second day of summer vacation, splendidly doing nothing.

That being said, whenever I get tired of studying and playing games, I always imitate a cushion at my usual place. Occasionally, my little sister Keyaki really sits on top of me and play mobile games, but it seems that she is not in the mood right now.

After all, I was intently gazing at the newly purchased toy.And apparently, my little sister felt disgusted by such an image of me.

– Hey, look at him, aunt. He is like this again all day again, this person...

this

– Oh, Jun-kun. Becoming all like nowadays' normie all of a sudden. Is this second year high school debut? Is this second year high school debut, oh, oh!

She questioned my present state and aunt Arika gave her an answer.

Still, of those two's responses are a bit contrastive. Opposite to the shocked glare of my little sister, aunt's grin was even broader than usual.And the thing which is the cause of this... ding. It made a random mechanical sound.

ding

– ...!

My body twitched by reflex.The name of my new pal is smartphone.A pathogen machine spread among the modern society. This way of saying might arouse some objections from various people, but it is not like I'm telling a lie. Actually, I have been infected myself and I have verified its harmful nature. I threw away both studying and playing games. Now, I only wait for this sound.

However, ... wrong. This is absolutely wrong!This is merely being obsessed with a new toy. I'll have enough of it right away. I'll have enough and I'll return to the days full of games for sure...This is not me

looking forward to getting a message from that classmate of mine. Probably, no, absolutely...

– Ara, ara, Jun-kun. Is that another reply from your girlfriend~?

– It, it's not true... She's not my girlfriend or anything!

– Yeah, yeah. Look, there's a message coming from that girl you're close with and who is not your girlfriend.

Flicking the screen before even thinking with my head, I launched a popular messenger app. And the one who sent a message is... no.

Sender is not0 Tachibana Karen0 .

"This Sunday, who is coming to buy swimsuit together?"

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It came from Hyoudou Yayoi, who often hangs out with that Tachibana. It was just a message to everyone in the class, it wasn't a message to me in the first place. I... Why did I? Letting out a humph, I blocked the phone and dropped it shaking off the feeling resembling dullness.

humph

These last few weeks, I have become unbearably effeminate. To be honest, I hate such me. Most probably, I look pitiful from the side. And actually, my little sister is not amused in the least. Turning thoroughly befuddled, I even stopped playing games together with her, so in the end, this became my name.

– ... Smartphone statue1

1

1

I thought smartphones were foolish things. Although, in a sense, it was correct. Cause, isn't it so? The perpetrator of me buying this useless gadget, even if there is no important matter, day after day she...

Excluding the mandatory long talk before sleep, Tachibana contacts me frequently. In case there is a received message, it would be annoying if she thought I was waiting for it all along, so I wait for about 5 minutes before giving a reply. But all of this is so foolish.

– But Jun-kun, how come it turned out like this? Haven't you been refusing to listen every time I offered to buy one so far?

– That is, If I got one, even friends would inconvenience me. Just because it was abnormal up till now...

– Haa... Isn't it dazzling. Looking back, I might even want to relive my high school days. Time like this, there won't ever be another chance for it.

Is that how it is...? Right now, I can only think of myself as being ill. If I let my guard down, ... grinning face of that blonde girl, who is on the other side of the network, comes into my mind. What should I call it, if it is not an illness?

– Hmm... Well, I've decided. I'll turn it off and this night, I'll accompany you for the games. Keyaki, you should be satisfied with that, right?

At this moment, ding, there was another notification sound. Reflexively, I reached out with my hand towards the phone, but Keyaki became angry with a humph!, so my hand stopped in the air. And then, I received needless support.

ding

humph!

– Keyaki-chan. You have to let him off for this. Though, it is understandable that you're burning with jealousy.

– Wh-, why would I be jealous or anything...

– But, you know... Keyaki-chan too... If you got a nephew, wouldn't you want to take a look at him?

– Eh? Nephew...? Nephew...

– Every year, you could give him New Year's gift, Keyaki-chan. Buy him a large PC and raise him into an elite otaku!

–Hmm. I want to meet him... maybe.

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c34

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Inside the library, we would always sit on two chairs next to each other. Without fail, she would have a smiling face and I would have a frown on mine. Somehow, I would become her playmate every day.

0 Hey, hey, bookworm. Don't be so scared, virgin&j0 Sitting next to me and poking me in the cheek or side, disturbing me from studies,

0 You can't turn away. Please, don't be cold to me...0 Not letting me look away and holding my chin with her soft hand,

0 You know, after all, I cannot accept it. Even if you will feel annoyed, I'm planning to do something about it. About how you are treated in class. 0 on the contrary, getting angry for someone like me.

Even though I was ignored in the class, thanks to the queen of normies of the class Tachibana, I ended up normally communicating with various guys. Loner Wall that I have been desperately building for a very long time was demolished and now there are even no traces left of it.

Like that, blonde girl's teasing continued day after day. How soon will she lose interest in it? Just what is so funny? While I was pondering like that, only time passed by.

I'm not happy or anything, I'm just being played with. I have been always telling myself so.

I wonder why? Just because I haven't been teased for several days, my chest feels painful and impatience is getting worse. Thinking about it, I could have refused her after all. But I didn't. Why? If I felt seriously reluctant, it would be conveyed to her. At times like that, Tachibana apologizes, looking really sad.

0 Sorry, I was being too annoying.....Really.....I'm sorry.....0

Just how can you refuse such a girl? Are there other women as unfair as her? In the end, I can only let her play until she gets tired.

And for this reason, first Sunday of the summer vacation. When I first saw Tachibana's face, I was startled. Something felt different from usual.

– Ah, you finally came...

Our meeting place - train station square in the morning. Her grinning face she normally shows right after we meet, today I couldn't see it. And for a moment, I even had an anxious thought. By some chance, have I done something wrong? However, I immediately realized that it was a needless anxiety.

She relaxed her face as if relieved, and even her eyes were slightly wet. What, is she actually... happy?

– Jun...

Stop, don't call me by my first name. Don't look at me with that sort of face. Cheer up. Isn't it alright to grin and say just as usual. "You felt lonely not being able to meet me, didn't you?" or something. If you do that, I can answer you "Not really..." with a flushed face.

Today, Tachibana wears a thin white blouse with lace and short black skirt. Her long bare feet exposed under the high blue sky, her abundant hair lustrous. Her skin white as if transparent just like always. And if she smiled pleasantly, that smile would seem shinier than even the sun up above.

Before getting near, she ran over with her heels clacking. Comparing with our first date, we're very close even when standing face to face.

– I've been waiting so much...

– Hmm, you're on time, more or less

– Not that... I haven't met you for so long. It was so tough...

... That's not good. When we actually meet like this, all of the things I worried about by myself become stupid. When this girl's feelings are conveyed through her facial expressions, I realize that I was lonely as well. Feeling comfortable and calm, I unconsciously let my face relax.

– Ha-ha, look at you. For so long, we haven't met for only three days.

– Three days is too long. Appear before me every day. It's not enough at all...

By some chance, do I have the same exact feeling...? It's not like I'm going to run away anywhere. I

wanted to immediately let her have a peace of mind.

– Well, um, if you are truly lonely...

Seeing her disheartened and appealing look, I stuck my hand out without thinking.... Am I an idiot? Did I think that Tachibana would hold it? What's more, such a cheesy line crossing my mind...

– If you feel lonely, I guess it's okay to call me whenever you want. If you're okay with me, I'll come flying to you. I mean, for you, who helped me so, I would do that much, um...

– Ya, idiot... What are you saying all of a sudden...?

– Ugh, correction. I've said a bit too much...

– Noope, I've already heard that. I'll call you a lot, all through the summer vacation...

Blonde girl suddenly drew near and... Not at all holding my stretched hand, she tightly pressed her body to my arm. It seems like she finally got back to good mood. She started poking my cheek with a usual grin on her face.

Boiling-up embarrassment increased blood circulation around my face.

Clinging like this in a place where all the passers-by can see... In the eyes of strangers, our relationship is certainly suspicious for no reason...

– Jun's red face, it's sooo cute. Are you feeling shy yourself after saying something so embarrassing?

– ... I regret it.

– Hey, we're immediately having a date even though summer vacation has only started. ... Why is that so? Tachibana's skin is rubbing my arm right in the center of the central part of the town. The more the softness of her body was felt, the more color of shyness was mixed into Tachibana's playful face. Even within the midsummer heat, what moves along the skin is cold sweat.

Uh, this... As expected.....

– Hey, hey? Just why are we having a date?

– ... Be-, because I promised

– Hmm? What kind of promise...?

– You, you want me to say it now? Please stop, am I not doing as I promised...

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Well, actually, there was a rule to the date today. Crux of the matter is that I bet on the test results and I lost. Originally, there was an agreement that the one who lost by total marks would grant one wish to the one who won. However,

0 Is it okay? Normally, I will win. I'm okay if you can win in just one subject0

That is to say, I'm getting my just deserts. Tachibana has commendably triumphed over me in national language. Although I was the one who taught her, I was also the one who lost. It is unclear if I am happy or frustrated, but Tachibana's request was merciless.

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– Ehehe, thank you... okay?

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– Three days is too long. Appear before me every day. It's not enough at all...

By some chance, do I have the same exact feeling...? It's not like I'm going to run away anywhere. I wanted to immediately let her have a peace of mind.

– Well, um, if you are truly lonely...

Seeing her disheartened and appealing look, I stuck my hand out without thinking.... Am I an idiot? Did I think that Tachibana would hold it? What's more, such a cheesy line crossing my mind...

– If you feel lonely, I guess it okay to call me whenever you want. If you're okay with me, I'll come flying to you. I mean, for you, who helped me so, I would do that much, um...

– Ya, idiot... What are you saying all of a sudden...?

– Ugh, correction. I've said a bit too much...

– Noope, I've already heard that. I'll call you a lot, all through the summer vacation...

Blonde girl suddenly drew near and... Not at all holding my stretched hand, she tightly pressed her body to my arm. It seems like she finally got back to good mood. She started poking my cheek with a usual grin on her face.

Boiling-up embarrassment increased blood circulation around my face.

Clinging like this in a place where all the passers-by can see...In the eyes of strangers, our relationship is certainly suspicious for no reason...

– Jun's red face, it's sooo cute. Are you feeling shy yourself after saying something so embarrassing?

– ... I regret it.

– Hey, we're immediately having a date even though summer vacation has only started. ... Why is that so? Tachibana's skin is rubbing my arm right in the center of the central part of the town. The more the softness of her body was felt, the more color of shyness was mixed into Tachibana's playful face. Even within the midsummer heat, what moves along the skin is cold sweat.

Uh, this... As expected.....

– Hey, hey? Just why are we having a date?

– ... Be-, because I promised

– Hmm? What kind of promise...?

– You, you want me to say it now? Please stop, am I not doing as I promised...

– Noope. I want to hear it one more time...

Well, actually, there was a rule to the date today. Crux of the matter is that I bet on the tests results and I lost. Originally, there was an agreement that the one who lost by total marks would grant one wish to the one who won. However,

0 Is it okay? Normally, I will win. I'm okay if you can win in just one subject0

That is to say, I'm getting my just deserts. Tachibana has commendably triumphed over me in national language. Although I was the one who taught her, I was also the one who lost. It is unclear if I am happy or frustrated, but Tachibana's request was merciless.

– That is, um... Be-, because I am your boyfriend. Just for one day. Damn, just why do I have to do such a thing...

... I want to image Tachibana's face in the usual library when she told me her request.

0 ... First Sunday of summer vacation, leave it free okay? For one day... For just one day. Become my real boyfriend0 0 Ehehe, penalty game&j I'll make you fall madly in love on our next date...0

Penalty is a date as a boyfriend. I'm not... happy or anything. The more I tell myself so, the more the girl before my eyes smiles. You, really have a nice personality.

– Jun, you don't seem to be reluctant at all though?

– Despite me desperately teaching you, this treatment...

– Ehehe, thank you... okay?

– Humph, what's with this "Thaaank you"! Always, always teasing the bookworm, is it that much enjoyable...?

– You know, I'll let you make today the most enjoyable day until now. My boyfriend-san for a day&j

– Uugh, you're going too far. Bookworm girl...

I haven't met Tachibana for three days. Something in my chest flicked because of that. Meeting me makes her so happy ... crap. Soon, I'll end up admitting. That I am unbelievably happy being together with Tachibana.

Chapter 34 - XX for a Day \$`

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I wonder just how much time has passed since I couldn't call myself a loner anymore.

0 Hey, hey, bookworm. Won't you teach me today as well? 0

One day, blonde gyaru of our class - Tachibana Karen, has asked me to teach her. Though it would simply

end as an irregular matter if that was all. Anyhow, the other party is at fault. Thus began a storm-like spring.

Inside the library, we would always sit on two chairs next to each other. Without fail, she would have a smiling face and I would have a frown on mine. Somehow, I would become her playmate every day.

0 Hey, hey, bookworm. Don't be so scared, virgin&j0 Sitting next to me and poking me in the cheek or side, disturbing me from studies,

0 You can't turn away. Please, don't be cold to me...0 Not letting me look away and holding my chin with her soft hand,

0 You know, after all, I cannot accept it. Even if you will feel annoyed, I'm planning to do something about it. About how you are treated in class. 0 on the contrary, getting angry for someone like me.

Even though I was ignored in the class, thanks to the queen of normies of the class Tachibana, I ended up normally communicating with various guys. Loner Wall that I have been desperately building for a very long time was demolished and now there are even no traces left of it.

Like that, blonde girl's teasing continued day after day. How soon will she lose interest in it? Just what is so funny? While I was pondering like that, only time passed by.

I'm not happy or anything, I'm just being played with. I have been always telling myself so.

I wonder why? Just because I haven't been teased for several days, my chest feels painful and impatience is getting worse. Thinking about it, I could have refused her after all. But I didn't. Why? If I felt seriously reluctant, it would be conveyed to her. At times like that, Tachibana apologizes, looking really sad.

0 Sorry, I was being too annoying.....Really.....I'm sorry.....0

Just how can you refuse such a girl? Are there other women as unfair as her? In the end, I can only let her play until she gets tired.

And for this reason, first Sunday of the summer vacation. When I first saw Tachibana's face, I was startled. Something felt different from usual.

– Ah, you finally came...

Our meeting place - train station square in the morning. Her grinning face she normally shows right after we meet, today I couldn't see it. And for a moment, I even had an anxious thought. By some chance, have I done something wrong? However, I immediately realized that it was a needless anxiety.

By some chance, have I done something wrong

She relaxed her face as if relieved, and even her eyes were slightly wet. What, is she actually... happy?

– Jun...

Stop, don't call me by my first name. Don't look at me with that sort of face. Cheer up. Isn't it alright to grin and say just as usual. "You felt lonely not being able to meet me, didn't you?" or something. If you do that, I can answer you "Not really..." with a flushed face.

You felt lonely not being able to meet me, didn't you?

Not really...

Today, Tachibana wears a thin white blouse with lace and short black skirt. Her long bare feet exposed under the high blue sky, her abundant hair lustrous. Her skin white as if transparent just like always. And if she smiled pleasantly, that smile would seem shinier than even the sun up above.

Before getting near, she ran over with her heels clacking. Comparing with our first date, we're very close even when standing face to face.

– I've been waiting so much...

– Hmm, you're on time, more or less

– Not that... I haven't met you for so long. It was so tough...

... That's not good. When we actually meet like this, all of the things I worried about by myself become stupid. When this girl's feelings are conveyed through her facial expressions, I realize that I was lonely as well. Feeling comfortable and calm, I unconsciously let my face relax.

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– Uugh, you're going too far. Bookworm girl...

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Chapter 35 - XX for a day \$a

Still, Tachibana Karen's boyfriend for a day? This was an enormous challenge. First command I received was to walk with linked arms like a couple, but I got a game over with my ego broken after the first 10 meters.

Skin on our arms rubs all over against each other just from walking like this. I'm about to go crazy from the heat filling my entire body. And when my hand trembles from nervousness... there it is. She absolutely notices such things. On top of noticing she also makes a move.

– We are nervous together... We need to have a rest

– ... It's too early no matter how you put it. We have only just started walking away from the station.

– Look, that bench... I want to flirt there...

– Flirt...

– Too late&j Hey, let's... do something that will make us even more nervous? Like a boyfriend and a girlfriend... okay?

Tachibana's soft right hand moved restlessly in my left hand. As if her mood has completely recovered, she looked right into my eyes with a provocative smile. I met her gaze as she would get angry if I turned away anyway, although today she is even closer than usual. Let alone smell, we're at a distance where we can hear each other's' breath.

When we sat next to each other on the bench, I felt as if my heart was about to come out of my chest.

This girl directly brought her body close to mine, hugged my left arm with both of her arms and started snuggling...

Her delicate hair touched my shoulder. At the end of our glued arms, our hands were still joined.

– Bookworm ingredient, it's still not enough... Why couldn't we meet for three days, ooh...

... Aren't, aren't we going too far? Ev-, even for a girlfriend, normally there should be a line here! We are common high school students, you know...

These words were on the tip of my tongue, but then I met eyes with my girlfriend for a day sitting extremely close.

– Girlfriend for a day... Girlfriend...&j

Grin, grin. Seriously, always like the Sun. This girl, why is she so happy...

Although she does keep updating her best record of happy mood every day, just for today her level of being naughty is different. The look she gives and the voice she uses feel dreamy like molten chocolate. What kind of face should I make? Today is not the only day I ask myself this question. Still, right now my face is stiff from nervousness and embarrassment.

Yet at the same time, I can't tell her to stop. Her happy appearance truly warms up my chest. That is why a guilty conscience rises within me just from the thought of pouring cold water over her.

– So, what should the boyfriend do...

– It's fun when you act shy and mumble... And on the other hand, I will cling to you and act lovestruck...

You should have fun as well, you know?

– Ta-, Tachibana... As expected, I'm getting... awfully nervous or something...

– ... Do you know why you are feeling nervous?

– Haa?

Tachibana completely put her weight on me and,

– Falling in love, you're just enduring not to do it, you know? Isn't it okay just fall in love with me already&j Aren't we boyfriend and girlfriend? Let's just both turn into fools?

– Ta-, Tachibana... You...

Love. Falling, in love? I... with her? No, certainly not... Both... into fools. If I give up protecting myself with nervousness... Next moment, what will happen?..... And at her next words, bubble of nervousness burst inside my chest.

– Groan! Today "Tachibana" and "You" are not allowed. Next time you call me that I'll earnestly hug you...

Rotten bookworm on the bench with his left arm tightly held. Immediately after the start of the penalty game, a lethal dose of nervousness hit the brain. First thing that arrived was the dizziness inside the head.

Passing through the feeling of light-headedness... I strangely calmed down. And together with a flash of a great idea, bookworm limiter was swallowed by the abyss.

... Just how many days do you think I have been together with her? It is obvious what will make Tachibana pleased. That's why I have to say it. Even though it is embarrassing, I have to... Yeah, this girl, she will probably be pleased after all...

– Um... It's good that I met you... Tachibana

– Ah! Right now, "You" and "Tachibana", you said them both!?

– ...I didn't.....

Both with red faces, we looked at each other. I made a displeased face just as always, but it's no use already. Feeling funny, we both burst into laughter at the same time. Tachibana started cackling and weakly poking me around my chest.

– Haha, I didn't say... So just now, it didn't count... Hahaha

– Fufu... Idiot... Do you want to hug with me so much?

– Hey, I didn't say. Aa, stop. Don't come near...

– Jun, you dummy...

Tachibana put her arms around my back... and tightly squeezed them. Her abundant blonde hair rubbed against my chest. I felt as if my heart would get out of my chest, but as the warmth was transmitted, I soon felt my nervousness dissolving at the same time. With my whole body wrapped in a sweet and tender feeling, a whisper sounded close to my ear.

– Mm... Hug, feels so good. I feel so relieved like this...

– Oi, it's about time you let go. We're absolutely getting watched.

– Today's Jun is kind and easy-going. ... Jun, you're happy to be lovey-dovey with me, isn't that right?

– Not really... Well, I did think that I wanted to meet a little...

– Hey... Jun, hug me back? I don't want to be the only one hugging...

– ... Well, I was the one who started this... Like, like this?

– Ah, so kind...

When I lightly rubbed the back of the young lady, Tachibana squeezed even tighter. It seems our presence corrupted with fluffiness was perceived with pain as there were obviously stabbing glances thrown at us from all directions.

– Your girlfriend for a day, it's so much fun...

Like I care. They should understand. Right now, I'm caught up in the moment. My senses are completely numb.

With dam of nervousness burst, I feel as if soon blood will gush out of all the holes in my body. This time, the warmth provides not only shyness, but also a peace of mind.

However, as a matter of fact, this mission of pleasing Tachibana-san is still not over. I can't believe myself, but I have prepared this final attack. Most likely I will regret it tomorrow, but this soft feeling inside my chest is commanding me to say it as it is.

–Karen

– Ah...

Blonde girl made a painful look. I've felt regret the very moment I have said it, and yet it seems that she hasn't failed to hear it.

– One more time...

– I don't want to

– No, please. Come on, please...

Too much of her warmth is being received through her clinging body. Please. Should I say literally, far from getting weaker, that effect is getting stronger. This, if this was seen by someone who knows us, this would be the end...

– Ka-, Karen...

– Jun. Jun&j Jun? Ehehe... another one

– Karen

– Pass... Haven't you become boyfriend-like... There, there
Pat, pat. My head was tousled by a soft hand.

– Damn, why did I have to say it...

Since I have entered second year, the only thing I've done is making Tachibana happy. First, I didn't know anything and this girl was only having fun as she pleased. Before long, I started feeling relieved seeing her like that.

Now, I more or less understand what I can do to make her happy. Stepping on this flirting mine myself, I am the strange one.

– Haa... It may be hopeless already. Our date has just started and I can't stop flirting. I want to be like this forever...

– Unh, it seems I got a little carried away. Sorry.

– Seriously this... I was the one who said I will make you fall madly in love with me! If I'm mad in love, then there's no difference from the usual...

– U-, usual...?

– No, dummy, it's nothing...!

Just like that, making each other blush, we sat on the bench for about an hour.

Time flew by. After getting up with much difficulty, we wandered the street in front of the station with no particular aim.

It was a day that gave a feeling of the summer vacation beginning. Summer day with a clear blue sky. Naturally, the road in front of the station was crowded with various families and single working adults.

And then, there were many passing couples clinging to each other just like us. Every single one of them seemed to get along with each other. Seeing that, Tachibana strongly hugged my left arm with an angry face. What on earth is this competition, you?

Until now, I haven't thought anything of the couples that I saw. From the beginning I firmly believed that they were irrelevant to me.

But now. Now, there is a girl walking next to me. A girl with bright long hair, satisfied smile and lovely laugh. Loved by everyone, she would usually be surrounded by lots of friends. Normally, she is the type I wouldn't even speak to despite being in the same class and despite having neighboring seats. A girl like that is being together with me in great mood like this.

At any rate, girlfriend for a day. It sounds weird. We have a relationship like that while today continues, but tomorrow it will return to normal. In that case, how should I deal with it starting next day. I'm troubled as I can almost smell the awkwardness.

– Hey. Where should we go after we have a meal...?

My girlfriend for a day whispered to me. Honestly, I had no ideas. Actually, I should have thought of something as well, but probably because I always have no plan and just get swayed by her after school, I got used to it.

– How about... movie?

– No... Movie is not good. Your face, I won't be able to see it...

– It's Sunday, it's packed everywhere. To have a nice time without a hurry for the two of us, there's only bench...

-

As if realizing something, Tachibana's smile gradually widened. With a really suspicious mischievous look, she suddenly pulled my left arm.

– Nishishi, I came up with a good idea. There might be one thing I want to do with you.

And then, she made a surprise attack. Still hugging my left arm, Tachibana stretched her neck. On the cheek... I felt the soft touch of lips.

– Chu... Idiot. For the teasing just now, I will be shifting from defense to offence... alright?

When I noticed, her red-colored face was several centimeters apart from mine. Only the sweet tender feeling was left on my skin.

– Hey? Just now, did you hate it...?

– ... Even as a girlfriend... That's going too far!

– But, did you hate it?

– ... I didn't hate it... probably

– Yay, then one more time..... mm, chu... Ehehe, let's go?

Within one month "loner" part of the bookworm loner was stolen by this girl. I couldn't measure the distance between me and Tachibana Karen. We may be getting along too much, I actually understand that myself. That she may be just playing with me, I'm actually afraid of it at times.

In any case, my penalty service as a boyfriend for a day has only just started.

Chapter 35 - XX for a day \$a

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Chapter 35 - XX for a day \$

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- Too late&j Hey, let's... do something that will make us even more nervous? Like a boyfriend and a girlfriend... okay?

Tachibana's soft right hand moved restlessly in my left hand. As if her mood has completely recovered, she looked right into my eyes with a provocative smile. I met her gaze as she would get angry if I turned away anyway, although today she is even closer than usual. Let alone smell, we're at a distance where we can hear each other's' breath.

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– Girlfriend for a day... Girlfriend...&j

Grin, grin. Seriously, always like the Sun. This girl, why is she so happy...

Although she does keep updating her best record of happy mood every day, just for today her level of being naughty is different. The look she gives and the voice she uses feel dreamy like molten chocolate. What kind of face should I make? Today is not the only day I ask myself this question. Still, right now my face is stiff from nervousness and embarrassment.

Yet at the same time, I can't tell her to stop. Her happy appearance truly warms up my chest. That is why a guilty conscience rises within me just from the thought of pouring cold water over her.

- So, what should the boyfriend do...
- It's fun when you act shy and mumble... And on the other hand, I will cling to you and act lovestruck... You should have fun as well, you know?
- Ta-, Tachibana... As expected, I'm getting... awfully nervous or something...
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Tachibana completely put her weight on me and,

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Too much of her warmth is being received through her clinging body. Please. Should I say literally, far from getting weaker, that effect is getting stronger. This, if this was seen by someone who knows us, this would be the end...

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– Pass... Haven't you become boyfriend-like... There, there

Pat, pat. My head was tousled by a soft hand.

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Just like that, making each other blush, we sat on the bench for about an hour.

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Chapter 36 - XX for a Day \$b

In the end, it appears that this girl is always taking the lead.

After meal I was brought along to the 5th floor of the station building. Well, as I usually don't go out of house on days off, much less shopping mall, most of the places are like savage lands to me, but among them there is one that is especially wicked... With surroundings of annoying random colors, a real Mystery Dungeon I stood right there.

– Ah, aaah...

With that before my eyes, I let out a hoarse voice. Multicolored frilly cloth. It's a swimsuit shop. Women's. It seems like for some reason my girlfriend for a day who was hugging my left arm the same as before became very interested in my miserable reaction.

– Choosing a swimsuit for me. 'Cause, aren't we going to beach...? Stuff like this, boyfriend-kun should be the one choosing it, right...?

– Is, is zat so... Rather, we're going to beach...?

– Fufu. That shy face... so cute

Saying that, she poked my thoroughly flushed cheek.

Ah, hey, passerby right there! Stop having that satisfied grin. I'm barely keeping myself from having foggy head. Just the fact that I have walked up to here is a miracle, if you like.

Naturally, not only was my face was hot since a while ago, I felt uneasiness in my chest. That being said, If I try taking my eyes off my one-day girlfriend for a moment. Here, a harsh flank attack like this is waiting for me.

– Mm... chu. You're not allowed look away from me.

Ugh... Kill me! I'm done with this!

I'm already regretting being so caught up in the moment earlier. Shifting from defense to offence. There was no false in these words. And she's not just physically teasing me. To begin with, bringing me to such a place, I can't help but think that she really wants to kill the bookworm.

Like, isn't that so? A large room with rows of ladies' swimsuits? The moment I saw it, it gave me a loud impression of "It's a Monster House!"². I'm in trouble as smartphone and the like doesn't even have a function like the Scroll of Evac³. When push comes to shove, modern technology is useless.

Shuddering, I ended up pulling back one of my legs, but there was no escape as I was already firmly caught.... By the way, it seems my lack of enthusiasm was perceived by Tachibana and she strengthened her hold even more.

I can see "There is no escape" from her smiling face. Everything from my arm to my back is already soaking wet, but apparently the blonde girl is not worried about it.

However, at the same time, it appears that she paid attention to my rigid reaction. And just when I thought she was foolishly laughing, and yet, probably feeling uneasy because of my nonplussed reaction, with despondent upturned eyes she... Seriously, she changes her facial expressions so frequently.

– Girlfriend's wish... Is it no good?

Seeing such a face, there's no way I can refuse, right... Now that I'm already here, just as usual, this was a lost game from the beginning.

That is... Today, I want to see her laughing plenty of times...

Is it okay if I gently pat her on the head and say that there is no need to make such a face? However, I cannot possibly do it, so instead, I've made a sullen face and replied.

– Not really. Anyway, there was no plan in the first place, so it can't be helped or something...

– Yay, thank you... So kind...

– Unh, it's not like that. For your information, I'm not the only one who can't refuse when they are asked like that! Just take a look in the mirror.

– Fufu, what's that? Is that by any chance indirect compliment?

– Wrong. Here, let's go...

– Ehehe, look who's shy...

And with that, Tachibana finally released my left arm and we started looking through the shop. My heart felt so light it was about to hop, yet at the same time it felt agonizing. When I thought that she was

concentrated on choosing swimsuit, she would turn around and grin from time to time.

I, am together with such a girl. What's more, the other person looks exaggeratedly joyful.

Taking a look once again like this, Tachibana Karen is infinitely cute. And if I don't pay attention, I get mesmerized by her. Naturally, I don't want this kind of thoughts to be noticed, so I am constantly under a strange pressure. Each second with this girl is agonizing.

Still, it's not only about appearance. There is a great variety to Tachibana's smiling face.

A teasing playful smile, a kind and caring smile, a happy smile and others... and I can already mostly recognize them. And all of these facial expressions are not for decoration, they are nothing but genuine.

Right now, I have a monopoly on this smile. And even if it is for a brief time, it is only for me alone. A boyfriend for a day... Boyfriend... Right now... me.....?

My chest tightened. My whole body still holds her warmth.

– Hey...?

I was startled. Because Tachibana's face was closer than I thought. I haven't noticed as she was walking next to me all along, but right now we are much closer than usual.

This lips... Soft lips that have touched my cheek many times since not long ago are curved now, like a beautiful bow. And this cute smile has been so close all this time.

– This and this, which do you think is better?

She showed me two hangers with bikini. One black and one pink... Ah, no, no! I was taken aback. Well, choosing swimsuit should be like this, but I haven't made any preparations at all.

Rather, what in the world is preparation for choosing a swimsuit? Today, it's just like there is no meaning to my thoughts...

– Em, even if you ask which one is better...

I have a mood like this, so I ended up making an indifferent reply. However, Karen,... ahem. Tachibana grinned as if my reply just now was exactly what she expected.

– Fuuun?

– Wh-, what?

– Well then, there's no choice but try it on, right? Tell me which one you like?

– Try, try it on? Here...?

– Come on, dummy... What are you surprised at? It is that sort of shop, you know?

Then, when she appeared from the other side of the curtain, my brain was about to melt and pour out of my ears. Blonde girl's red face was blank. At the same time, noticing my nervousness, she gave me a shy smile.

– Now that I'm showing it to you, it may be a bit embarrassing... How is it...?

How is it, huh...? Well, of course...

On the healthy slender body, there was a black bikini with frills. She has a well-balanced figure. Bust and hips beautifully bulge and smoothly join at the slim waist. Choice of black was superb too. Contrasting with the white skin and bright blonde hair, somehow, it seems extremely adult-like.

At that time, I was at last mesmerized by the girl before my eyes. I ended up standing still on the spot for several seconds and noticing my own state I couldn't look in front of me. Still, for some reason, Tachibana before me had a lack of confidence and avoided looking into my eyes. Glancing at me, she anxiously averted her eyes.

– How is it...? Does it, not suit me...?

Why are you making such a face? You are Tachibana Karen after all, you're always brimming with confidence. But because of uncertainty in my attitude, anxiety in her look kept getting stronger little by little. It seems that she is looking forward to my reply so much.

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Swimsuit shop

Chapter 36 - XX for a Day \$b

In the end, it appears that this girl is always taking the lead.

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With that before my eyes, I let out a hoarse voice.Multicolored frilly cloth. It's a swimsuit shop. Women's. It seems like for some reason my girlfriend for a day who was hugging my left arm the same as before became very interested in my miserable reaction.

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Saying that, she poked my thoroughly flushed cheek.

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Like, isn't that so? A large room with rows of ladies' swimsuits? The moment I saw it, it gave me a loud impression of "It's a Monster House!"². I'm in trouble as smartphone and the like doesn't even have a function like the Scroll of Evac³. When push comes to shove, modern technology is useless.

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I can see "There is no escape" from her smiling face. Everything from my arm to my back is already soaking wet, but apparently the blonde girl is not worried about it.

However, at the same time, it appears that she paid attention to my rigid reaction. And just when I thought she was foolishly laughing, and yet, probably feeling uneasy because of my nonplussed reaction, with despondent upturned eyes she... Seriously, she changes her facial expressions so frequently.

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I, am together with such a girl. What's more, the other person looks exaggeratedly joyful.

Taking a look once again like this, Tachibana Karen is infinitely cute. And if I don't pay attention, I get mesmerized by her. Naturally, I don't want this kind of thoughts to be noticed, so I am constantly under a strange pressure. Each second with this girl is agonizing.

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My chest tightened. My whole body still holds her warmth.

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I was startled. Because Tachibana's face was closer than I thought. I haven't noticed as she was walking next to me all along, but right now we are much closer than usual.

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– Come on, dummy... What are you surprised at? It is that sort of shop, you know?

Then, when she appeared from the other side of the curtain, my brain was about to melt and pour out of my ears. Blonde girl's red face was blank. At the same time, noticing my nervousness, she gave me a shy smile.

– Now that I'm showing it to you, it may be a bit embarrassing... How is it...?

How is it, huh...? Well, of course...

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Chapter 36 - XX for a Day \$b

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One like this

Swimsuit shop

One like this

this

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Swimsuit shop

c37

Chapter 37 - XX for a Day \$c

– Look, like I thought, on that side... isn't that Karen?

I could see a group of people, who appeared to be our classmates, at the entrance. Fortunately, we were hidden behind a pillar, but all of them were familiar faces. Hyodou, Tenjuin and several other people... coming here!

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Kabedon

Nobody

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– Look, like I thought, on that side... isn't that Karen?

I could see a group of people, who appeared to be our classmates, at the entrance. Fortunately, we were hidden behind a pillar, but all of them were familiar faces. Hyodou, Tenjuin and several other people... coming here!

Which reminds me, wasn't there an announcement about shopping for swimsuits as a class or something on the smartphone the other day? Although I have completely forgotten, if only I have borne it in mind, it could have been expected...

And then, there is this one-day girlfriend in a swimsuit near me.

If anybody saw just the two of us being so flimsy, there would be a big scandal. Just a glance at us doing something like choosing a swimsuit at such a place and they will guess all sorts of truths and lies.

Rumors will immediately spread just from this girl having a boyfriend, not to mention that the likes of me is the other party...

I turned Tachibana's way at once. She has an impish grin and it seems she is in good spirits from looking at my flustered state. Grabbing my withdrawing left hand, she was asking something with her eyes only. "Leave it to me? You don't want this to be exposed to everyone, right...?"

Leave it to me? You don't want this to be exposed to everyone, right...?

Eei, what do I care... Everything will be on display if I stand still like this anyway. As a result of instantaneous decision, I stopped resisting. And the destination where I was pulled to by Tachibana just like that, was... inside the dressing room. She tossed me into the room and quickly drew the curtain behind.

Hmm... Ain't this a good idea? I felt relieved. However, that was a brief feeling. Unexpectedly, this girl's plan is not merely on the level of imp.

Even though there is enough space for two people between the curtain and the mirror, for some reason, Tachibana is slowly and steadily getting closer to me.

– Wh-, what...?

If I make one step back, she makes one step forward. By the time I noticed, I was already cornered to the edge of the small and dark room. Don, the girl in a swimsuit placed her right hand on the wall behind me near my back.

Don

Fuee... New method of doing kabedon...! Although I have been panicking just earlier even without this, today this girl is beyond merciless.

1

1

Yeah, it's like this. My dear classmates, after all, please come and be a nuisance! TA-DAH! NOBODY EXPECTS THE SPANISH INQUISITION!!2 Something like that. Please turn this scene into a pure gag ...!

2

2

Still, today is the day nothing will happen conveniently. A suspicious smile appeared on her red and white face mixed with shyness.

– Ehehe, now we're alone... Nobody can see us...

Close enough to feel the rhythm of each other's breath. Moreover, right now... blonde girl is a girl in swimsuit. Currently, most of her bare skin can be seen.

I, who was resolved to bring my natural status of a virgin straight to the grave, was giving an emergency order to my whole body to not touch her, but... there's nothing I can do as there is no more space to step back.

– Today, you were kind... If you treat me like that, I will misunderstand, you know?

– About that. I just got caught up in the moment, it is already, if you like, close to being my dark past...

– No, it's okay... Stuff like just now, I like it so much...

White captivating skin is right before my eyes and I can directly feel her heat. Feeling the distance shorten even more than earlier, I tried to keep my composure. But it didn't go well at all. I feel as if I will swallow my breath and choke.

– Hey, stay away... Isn't there enough space here...

It seems she completely expected my hasty response. With a satisfied grin she whispered in a low voice,

– Shh... Us being lovey-dovey, it'll get leaked to everyone.

When I tried to voice my objection once more, she covered my mouth with her palm. Bringing her beautiful face close... gentle breath hit the side of my face.

– Huh? I'm sure I have seen Karen-like blonde hair.

Hyoudou's voice came from the other side of the curtain. While we kept our voices down -- even though our appearances are hidden and there is no need for this - both of us tried to make our bodies smaller. We stood like that for a short while. Until the presence outside has disappeared, I was listening to the noise outside with Tachibana's soft hand still covering my mouth.

At long last the surrounding noise has disappeared. And then silently. Her whisper gently brushed my ear.

– My, my, now this is bad... A boy got into such a place.

– It, it was you who pulled me in!

– That's right... I've let my boyfriend in & j We're doing something bad together...

She probably sensed that I was planning to stubbornly resist. She suddenly grabbed my right hand with her left. Because of that, I have once again felt rough breathing next to my ear.

– No... You can't struggle. Here's the punishment for a bad person & j Mn...

My left ear has been... chomp, bitten in a playful manner. A numbing feeling has spread through my whole body as if melting.

chomp

Still, it was not the end of her pursuit. Even though we are already at the point-blank range, Tachibana has made one more step forward. Like that, I was plastered between her and the wall with absolutely no space between either. With our legs entwined, warmth of her bare skin passed through my clothes... My body, still from nervousness, was crushed by the softness of the young lady.

I feel dizzy and it feels like my brain will explode just like a tomato. My cheek took the fire once more.

– Mn, chu... This, I like it..... Chu...

– S-, sto-...

– Jun, don't hold back... Don't be shy, won't you earnestly love your girlfriend?

Ha, haaaaaa. Seriously... This, this is a dead end...

– Mn... Chu

Tachibana's lips remained on my skin. This time, she did not separate right away and let out her breath there for several seconds. Comfortably. With my embarrassment growing so strong that I could feel the silence in the room, I swiftly rubbed my back against the wall and my butt landed on the floor.

I'm not sure if I will be able to look her in the eye from tomorrow onwards. Most likely, I will recall today's matters if our eyes meet just once and I'll die from itchy feeling in my chest. Despite it being pathetic, I have let out a voice of surrender.

– Idiot. This is too much.

... But naturally, one-day girlfriend couldn't care less. Tachibana squatted in front of me as well and with a "Nihihi" met my eyes with a mischievous look. As if conscious of the embarrassing things she has done, she is indeed holding a hand at her nape with a seemingly wry smile, but... it's so fake.

Nihihi

– You called me cute, I was so happy... Ehehe... Reward & j

– Hey, it seems they have gone already. Let's go out...

– No... Away from prying eyes, it is something like this. Don't I have to hold myself back outside?

– ... You, has that been how you hold yourself back?

– Have I failed...?

Tachibana quietly sat next to me, clasped my hand and brought her body closer. Her uncovered shoulder touched my arm. As I felt bare skin, I wanted to separate myself from her right away, but the blonde girl didn't give up and followed right after me.

– You know, we're going to get busted sooner or later. We do get along so much. I don't want to control myself anymore. In truth, it is tough. That is why, I want to be lovey-dovey while I can. I want to save up some lovey-dovey. It's so lonely at home...

Similar to the time when she was hugging my arm on the bench... she placed her head on my shoulder, so her soft hair touched my nape.

Girlfriend... My, girlfriend.....? Tachibana Karen, just like a genuine lover... No, probably, she behaves three times more intensive of how she behaves on average. My disordered breath and the sound of violently beating heart, she is certainly aware of both.

– Right now, is perhaps the most enjoyable time of my life... Thanks to the kind boyfriend-kun, I've thoroughly become a normie... Ehehe

– Humph, weren't you a normie from the beginning

– No, that's not true...

With hugging getting stronger, time spent in silence increased. Little by little, it became awkward. Inside the small dark room, just the two of us...

– I'll turn Jun into a normie too. Isn't it summer holiday after all? You understand, right?

– Not a thing! Summer holiday is about idling about at home alone...
– Dummy. If you are alone, am I not alone as well? If I am to be a normie, it has to be together with Jun... I want to become normies together...

The certain matter is that from tomorrow onwards, very likely, we won't be able to stay as just friends. Even after this ridiculous conversation, I still think of her as an important person. Tachibana as well, just now was probably... how she thought that I would be happy. The way she bit my ear was extremely sweet and soft.

Cute. Extremely cute. I admit. That I am immensely happy. That I get along with Tachibana right now, it is inevitable that I am happy about it.

I wonder if it is because I have suddenly noticed this thought of mine? I wanted to treat her kindly much more. To add up, I had a feeling that Tachibana's feelings have been faintly transmitted to me and my chest which has been in pain for some time, was suddenly filled with a warm feeling.

Damn... My nervousness is... melting once more.

– Being your girlfriend for a day, I like it. Hey, I want just the two of us to be alone even more than we are right now...

– Aren't we alone right now? How can we be even more alone than this?

– Wrong. How should I put this...? We, I feel it can be just the two of us even more. It was extremely fun when we were almost found out just now, but. Perhaps, I don't want to be disturbed anymore today...

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c38

Chapter 38 - XX for a Day \$d

After that, unstoppable flirting continued.

I wonder if until now, there was a day I have played outside so much. Holding the hand of a girl that I get along with so much and walking in the city without any plan. Cackling, touching each other a lot and even taking a photo in a photo booth on top of that. And then, honestly thinking that it is fun.

That is why feeling of loneliness got stronger on a totally chilly road in the night. Tap, tap, Tachibana was walking next to me saying almost no words. She frankly slowed down her pace and I matched mine with hers. The closer we got to her house, the slower we got. At that time, while we were walking, she glanced at me as if worried about something,

– Jun... So, um... today's date, was it fun?

Reluctant to part. I felt like such a thought of hers was being conveyed through our connected hands. Instead of answering "It was fun", I slowly squeezed it back. As I have done that, she brightly smiled, so...

Cute. So cute. I'm embarrassed and happy... Can you believe it? I can still be, just for a little bit, such a cute girl's boyfriend. Despite being together with her every day, I can only now understand this happiness. Today, I've clasped her hand. Our arms linked. Moreover, there was that event in the dressing room... such a thing is normally impossible. The more I cool down, the more my pulse accelerates from realizing what an outrageous thing I have done. When tomorrow arrives, will everything really be able to return to normal?

Tachibana halted. She had wet eyes, as if wanting to bring something up.

I understand, don't worry. I don't intend to go home just like that as well. Now that it has come to this, I will let you play with me until the last second.

– ... There, was a park, right....

– Oh, dummy... Why do you notice all of my feelings...?

Just like when we met at noon, a bookworm and a blonde girl sat on the bench next to each other. Perhaps, right now, it was enough for both of us. There was no need for us to go to movie, amusement park or karaoke. If we can just stay together, we can spend so many hours just like that. And that is despite us being together every day during the school term, there's something strange with it.

– Ehehe~ One-day... boyfriend.....&j

My one-day... girlfriend limply pressed her body against my left arm.

She looked like was having fun. Even though she is with someone like me, she looks like she is having fun. I still feel like seeing her happy face. Well, I may not bite her ear, but I decided to get even with her for earlier.

I lightly shook off the hand clinging to me, hugged her shoulder and... reached out my hand to her head and... caressed it.

– Kya...

– Hm. You didn't like it...?

– No... There's no way I can reject you, is there? Carry on...?

Her hair was soft and long. I'm sure it is difficult to care for it. It seems she felt that I have touched her as someone important, so Tachibana eagerly brought her delicate body closer. Like that, it happened that I was embracing her with one hand and I was inevitably embarrassed that I started this myself.

She let out a high voice which cannot be described in words. I wonder if it means that she is happy? As I continued to stroke, it changed to a sigh-like voice like "Haa...".

– When we were lovey-dovey in the morning, you have called me by the name, right...

– Lo-, lovey-dovey... Wasn't it flirting...

– Uh huh...&j And during noon, you called me cute

– Stop. Don't make me recall

– Right now, you're caressing me. You know, in truth, I always wanted you to do something like this...

Jun, is it still embarrassing? Oh, you're so cute...

Our eyes met and I gulped. A pair of lovers alone in the park at night. It's because of this absurd situation. With nervousness smashed into pieces, my field of vision narrowed. The only ones left in the

world were me and her, and if I don't return to the normal world quickly, I may lose that chance to return...

However, it was already late. The couple huddling with cold air around them, were probably both feverish. Thinking just a bit, it is obvious that it will be awkward staring from the next day. Perhaps, they were both overwhelmed by this atmosphere filled with magic.

– Today, you were excessively kind... Boyfriend for a day, isn't it outstandingly effective...?

– Unh... It's just for today...

– Hey, can you spoil me a bit longer?

– Spoil...?

– Yeah..... Do something, boyfriend-like?

She escalated everything again. Tachibana brushed her hair aside and stuck out her cheek to me.

– After all... I was the only one doing it

Several seconds later I finally realized what she meant. Should I say that the fact that she has done something so naughty wearing swimsuit just a while ago, has made her extremely daring now that she is wearing clothes... I want to writhe right now.

Still, I already cannot withdraw. Slowly and timidly I pressed my mouth against the exposed cheek.

– Mn...

– Ah...

As my lips touched soft white skin... It is unlikely that I can endure even a second. Yet when I tried to separate from her, my clothes around the lap got pulled. As I was clinging my body to her as if pestering, my face full of embarrassment was about to boil.

And then, when we separated, smile vanished from Tachibana's face and only sadness was left on it.

– Today, is about to end...

– Yeah...

– Tomorrow onwards, I will become ex-girlfriend, you know...?

– Clinging to each other like this, we might won't be able to do it...

– Really, I'm so full of lingering affections! What should I do from tomorrow on...

– ... Tomorrow is not coming. It's still... today.

I'm embarrassed saying this myself. I have looked away for just a moment and immediately looked at Tachibana's expression.... Seemingly happy from my few words just now, she had wet eyes on a smiling face. Thus, as a result of staring at each other for a while, I caught Tachibana's flopping body. As I was patting her back, she let out a pleased voice. Her happiness and my happiness... Like this, both of us are about to melt.

– Hug. Lovey-dovey hug... As expected, so pleasant

– ... I wonder if I am acting like a boyfriend

– Oh my gosh... Even though I've been always playing with you...

– Uh, that's not like you. Isn't it alright to play with me

– That is, already not possible... I may, not be able to look at you like that...

– Wh-, Why...?

– Be-, because. Jun... Um...

She stopped talking at that point and it became silent.

Before long, Tachibana pushed my chest, pulled away from the hug and looked at me with sad eyes. Impelled by the uneasiness that I couldn't be silent, I reached out to the blonde hair with my hand, but... I couldn't find the words. I stopped midway.

Our eyes repeatedly met inches apart from each other. Tachibana wanted to say something, and yet in the end she couldn't put it into words.

– He-, hey... I... About Jun... About you...

Perhaps, I am failing to notice something essential. I thought to simply let her play with me. I just thought I'll let her fully enjoy today. Relaxing my guard around an important person and getting healed a lot, how great would that be...

Hey, Tachibana? Up until now and today as well, so it wasn't a... lovely mischief with no ill will?

The longer I stay silent, the stronger becomes the look of dissatisfaction on the girl's face and increases

the feeling of desperation as if telling that she cannot endure it anymore.

– ~~! Jun... Jun...! You know...

– Ka-, Karen...

– Haa, haa... Jun..... Sorry. I'm so... sorry

For several seconds the silence between us was filled with unbearable sadness. Her charming lips were twitching...

My last memory of that day. A fragile moment of directly touching her lips... and then, right after. The girl's appearance filled with regret.

Chapter 38 - XX for a Day \$d

After that, unstoppable flirting continued.

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Her hair was soft and long. I'm sure it is difficult to care for it. It seems she felt that I have touched her as someone important, so Tachibana eagerly brought her delicate body closer. Like that, it happened that I was embracing her with one hand and I was inevitably embarrassed that I started this myself.

She let out a high voice which cannot be described in words. I wonder if it means that she is happy? As I continued to stroke, it changed to a sigh-like voice like "Haa..."

– When we were lovey-dovey in the morning, you have called me by the name, right...

– Lo-, lovey-dovey... Wasn't it flirting...

– Uh huh...&j And during noon, you called me cute

– Stop. Don't make me recall

– Right now, you're caressing me. You know, in truth, I always wanted you to do something like this...

Jun, is it still embarrassing? Oh, you're so cute...

Our eyes met and I gulped. A pair of lovers alone in the park at night. It's because of this absurd situation. With nervousness smashed into pieces, my field of vision narrowed. The only ones left in the world were me and her, and if I don't return to the normal world quickly, I may lose that chance to return...

However, it was already late. The couple huddling with cold air around them, were probably both feverish. Thinking just a bit, it is obvious that it will be awkward staring from the next day. Perhaps, they were both overwhelmed by this atmosphere filled with magic.

– Today, you were excessively kind... Boyfriend for a day, isn't it outstandingly effective...?

– Unh... It's just for today...

– Hey, can you spoil me a bit longer?

– Spoil...?

– Yeah..... Do something, boyfriend-like?

She escalated everything again. Tachibana brushed her hair aside and stuck out her cheek to me.

– After all... I was the only one doing it

Several seconds later I finally realized what she meant. Should I say that the fact that she has done something so naughty wearing swimsuit just a while ago, has made her extremely daring now that she is wearing clothes... I want to writhe right now.

Still, I already cannot withdraw. Slowly and timidly I pressed my mouth against the exposed cheek.

– Mn...

– Ah...

As my lips touched soft white skin... It is unlikely that I can endure even a second. Yet when I tried to separate from her, my clothes around the lap got pulled. As I was clinging my body to her as if pestering, my face full of embarrassment was about to boil.

And then, when we separated, smile vanished from Tachibana's face and only sadness was left on it.

– Today, is about to end...

– Yeah...

– Tomorrow onwards, I will become ex-girlfriend, you know...?

– Clinging to each other like this, we might won't be able to do it...

– Really, I'm so full of lingering affections! What should I do from tomorrow on...

– ... Tomorrow is not coming. It's still... today.

I'm embarrassed saying this myself. I have looked away for just a moment and immediately looked at Tachibana's expression.... Seemingly happy from my few words just now, she had wet eyes on a smiling face. Thus, as a result of staring at each other for a while, I caught Tachibana's flopping body. As I was patting her back, she let out a pleased voice. Her happiness and my happiness... Like this, both of us are about to melt.

– Hug. Lovey-dovey hug... As expected, so pleasant

– ... I wonder if I am acting like a boyfriend

– Oh my gosh... Even though I've been always playing with you...

– Uh, that's not like you. Isn't it alright to play with me

– That is, already not possible... I may, not be able to look at you like that...

– Wh-, Why...?

– Be-, because. Jun... Um...

She stopped talking at that point and it became silent.

Before long, Tachibana pushed my chest, pulled away from the hug and looked at me with sad eyes. Impelled by the uneasiness that I couldn't be silent, I reached out to the blonde hair with my hand, but... I couldn't find the words. I stopped midway.

Our eyes repeatedly met inches apart from each other. Tachibana wanted to say something, and yet in the end she couldn't put it into words.

– He-, hey... I... About Jun... About you...

Perhaps, I am failing to notice something essential. I thought to simply let her play with me. I just thought I'll let her fully enjoy today. Relaxing my guard around an important person and getting healed a lot, how great would that be...

Hey, Tachibana? Up until now and today as well, so it wasn't a... lovely mischief with no ill will?

The longer I stay silent, the stronger becomes the look of dissatisfaction on the girl's face and increases the feeling of desperation as if telling that she cannot endure it anymore.

– ~~! Jun... Jun...! You know...

– Ka-, Karen...

– Haa, haa... Jun..... Sorry. I'm so... sorry

For several seconds the silence between us was filled with unbearable sadness. Her charming lips were twitching...

My last memory of that day. A fragile moment of directly touching her lips... and then, right after. The girl's appearance filled with regret.

Chapter 38 - XX for a Day \$d

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After that, unstoppable flirting continued.

I wonder if until now, there was a day I have played outside so much. Holding the hand of a girl that I get along with so much and walking in the city without any plan. Cackling, touching each other a lot and even taking a photo in a photo booth on top of that. And then, honestly thinking that it is fun.

That is why feeling of loneliness got stronger on a totally chilly road in the night. Tap, tap, Tachibana was walking next to me saying almost no words. She frankly slowed down her pace and I matched mine with hers. The closer we got to her house, the slower we got. At that time, while we were walking, she glanced at me as if worried about something,

Tap

tap

– Jun... So, um... today's date, was it fun?

Reluctant to part. I felt like such a thought of hers was being conveyed through our connected hands. Instead of answering "It was fun", I slowly squeezed it back. As I have done that, she brightly smiled, so...

Cute. So cute. I'm embarrassed and happy... Can you believe it? I can still be, just for a little bit, such a cute girl's boyfriend. Despite being together with her every day, I can only now understand this happiness. Today, I've clasped her hand. Our arms linked. Moreover, there was that event in the dressing room... such a thing is normally impossible. The more I cool down, the more my pulse accelerates from realizing what an outrageous thing I have done. When tomorrow arrives, will everything really be able to return to normal?

Tachibana halted. She had wet eyes, as if wanting to bring something up.

I understand, don't worry. I don't intend to go home just like that as well. Now that it has come to this, I will let you play with me until the last second.

– ... There, was a park, right....

– Oh, dummy... Why do you notice all of my feelings...?

Just like when we met at noon, a bookworm and a blonde girl sat on the bench next to each other. Perhaps, right now, it was enough for both of us. There was no need for us to go to movie, amusement park or karaoke. If we can just stay together, we can spend so many hours just like that. And

that is despite us being together every day during the school term, there's something strange with it.

– Ehehe~ One-day... boyfriend.....&j

My one-day... girlfriend limply pressed her body against my left arm.

She looked like was having fun. Even though she is with someone like me, she looks like she is having fun. I still feel like seeing her happy face. Well, I may not bite her ear, but I decided to get even with her for earlier.

I lightly shook off the hand clinging to me, hugged her shoulder and... reached out my hand to her head and... caressed it.

– Kya...

– Hm. You didn't like it...?

– No... There's no way I can reject you, is there? Carry on...?

Her hair was soft and long. I'm sure it is difficult to care for it. It seems she felt that I have touched her as someone important, so Tachibana eagerly brought her delicate body closer. Like that, it happened that I was embracing her with one hand and I was inevitably embarrassed that I started this myself.

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Chapter 39 - Melting

From time to time a thought crosses my mind, that anything and everything might be a lie.

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Probably, it happens because the less you can distinguish living itself from a dream, the more it becomes inevitably vague.

Still, isn't everyone like that? After all, the only thing most of us do is going down the same road day after day. Studying and working, it's not like they differ much. Therefore, the more you go through similar days, the more the boundary of the visible scenery becomes unclear. And as you somehow kill time, a real feeling is floating somewhere...

It's fine if it is not me playing the popular game. Strangely, it's fine if it is not me doing my best at studying. And it's not like it's absolutely necessary for it to be me who unsteadily walks the same road wearing the same uniform together with everyone.

It's fine if I'm not me. I can even be replaced with someone else.

But most likely, any person is like that. If you live without any reason, just because you are alive, it naturally becomes boring.

And that is not good nor bad. Anybody is a nobody. I was a nobody as well. Just like that, I was supposed to do my best, comply and live, but...

"... Chu..."

That single moment. No, was it actually a longer time?

That was, for sure, a kiss.

Although I still suspect that it is a lie, even after three days have passed. And yet even now, that feeling is stuck deep inside my body and is not getting out. When I touch my lips like this, I end up remembering.

Her soft, pleasant lips...

Even so, it's a lie. I'm sure of it.

Yeah, that day, I was too carried away as well. I was not myself but a completely different person. It is absolutely so. Just holding hands is already crazy, but linking arms, clinging to each other with her in a swimsuit... Aah, it's no good. I'm about to writhe from remembering just a little. Her being too cute, being happy from getting along, getting carried away because I'm the boyfriend, and that is why I became proactive to that extent... like I thought. It was a different person for sure.

...However, there is a reason I cannot evade matters regarding that day.

"Chu... Jun..."

Tachibana... No, Karen. Throughout the day, so close to me, she has been calling me by my name - Jun. Without a doubt, at that moment, I was next to her. There was no one else. And not just anyone else, I had to be me. If you get called by your name so many times, you cannot replace yourself with someone else.

— Even so, there's no way it can be true...!

Ichijou Jun, has kissed. Ichijou Jun, has kissed with Tachibana Karen. Ichijou Jun..... was wanted. In any case, it's impossible.

Clearly, I'm not worthy of her. I was always a friendless nerd. An unsociable male student who doesn't look towards anyone. As I became completely cold, fun things and happy things, apart from things that would let me continue to be me, if that sounds better,... I gave up everything, and yet.

Kiss, what is it? What is a better way to interpret it? Kiss, isn't it something that you do with that kind of partner...? When it ended, she made an apologetic face. She quietly apologized. After that, she ran back. I could only stand still without saying anything.

Being worried like this is the first time for me. I became thoroughly effeminate. I hate myself being like this. I'd rather quit being Ichijou Jun right now and switch places with someone else.

.....

— Aniki... Can it be, that he was rejected...?

— Keyaki-chan, shh! Uh... Still, it's a pity. Oh, Jun-kun, and he was even looking at his phone so much, right

– ... Yeah, I'll leave him alone for now..... Somehow, I feel sorry...

– For the time being, that is for the best...

Family's voices could be heard from nearby the closed door.

... Rejected? Me? No really, maybe, that is actually true. As a matter of fact, calls from her, which were coming every day without fail, completely stopped after we parted on that day.

..... Does she hate me now? Even though we were so close and whispered each other's names? Even though I was kissed?

No... That kiss, who was the one that initiated it in the first place? Turmoil inside my chest made the small memory messy and I can hardly remember anything. Like this, I can't be confident in the memories of what happened three days ago. I wonder if I'm conveniently rewriting them to save myself from stress.

... Could it be, that I have lost control and went for a kiss?

Hmm, it does seem possible. Being accepted by such a cute girl I got carried away... that is surely so.

Even if it is Tachibana, there's no way she would've kissed me. It was just me doing something foolish.

But in that case, at that time, what did she think of it? Was it, after all, unpleasant? Well then, it is natural that I'm hated... Everything is my fault...

Turmoil intensifies as time passes, screws in my head are melting from high temperature... I... might be broken already. Even though I had so much fun that day... Now I don't feel like doing anything. I'm not even sure about my own memories.

I surely ought to make a call. However, if I heard Karen's voice right now, I wouldn't be able to stay sane.

I don't feel like being faced with her. When I think that I might be hated already, I might be killed even by a short message. Smartphone that was so annoying is nowadays completely silent.

Anyway, one week passed since I have retired from my position as a one-day boyfriend, days resembling a gaping hole went on.

– Hey, Aniki, you messed up again

– Hmm... That's because recently, I haven't really touched the controller

– Yeah, yeah, excuses, excuses. You have much free time during summer holidays, so I can keep company with you for some practice juuust a little bit?

– ... I won't lose the next one

– Ha, keep saying that&j Well then, one more!

I went along with my family who tried to bring me back to normal everyday life without resisting. This kind of "Just like always" pampers the depressed me.

– Hey, hey, Jun-kun, how about this! Helping to arrange the festival or overseas volunteering? Events that happen only during summer, there are surprisingly lots of them!

– Hahaha, I will absolutely not work for free. Well, it's a different matter if I am to be aunt's assistant

– Come on, you're so passive. Of course, it's alright to be carefree since it's holiday. Time flies when you do nothing, so just give it a thought... okay? If it is about money, I'll figure something out.

– Yeah, yeah, if it is just giving it a thought...

Just what were summer holidays for me? It was always about pile of old complete sets of manga or light novels, sound of booting up the console, eyes tired from the blue light. And that is waking up late, taking a nap at the same time, I was also staying up late night after night. It has been so for a long time. Summer holidays means staying inside the house by default.

Summer holiday of playing by the sea with Tachibana and everyone. Summer holiday of watching fireworks alone with Tachibana.

I wonder if such a wonderful future was possible? When I think like that, I feel pain in my chest.

I finally realized. Being together with Tachibana was incredibly fun. That a time would come, when I would hold how I was teased day after day dear. I want my cheek to be poked again. I want to let her play with the sullen faced virgin nerd until she's satisfied. I don't want to make her apologize anymore. All that she wants, I want to give it. I want to hear her voice. I want touch her once again. I want to see up close how she is laughing. I want her to call me by my name again. I want to be together every day.

That is why I reached out towards the smartphone with my hand, but... my fingers always stop right before it. Like that, for nearly half of the summer holidays, I have been struggling alone inside a cage.

Chapter 39 - Melting

From time to time a thought crosses my mind, that anything and everything might be a lie. Familiar faces of my family, manga and games that are supposed to be exciting, people from school, whose names and faces I can't remember, everything is in truth just fragments of a dream... And if I wake up, I will return not to my false self, but to a true someone. Sometimes I think like that. Probably, it happens because the less you can distinguish living itself from a dream, the more it becomes inevitably vague.

Still, isn't everyone like that? After all, the only thing most of us do is going down the same road day after day. Studying and working, it's not like they differ much. Therefore, the more you go through similar days, the more the boundary of the visible scenery becomes unclear. And as you somehow kill time, a real feeling is floating somewhere...

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Clearly, I'm not worthy of her. I was always a friendless nerd. An unsociable male student who doesn't look towards anyone. As I became completely cold, fun things and happy things, apart from things that would let me continue to be me, if that sounds better,... I gave up everything, and yet.

Kiss, what is it? What is a better way to interpret it? Kiss, isn't it something that you do with that kind of partner...? When it ended, she made an apologetic face. She quietly apologized. After that, she ran back. I could only stand still without saying anything.

Being worried like this is the first time for me. I became thoroughly effeminate. I hate myself being like this. I'd rather quit being Ichijou Jun right now and switch places with someone else.

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– Aniki... Can it be, that he was rejected...?

– Keyaki-chan, shh! Uh... Still, it's a pity. Oh, Jun-kun, and he was even looking at his phone so much, right

– ... Yeah, I'll leave him alone for now..... Somehow, I feel sorry...

– For the time being, that is for the best...

Family's voices could be heard from nearby the closed door.

... Rejected? Me? No really, maybe, that is actually true. As a matter of fact, calls from her, which were coming every day without fail, completely stopped after we parted on that day.

..... Does she hate me now? Even though we were so close and whispered each other's names? Even though I was kissed?

No... That kiss, who was the one that initiated it in the first place? Turmoil inside my chest made the small memory messy and I can hardly remember anything. Like this, I can't be confident in the memories of what happened three days ago. I wonder if I'm conveniently rewriting them to save myself from stress.

... Could it be, that I have lost control and went for a kiss?

Hmm, it does seem possible. Being accepted by such a cute girl I got carried away... that is surely so. Even if it is Tachibana, there's no way she would've kissed me. It was just me doing something foolish. But in that case, at that time, what did she think of it? Was it, after all, unpleasant? Well then, it is natural that I'm hated... Everything is my fault...

Turmoil intensifies as time passes, screws in my head are melting from high temperature... I... might be broken already. Even though I had so much fun that day... Now I don't feel like doing anything. I'm not even sure about my own memories.

I surely ought to make a call. However, if I heard Karen's voice right now, I wouldn't be able to stay sane. I don't feel like being faced with her. When I think that I might be hated already, I might be killed even by a short message. Smartphone that was so annoying is nowadays completely silent.

Anyway, one week passed since I have retired from my position as a one-day boyfriend, days resembling a gaping hole went on.

– Hey, Aniki, you messed up again

– Hmm... That's because recently, I haven't really touched the controller

– Yeah, yeah, excuses, excuses. You have much free time during summer holidays, so I can keep company with you for some practice juuust a little bit?

– ... I won't lose the next one

– Ha, keep saying that&j Well then, one more!

I went along with my family who tried to bring me back to normal everyday life without resisting. This kind of "Just like always" pampers the depressed me.

– Hey, hey, Jun-kun, how about this! Helping to arrange the festival or overseas volunteering? Events that happen only during summer, there are surprisingly lots of them!

– Hahaha, I will absolutely not work for free. Well, it's a different matter if I am to be aunt's assistant

– Come on, you're so passive. Of course, it's alright to be carefree since it's holiday. Time flies when you do nothing, so just give it a thought... okay? If it is about money, I'll figure something out.

– Yeah, yeah, if it is just giving it a thought...

Just what were summer holidays for me? It was always about pile of old complete sets of manga or light novels, sound of booting up the console, eyes tired from the blue light. And that is waking up late, taking a nap at the same time, I was also staying up late night after night. It has been so for a long time. Summer holidays means staying inside the house by default.

Summer holiday of playing by the sea with Tachibana and everyone. Summer holiday of watching fireworks alone with Tachibana.

I wonder if such a wonderful future was possible? When I think like that, I feel pain in my chest.

I finally realized. Being together with Tachibana was incredibly fun. That a time would come, when I would hold how I was teased day after day dear. I want my cheek to be poked again. I want to let her play with the sullen faced virgin nerd until she's satisfied. I don't want to make her apologize anymore. All that she wants, I want to give it. I want to hear her voice. I want touch her once again. I want to see up close how she is laughing. I want her to call me by my name again. I want to be together every day.

That is why I reached out towards the smartphone with my hand, but... my fingers always stop right before it. Like that, for nearly half of the summer holidays, I have been struggling alone inside a cage.

Chapter 39 - Melting

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From time to time a thought crosses my mind, that anything and everything might be a lie.

Familiar faces of my family, manga and games that are supposed to be exciting, people from school, whose names and faces I can't remember, everything is in truth just fragments of a dream... And if I wake up, I will return not to my false self, but to a true someone. Sometimes I think like that. Probably, it happens because the less you can distinguish living itself from a dream, the more it becomes inevitably vague.

Still, isn't everyone like that? After all, the only thing most of us do is going down the same road day after day. Studying and working, it's not like they differ much. Therefore, the more you go through similar days, the more the boundary of the visible scenery becomes unclear. And as you somehow kill time, a real feeling is floating somewhere...

It's fine if it is not me playing the popular game. Strangely, it's fine if it is not me doing my best at studying. And it's not like it's absolutely necessary for it to be me who unsteadily walks the same road wearing the same uniform together with everyone.

It's fine if I'm not me. I can even be replaced with someone else.

But most likely, any person is like that. If you live without any reason, just because you are alive, it naturally becomes boring.

And that is not good nor bad. Anybody is a nobody. I was a nobody as well. Just like that, I was supposed to do my best, comply and live, but...

"... Chu..."

Chu

That single moment. No, was it actually a longer time?

That was, for sure, a kiss.

Although I still suspect that it is a lie, even after three days have passed. And yet even now, that feeling is stuck deep inside my body and is not getting out. When I touch my lips like this, I end up remembering. Her soft, pleasant lips...

Even so, it's a lie. I'm sure of it.

Yeah, that day, I was too carried away as well. I was not myself but a completely different person. It is absolutely so. Just holding hands is already crazy, but linking arms, clinging to each other with her in a swimsuit... Aah, it's no good. I'm about to writhe from remembering just a little. Her being too cute, being happy from getting along, getting carried away because I'm the boyfriend, and that is why I became proactive to that extent... like I thought. It was a different person for sure.

...However, there is a reason I cannot evade matters regarding that day.

"Chu... Jun..."

Chu... Jun...

Tachibana... No, Karen. Throughout the day, so close to me, she has been calling me by my name - Jun. Without a doubt, at that moment, I was next to her. There was no one else. And not just anyone else, I had to be me. If you get called by your name so many times, you cannot replace yourself with someone else.

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Chapter 40 - Karen-sick

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Yet, both me and Karen didn't hit it off in the beginning. Even now, I sometimes think like that. An approachable girl and an unapproachable girl. One always grinning and loving school, and the other hating school so much that it can be noticed from the air around her. That girl was often surrounded by boys, while I was resting my chin in my hands, I just watched that from a distance.

Similarities that we share, that would be... unwillingness to study and that's about it? But still, Karen. She doesn't really skip school like me. Even stuff like homework, she asks others to teach her and some way or another properly finishes it. And she looks like she's having fun going to school. As expected, we are a bit different.

Truly, how did it happen that we got along? We were in the same class and our seats were together. Apart from that, I feel like there were no other chances.

School is crap. It was at the time when I murmured it inside my chest like a favorite spell that you always chant.

– Yaa-yoo-ii. Ehehe. Good morning!

Every morning at the same time, blonde girl clings her body on to me from the seat behind. Truly sultry and dazzling. When you're with this girl, you won't even be able to see if it rains outside.

By the way, Karen is the first one to call me without any honorifics. It is usually Hyodou-san. Or Yayoi-chan. That girl who often skips school. The girl who always sleeps. Looks so cold. I also get called. Isn't she pretty cute? Etc., etc....

Because of that, it is fairly awkward to be called Yayoi. I start thinking "Huh, so that was my name", so I actually want her to stop doing it.

– Uu-aah, so noisy right from the morning. I'm telling you, I didn't get to sleep at all. Aah, my sleepiness is about to wear off...

– Hey, hey. What are you planning to do today after school? What are your plans?

– ...Mm? Today as well? With me?

I got up and combed my disheveled hair with my hand. Turning around, I looked at the usual smile, which replaces the alarm clock.

– Ehehe&j You make it seem troublesome, but you always play together with me, right?

– Not really...

– I... honestly act spoiled around good people, you know?

– So irritating. What the heck is a good person...

As expected, a beautiful face. This feeling that she can get along with anyone. All of the boys probably misunderstand, and it seems difficult from having girls liking and hating her.

... However, according to the rumor that I have heard, she is fierce in her plays with men or something.

According to the rumor, when she has troubles with money, she coaxes some sort of an older man.

According to the rumor, she randomly chooses a third year senior and does it every day.

This sounds interesting. It might be a source of a nice gossip. That is why, I decided to try probing a bit.

– ... Karen, weren't you confessed to yesterday? Isn't it fine to go with a guy?

– No... That is, um...

Karen made a gloomy face and looked away. I noticed it later, but topics like this one resemble land mines. A girl, who basically clings to me without a care about surrounding eyes, looking away by herself, it could only happen with this timing.

– ...I turned him down on the spot

– Why? Even though the other party, somebody called Takase, is a good looking guy?

– Rather, it's so good to be together with Yayoi. I just want to have some fun... Hey, Yayoi's nails are cute. Bring me with you, please...?

Huh? Is this a fellow girl? Something like it is better with me than with a guy. Oi, oi, my heart is about to skip a beat which is unusual for me ...

But still, this girl was like that at all times. Should I say surprisingly pure hearted, or is it better to say childish? It's like I have to worry that I need to protect her. Why would that sort of rumors circulate? I

don't get it. Everything's a lie. I'm saying it as the one who is always together with her, so there's no doubt about it.

– Well then. Who's your type?

– Eh? Let me think... The one they call gap moe?1 Like Yayoi?

Haa? Which part of me is good?If I ask that, she can easily list 20 of my strong points. That is why embarrassed, I stop her at the third one.

I think that probably, it doesn't matter if we are alike or not.She looks for me calling my name. She touches me while she smiles. She skips on studies together with me and from time to time invites to do the homework together.Unexpectedly, that may have been enough to be a friend.

– Miss Momoko. Homework is nonsense. Super help. I'll end up dead like this.

– I say, Yayoi. You don't learn anything at all...

– It's fine, Momoko! An excuse for three of us to gather, I've found another one&j

– Huh... Karen as well? Look here. For your information, I have club activities to do.

Another close friend whom Karen has introduced.Also, the girl with whom I didn't hit it off, No. 2.Long hair, big tits glasses-chan, who is obviously diligent. She is girl from such a different race, that it is unthinkable how we can hang out together.

But at the time when I got to know this girl, for a number of reasons, I got "Karen-sick" as well.I think, that if I had not met Karen, most likely... it wouldn't have turned out well.

– You know. It's no good if you're not there, Momoko nee-san

Nicknaming other girls, what's wrong with me?Before I knew it, I even forgot skipping school.

– What's with this Momoko nee-san... Even though were of the same age...

– Yeah, yeah, despite saying so, you seem to look happy... Fufu. Hey, Tenjuin, skip your club and let's go to family restaurant&j I'm not letting you sleep tonight&a

– Oh... dummy

School life purified by Karen.In a flash it was almost time for the second year, but when I found that I'm going to be in the same class with both of them, I was beyond happy.

Am I perhaps becoming a bit more honest? Karen, is that your fault?

However... For this reason.After the three of us had a blast during Golden Week2, it became dull as soon as it ended.Even if I invited Karen after school, she would just come with some reason and dodge me.

– Sorry... I'll make up for it during the weekend... okay?

– Okay, but, wasn't the last week the same? You don't have to apologize, I just want to know the reason a little bit...

– I'm sorry...

Just what the heck is happening?If a guy is the cause, isn't it okay to let us know? We're not of the type to hinder you going out with someone from the side. Did you not trust us so much?

Could it be that that time when you brought Ichijou along for the school trip has something to do with this? No, certainly not...Will she hate me if I spy? But still, as expected it's on my mind.

Still, Karen's man... huh? It should be an understatement to say that he is extremely lucky.

It is not only about going home with joined hands and having dates often.Being told "it's so good to be together with XX" like I do, its impressive destructive power is beyond imagination. A guy who will not end up falling for her if she likes him, is there one in this school? There's no way there is.

I thought like that and on about tenth day of summer holidays.All of a sudden I was called by Karen to a café, that three of us usually go to.

Have she finally started dating?Hey, hey, who's that very lucky someone?Will you let me meet him?On a relatively serious note, is it someone who suits our Karen-chan?I'll make fun of both of you. I'll take a photo of how both of you are dere-dere and upload it to the class's LINE.

Yet... on that day. My anticipation was betrayed.I have seen Karen's about to cry face for the first time.

– ...Yayoi. Hey, what should I do.....

I, might have been rejected.

That was the first thing my best friend have said.With such an anger welling up that I couldn't say anything, I immediately stood up with a thud.

When someone does something that contradicts how they usually behave.
in early May.

Chapter 40 - Karen-sick

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– I... honestly act spoiled around good people, you know?

– So irritating. What the heck is a good person...

As expected, a beautiful face. This feeling that she can get along with anyone. All of the boys probably misunderstand, and it seems difficult from having girls liking and hating her.

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According to the rumor, when she has troubles with money, she coaxes some sort of an older

man. According to the rumor, she randomly chooses a third year senior and does it every day.

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Karen made a gloomy face and looked away. I noticed it later, but topics like this one resemble land mines. A girl, who basically clings to me without a care about surrounding eyes, looking away by herself, it could only happen with this timing.

– ...I turned him down on the spot

– Why? Even though the other party, somebody called Takase, is a good looking guy?

– Rather, it's so good to be together with Yayoi. I just want to have some fun... Hey, Yayoi's nails are cute. Bring me with you, please...?

Huh? Is this a fellow girl? Something like it is better with me than with a guy. Oi, oi, my heart is about to skip a beat which is unusual for me ...

But still, this girl was like that at all times. Should I say surprisingly pure hearted, or is it better to say childish? It's like I have to worry that I need to protect her. Why would that sort of rumors circulate? I don't get it. Everything's a lie. I'm saying it as the one who is always together with her, so there's no doubt about it.

– Well then. Who's your type?

– Eh? Let me think... The one they call gap moe? I like Yayoi?

Haa? Which part of me is good? If I ask that, she can easily list 20 of my strong points. That is why embarrassed, I stop her at the third one.

I think that probably, it doesn't matter if we are alike or not. She looks for me calling my name. She touches me while she smiles. She skips on studies together with me and from time to time invites to do the homework together. Unexpectedly, that may have been enough to be a friend.

– Miss Momoko. Homework is nonsense. Super help. I'll end up dead like this.

– I say, Yayoi. You don't learn anything at all...

– It's fine, Momoko! An excuse for three of us to gather, I've found another one&j

– Huh... Karen as well? Look here. For your information, I have club activities to do.

Another close friend whom Karen has introduced. Also, the girl with whom I didn't hit it off, No. 2. Long hair, big tits glasses-chan, who is obviously diligent. She is girl from such a different race, that it is unthinkable how we can hang out together.

But at the time when I got to know this girl, for a number of reasons, I got "Karen-sick" as well. I think, that if I had not met Karen, most likely... it wouldn't have turned out well.

– You know. It's no good if you're not there, Momoko nee-san

Nicknaming other girls, what's wrong with me? Before I knew it, I even forgot skipping school.

– What's with this Momoko nee-san... Even though were of the same age...

– Yeah, yeah, despite saying so, you seem to look happy... Fufu. Hey, Tenjuin, skip your club and let's go to family restaurant&j I'm not letting you sleep tonight&a

– Oh... dummy

School life purified by Karen. In a flash it was almost time for the second year, but when I found that I'm going to be in the same class with both of them, I was beyond happy.

Am I perhaps becoming a bit more honest? Karen, is that your fault?

However... For this reason. After the three of us had a blast during Golden Week2, it became dull as soon as it ended. Even if I invited Karen after school, she would just come with some reason and dodge me.

– Sorry... I'll make up for it during the weekend... okay?

– Okay, but, wasn't the last week the same? You don't have to apologize, I just want to know the reason a little bit...

– I'm sorry...

Just what the heck is happening? If a guy is the cause, isn't it okay to let us know? We're not of the type to hinder you going out with someone from the side. Did you not trust us so much?

Could it be that that time when you brought Ichijou along for the school trip has something to do with this? No, certainly not... Will she hate me if I spy? But still, as expected it's on my mind.

Still, Karen's man... huh? It should be an understatement to say that he is extremely lucky.

It is not only about going home with joined hands and having dates often. Being told "it's so good to be together with XX" like I do, its impressive destructive power is beyond imagination. A guy who will not end up falling for her if she likes him, is there one in this school? There's no way there is.

I thought like that and on about tenth day of summer holidays. All of a sudden I was called by Karen to a café, that three of us usually go to.

Have she finally started dating? Hey, hey, who's that very lucky someone? Will you let me meet him? On a relatively serious note, is it someone who suits our Karen-chan? I'll make fun of both of you. I'll take a photo of how both of you are dere-dere and upload it to the class's LINE.

Yet... on that day. My anticipation was betrayed. I have seen Karen's about to cry face for the first time.

– ...Yayoi. Hey, what should I do.....

I, might have been rejected.

That was the first thing my best friend have said. With such an anger welling up that I couldn't say anything, I immediately stood up with a thud.

When someone does something that contradicts how they usually behave.
in early May.

Chapter 40 - Karen-sick

At the time when I have just entered high school my first impression was: Hmm, isn't she cute?

Hmm, isn't she cute

Yet, both me and Karen didn't hit it off in the beginning. Even now, I sometimes think like that. An approachable girl and an unapproachable girl. One always grinning and loving school, and the other hating school so much that it can be noticed from the air around her. That girl was often surrounded by boys, while I was resting my chin in my hands, I just watched that from a distance.

Similarities that we share, that would be... unwillingness to study and that's about it? But still, Karen. She doesn't really skip school like me. Even stuff like homework, she asks others to teach her and some way or another properly finishes it. And she looks like she's having fun going to school. As expected, we are a bit different.

Truly, how did it happen that we got along? We were in the same class and our seats were together. Apart from that, I feel like there were no other chances.

School is crap. It was at the time when I murmured it inside my chest like a favorite spell that you always chant.

– Yaa-yoo-ii. Ehehe. Good morning!

Every morning at the same time, blonde girl clings her body on to me from the seat behind. Truly sultry and dazzling. When you're with this girl, you won't even be able to see if it rains outside.

By the way, Karen is the first one to call me without any honorifics. It is usually Hyodou-san. Or Yayoi-chan. That girl who often skips school. The girl who always sleeps. Looks so cold. I also get called. Isn't she pretty cute? Etc., etc....

Because of that, it is fairly awkward to be called Yayoi. I start thinking "Huh, so that was my name", so I actually want her to stop doing it.

Huh, so that was my name

– Uu-aah, so noisy right from the morning. I'm telling you, I didn't get to sleep at all. Aah, my sleepiness is about to wear off...

– Hey, hey. What are you planning to do today after school? What are your plans?

– ...Mm? Today as well? With me?

I got up and combed my disheveled hair with my hand. Turning around, I looked at the usual smile, which replaces the alarm clock.

– Ehehe&j You make it seem troublesome, but you always play together with me, right?

– Not really...

– I... honestly act spoiled around good people, you know?

– So irritating. What the heck is a good person...

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 – Why? Even though the other party, somebody called Takase, is a good looking guy?
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 Huh? Is this a fellow girl? Something like it is better with me than with a guy. Oi, oi, my heart is about to skip a beat which is unusual for me ...
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– Sorry... I'll make up for it during the weekend... okay?
 – Okay, but, wasn't the last week the same? You don't have to apologize, I just want to know the reason a little bit...
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Chapter 41 - Leave it to me

– Ha, haaaaaaa!?

Rejected? Karen?

As my voice resounded within the calm atmosphere of the shop, blaming gazes gathered on me. I immediately let out an "Ugh..." and forcibly stifled my astonishment. It's been a while since I last let out such a loud voice.

Still... Why! Just why...! Cause, it's Tachibana Karen, you know? She gets confessed to twice a week, she's the number one beauty of the school? Say it's a lie. Let me hear a Karen-like pure hearted love story.

– Ka.... Karen...

Just who is the idiot who rejected Karen? What happened between them? What have the two of you been doing during the school term? Why haven't you told me anything before today?

There was so much I wanted to know. But when I looked at Karen's sad face... By the way, this might be the first time that this girl is not looking in the eye. Even though usually, she would have a cocky grinning face.

I couldn't say anything. That's why I was in despair. Rushing towards Karen who was sitting down on the opposite chair, I stroked her back. But feeling that it won't be enough, I put my arm around her from behind. Just like that, I buried my face into my best friend's blonde hair.

This isn't like me... but. Smells so nice. Like an angel. I'm about to become kind from the bottom of my heart just from touching her hair.

– ... Are you okay? ... Can you talk?

– Sob... Yayoi, thanks... Will you hear me out?

As I somehow returned to my seat and waited, Karen has slowly started to speak.

– Perhaps, it's my first love. I like him so much... Like him...

And the name, which came out of Karen's mouth, was that Ichijou Jun. Basically, he doesn't do anything apart from studies, that's why he's not part of any gossips, irrelevant guy. You can tell at a glance that he is nerdy. Honestly, I can't really see him with Karen.

Plenty of good looking guys have confessed to this girl. Captain of the sports club, vocalist of the light music club, active model from another school... I receive all of the rumors. One month prior to me really getting along with Karen, there was no other fun apart from that. Even though guys better than Ichijou are a dime a dozen. Why?

I recalled how with the start of second year, Karen has forcibly drew him into the group for school trip. And it was right after Golden Week, so speaking of timing, it is perfect.

– I pretended that I wanted him to teach me and was acting spoiled. Day after day, he was so very kind... Oh my gosh, I like him after all...

As her story went on, Karen's face became happier and more relaxed.

... A-ha, I see. Ichijou started standing out a little after the seat change. Karen started getting excessively involved with him, and as an extension he also started talking with us. Still, that guy. Wasn't he unlucky and ever since he entered a new class, wasn't he alone for a while?

And yet, around the time when summer holidays were about to start, it came to be that everyone was relying on him. Thinking carefully, it was an amazing change... maybe. Considering that Karen was involved in this, it may not be so strange.

– But then, why? If you were clinging to each other like that, it sounds like you could've easily started going out. What... has happened?

– Mm... That is...

Karen brought her hand to her lips and briefly touched it. As if remembering something, she made a happy face, but then as if she remembered something else, she made a gloomy face once again.

– ... I. His first kiss, I've snatched it away...

– Karen...

– Even though I wanted to do it with a better mood. Even though every day I had various delusions in the bed! He was excessively kind that day and I got carried away...

Regret has spread on my best friend's fair face. According to her story, it seems she thought she would

confess that day. She practiced with Ichijou's picture on smartphone many times, did visualization even in bed, and it seems she was planning to introduce him to me if they started going out. Just how cute are you... But since she has no decent love experience, she makes fruitless effort in crucial matters.

– Just dating is not enough at all. That is why, that is why! Let's marry at once, I really thought I would say that... First kiss was painful, bitter, but... very good. He is, after all, the one for me...

And finally she added one more tiny "...like him" Just which part of that guy is good? I just don't get it. Either way, Ichijou who doesn't seem to be experienced with women of all things, huh...

– Yayoi, what should I do... Now I'm hated by Jun. I was rejected...!

– But. Have Ichijou said so?

– I kissed him and ran away, so I don't know. He was turned off for sure...

– You have to meet and check that. Otherwise, isn't it just an assumption?

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... I have to do something. For Karen's sake.... After all, if she makes such a face, it's impossible to just watch in silence.... This misunderstanding, can it be somehow solved?... Or rather, what am I getting heated up for? I haven't noticed...

It was the first time I had such feelings for my friend. She is after all a mysterious girl. I mean, even a lazy person like me can't ignore her. There is something that makes me worried about it.

– Would you do anything if it means you can kiss Ichijou again? Are you okay with whatever happens?

– Can you, do something?

– Haven't you specially called me? And I don't want to hear idle complaints, it's just a waste of time. So, are you okay with whatever happens?

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– But. Have Ichijou said so?

– I kissed him and ran away, so I don't know. He was turned off for sure...

– You have to meet and check that. Otherwise, isn't it just an assumption?

– ... No, no, no, no way! I'm, too embarrassed...

Fufu, dummy Karen. There's no way there is a guy who will not fall in love if an angel like you kisses him.

... I have to do something. For Karen's sake.... After all, if she makes such a face, it's impossible to just watch in silence.... This misunderstanding, can it be somehow solved?... Or rather, what am I getting heated up for? I haven't noticed...

It was the first time I had such feelings for my friend. She is after all a mysterious girl. I mean, even a lazy person like me can't ignore her. There is something that makes me worried about it.

– Would you do anything if it means you can kiss Ichijou again? Are you okay with whatever happens?

– Can you, do something?

– Haven't you specially called me? And I don't want to hear idle complaints, it's just a waste of time. So, are you okay with whatever happens?

– Yeah

– Alright. Well then, leave it to me

However, what can I do? Should I get in touch with Ichijou and question him? Although I haven't had a decent talk with him previously. Is there something that can be done through the boys in our class? To begin with, does that bookworm have close friends? Is there something in the rumors related to him that can be used?

Well... Minor details can be dealt with later.

Anyhow, he has hurt my best friend's feelings, so I'll make him return his debt. No matter how embarrassed bookworm may be, no matter how much he says he dislikes it... I will certainly make him and Karen kiss in front of the whole class. That would be getting even. He is probably in love with Karen

anyway. It's fine if both of them are happy. I will take a picture of that moment and send it to Karen. Well, things are getting interesting. After all, plenty of happy summer holidays are still remaining.

Chapter 41 - Leave it to me

Chapter 41 - Leave it to me

– Ha, haaaaaaa!?

Rejected? Karen?

As my voice resounded within the calm atmosphere of the shop, blaming gazes gathered on me. I immediately let out an "Ugh..." and forcibly stifled my astonishment. It's been a while since I last let out such a loud voice.

Ugh...

Still... Why! Just why...! Cause, it's Tachibana Karen, you know? She gets confessed to twice a week, she's the number one beauty of the school? Say it's a lie. Let me hear a Karen-like pure hearted love story.

– Ka.... Karen...

Just who is the idiot who rejected Karen? What happened between them? What have the two of you been doing during the school term? Why haven't you told me anything before today?

There was so much I wanted to know. But when I looked at Karen's sad face... By the way, this might be the first time that this girl is not looking in the eye. Even though usually, she would have a cocky grinning face.

I couldn't say anything. That's why I was in despair. Rushing towards Karen who was sitting down on the opposite chair, I stroked her back. But feeling that it won't be enough, I put my arm around her from behind. Just like that, I buried my face into my best friend's blonde hair.

This isn't like me... but. Smells so nice. Like an angel. I'm about to become kind from the bottom of my heart just from touching her hair.

– ... Are you okay? ... Can you talk?

– Sob... Yayoi, thanks... Will you hear me out?

As I somehow returned to my seat and waited, Karen has slowly started to speak.

– Perhaps, it's my first love. I like him so much... Like him...

And the name, which came out of Karen's mouth, was that Ichijou Jun. Basically, he doesn't do anything apart from studies, that's why he's not part of any gossips, irrelevant guy. You can tell at a glance that he is nerdy. Honestly, I can't really see him with Karen.

Plenty of good looking guys have confessed to this girl. Captain of the sports club, vocalist of the light music club, active model from another school... I receive all of the rumors. One month prior to me really getting along with Karen, there was no other fun apart from that. Even though guys better than Ichijou are a dime a dozen. Why?

I recalled how with the start of second year, Karen has forcibly drew him into the group for school trip. And it was right after Golden Week, so speaking of timing, it is perfect.

– I pretended that I wanted him to teach me and was acting spoiled. Day after day, he was so very kind...

Oh my gosh, I like him after all...

As her story went on, Karen's face became happier and more relaxed.

... A-ha, I see. Ichijou started standing out a little after the seat change. Karen started getting excessively involved with him, and as an extension he also started talking with us. Still, that guy. Wasn't he unlucky and ever since he entered a new class, wasn't he alone for a while?

And yet, around the time when summer holidays were about to start, it came to be that everyone was relying on him. Thinking carefully, it was an amazing change... maybe. Considering that Karen was involved in this, it may not be so strange.

– But then, why? If you were clinging to each other like that, it sounds like you could've easily started going out. What... has happened?

– Mm... That is...

Karen brought her hand to her lips and briefly touched it. As if remembering something, she made a happy face, but then as if she remembered something else, she made a gloomy face once again.

– ... I. His first kiss, I've snatched it away...

– Karen...

– Even though I wanted to do it with a better mood. Even though every day I had various delusions in the bed! He was excessively kind that day and I got carried away...

Regret has spread on my best friend's fair face. According to her story, it seems she thought she would confess that day. She practiced with Ichijou's picture on smartphone many times, did visualization even in bed, and it seems she was planning to introduce him to me if they started going out.

Just how cute are you... But since she has no decent love experience, she makes fruitless effort in crucial matters.

– Just dating is not enough at all. That is why, that is why! Let's marry at once, I really thought I would say that... First kiss was painful, bitter, but... very good. He is, after all, the one for me...

Let's marry at once

And finally she added one more tiny "...like him" Just which part of that guy is good? I just don't get it. Either way, Ichijou who doesn't seem to be experienced with women of all things, huh...

like him

– Yayoi, what should I do... Now I'm hated by Jun. I was rejected...!

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c42

Chapter 42 - Prison Labor

– ...Rei! Jun too! Come on, wake up

Voice, which I'm still not used to hear, has called for me and my companion who is sleeping next to me. Husky female voice of a young adult. The way she calls me is for sure rude, but there is also a degree of familiarity mixed in her tone of voice. Despite the fact that we have met for the first time just yesterday. 5:30 in the morning, tatami room. Smell of the sea breeze came in through the open window. The sound of waves can be heard from the other side of the morning air. It is quiet, but there are certainly sounds of water rushing. I can't help but feel the summer and it feels weird. Because for me, summer was always about playing games or reading manga nonstop, all day long.

Right now, for some reason, that has completely changed. Fatigue from yesterday and heat were gradually pressing my back and...

– Hey! I won't repeat myself. There's lots of work to do today as well

– Hnn... Yeah, right away...

– Good. Rei too, should I wake you up roughly?

– Understood

This is the second day since I left home. I rose up. Today as well, I have to work and work and deeply sleep.

Luckily, it appears that in this coastal private lodging "Hiiragi Manor" there is absolutely no free time. Even though apart from having delicious seafood for dinner I'm working for free, I don't mind. That is because what I need to do right now is only to work and to forget.

Morning duty starts from picking up rubbish in the swimming area. Holding tongs and plastic bag, I was earnestly walking on the beach for the first time in several years. Due to the early morning, there were hardly any people. Only sounds of the wind and waves were resounding gently.

But still, before long, this area will likely become bustling. Whatever is said, it is summer, what's more, it is sea. Yesterday, just a little, I have seen for the first time in my life how crazy, vigorous, normie party animals were coming and going. It felt like going to the zoo.

I wonder if we are, after all, errand-boys (un-normies), as we clean the garbage that those guys have dropped. It is a fresh feeling, somewhat like prison labor.

... Let me see, still, prison, huh? Have I committed some sort of a crime? And yet mysteriously, my will to work surged. I had a feeling that as long as I do my best, I'll get liberated from some crime, which I don't really understand myself.

– Ichijou-kun.....! Wait, too fast, too fast!

I stopped walking. As I turned around, my youth companion, Komatsu Rei, came running. It seems we are both lacking in physical training.

– Haa... Haa... You've been trying so hard since yesterday, haven't you Ichijou-kun...

– Hm, does it look like that...?

– Nee-san was grateful as well. She said "That guy, strangely has some guts"

This loner-colleague classmate has saved me again.

When I was thinking that I would rather run away to the other side of the Earth, he has sent me a message saying "Nee-san's private lodge is in a lack of manpower". And that is how I came after an immediate reply. Of course this is not a trip to Brazil, but it only takes about two hours by bus to get here. That's probably the minimum necessary distance to deceive the gaping hole in my chest.

After all, nobody can find me here... isn't that right?

Well, I got to see aunt's face happy from the fact that I'm going to work at the beach. Thinking about how he might have returned to being a loner, it's not bad to have Komatsu-kun owe me one. It is killing two birds with one stone.

– I didn't think you would come. Even though I tried only because I got nothing to lose.

– Have you called others from our class?

– No? I didn't have a decent talk with anyone apart from Ichijou-kun

– Is that so? That's good then. There's still much rubbish, let's go

– Ye-, yeah...

We continued to work. The simpler the work and the more I was dripped in sweat, the easier I deceived the gloomy feeling of emptiness inside my chest. But in the end, it is still only deceiving. I will end up remembering again after the work is over in any case.

Her exceedingly cute, laughing face... It still painfully remained inside my chest ...

– Jun, stop daydreaming! There is still lots of laundry to do!

Inside the hot kitchen, Komatsu-kun's older sister Ririka-san, raised her voice. She has denim hot pants on her long tanned legs, but as she is inside the kitchen she is also wearing an apron and her long red hair is gathered into a ponytail. She looks as if she's in her mid-twenties, but it seems she has succeeded this private lodge from her parents. With strong eyes that look confident she gives pep talks to other employees as well. I was wondering what kind of person would be Komatsu-kun's sister, but she is his complete opposite.

– Peak will be after this, so brace up.

– Ye-, yes...!

– I have prepared quite a lot of rewards, okay?

This place also happens to be a lunch counter and the sea is close, so during the day it completely changes into a beach hut. It is open to the non-guests as well, so this place is quite busy. More precisely, there is a pretty hotel close to here, so guests are getting stolen. It appears that most of the income comes from food and drinks.

Basically it is like this during the day, therefore I seldom go to the sea. I often get exposed to the air overflowing with energy of vigorous party animals, so by the time I get to have a pause, it is already evening.

That being said, work does not end here. Because even though Ririka-san calls it "reward", personally, I would call it heavy labor itself. There is no lie in her declaration of "lots", there are sashimi and stuff lined up on the dining table, but...

– Haa... Really, you guys have some strange tastes, huh? Right now, it is summer holidays, you know? In a place like this, what are you loafing around for?

Giggling, Komatsu-kun's sister drained another cup of shochu. It has been about half an hour since we started eating, but she already reeks of alcohol. Her dignified face is red as well. By the way, this has also happened yesterday. It doesn't happen to be an established part of the work done by the volunteers, right...?

– Come on, it was nee-san who called us, wasn't it!

– Haha, that's right. Well then... Ichijou, do you have a girl you like?

– Not really...

– Oh, a yes-face...&j Haa... Aren't you guys in second year? This place is close to the sea, there are both men and women lying around there. As they are not here, why don't you just go and pick them up?

– What's with that way of talking, as if it is about picking up shells...

– After all, rooms are empty for so long, they will soon stink... right? Here, you guys, have a cupful as well.

– Nee-san, please stop...

– It's fine, it's fine. Rei and Jun too, aren't you already seventeen? Come, come

– I won't be drinking, absolutely

– Che, ain't you a Serious-kun... It would've been more fun if someone more easy-going came. Alas. How I want to have a chat with a cute girl

– Nee-san, Ichijou-kun is here, please stop it...

It's difficult, but comfortable at the same time. Both of them don't know about my circumstances. Even my aunt and little sister suspect that I was rejected. Thinking about that, I'm so happy to be able to work hard. Even though it is only the second day, I started being pleased with this situation. After working and working and then keeping company for idle talk, there is only sleep.

– Ahaha... Sorry about my sister, okay...?

– She is an excessively easy-going person.

11:30 pm. Well-regulated life. Urging my tired body, I swiftly finished laying out the futon. I want to quickly sleep. I still worry, but I can easily sleep if I'm this tired. The only thing left is to wait before

Komatsu-kun finishes his preparations, but...

– Hey...? Isn't it, summer-like?

– Ha, huh? Which part of it?

Youth with a childish face and visible freckles shyly laughed.

– Like staying together overnight with a friend. Somehow, it's a bit fun... maybe

– ... Basically, we're only working

– Even so. Ichijou-kun, didn't you hate being a loner?

Hate being a loner...? I have never thought about it.

– Did you... hate it?

– I don't know... but. After ceasing to be a loner, I started thinking that I don't want to return to being one, um. That it would be great to further get along with everyone. Is it... impossible?

As I tried to move my head, his butt fell down on the futon with a thump. Seeing that, Komatsu-kun smiled with a "Hahaha, sorry, sorry".

– Fu-aah..... At any rate, if you want to get along with everyone, you're not supposed to be here. It is indeed summer, so let's rest.

– Yeah... Ah, right!

– Hm...?

For some reason Komatsu-kun rustled behind him and took out his smartphone. And what he has shown me was the chat history with classmates.

– What?

– You know, Hyoudou-san, she asked if Ichijou was together with someone. Haven't you got the message?

– It's noisy, so I turned it off

– Come one... Isn't having smartphone ringing supposed to be part of the job? Has something happened?

– Well... I wonder...

Has something happened? There shouldn't have happened anything concerning Hyoudou. Why is it Hyoudou? The more I thought, the more something cold has been running down my spine. Among my classmates, the only one who is supposed to know that I am here is Komatsu-kun.

– Anyway, Ichijou is not with me. It would really help if you sent that.

Sea continued to faintly resound in the distant night air. It seems tonight I won't be able to sleep soundly once again.

Chapter 42 - Prison Labor

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Right now, for some reason, that has completely changed. Fatigue from yesterday and heat were gradually pressing my back and...

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– Hnn... Yeah, right away...

– Good. Rei too, should I wake you up roughly?

– Understood

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But still, before long, this area will likely become bustling. Whatever is said, it is summer, what's more, it is sea. Yesterday, just a little, I have seen for the first time in my life how crazy, vigorous, normie party animals were coming and going. It felt like going to the zoo.

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Well, I got to see aunt's face happy from the fact that I'm going to work at the beach. Thinking about how he might have returned to being a loner, it's not bad to have Komatsu-kun owe me one. It is killing two

birds with one stone.

– I didn't think you would come. Even though I tried only because I got nothing to lose.

– Have you called others from our class?

– No? I didn't have a decent talk with anyone apart from Ichijou-kun

– Is that so? That's good then. There's still much rubbish, let's go

– Ye-, yeah...

We continued to work. The simpler the work and the more I was dripped in sweat, the easier I deceived the gloomy feeling of emptiness inside my chest. But in the end, it is still only deceiving. I will end up remembering again after the work is over in any case.

Her exceedingly cute, laughing face...It still painfully remained inside my chest ...

– Jun, stop daydreaming! There is still lots of laundry to do!

Inside the hot kitchen, Komatsu-kun's older sister Ririka-san, raised her voice. She has denim hot pants on her long tanned legs, but as she is inside the kitchen she is also wearing an apron and her long red hair is gathered into a ponytail. She looks as if she's in her mid-twenties, but it seems she has succeeded this private lodge from her parents. With strong eyes that look confident she gives pep talks to other employees as well. I was wondering what kind of person would be Komatsu-kun's sister, but she is his complete opposite.

– Peak will be after this, so brace up.

– Ye-, yes...!

– I have prepared quite a lot of rewards, okay?

This place also happens to be a lunch counter and the sea is close, so during the day it completely changes into a beach hut. It is open to the non-guests as well, so this place is quite busy. More precisely, there is a pretty hotel close to here, so guests are getting stolen. It appears that most of the income comes from food and drinks.

Basically it is like this during the day, therefore I seldom go to the sea. I often get exposed to the air overflowing with energy of vigorous party animals, so by the time I get to have a pause, it is already evening.

That being said, work does not end here. Because even though Ririka-san calls it "reward", personally, I would call it heavy labor itself. There is no lie in her declaration of "lots", there are sashimi and stuff lined up on the dining table, but...

– Haa... Really, you guys have some strange tastes, huh? Right now, it is summer holidays, you know? In a place like this, what are you loafing around for?

Giggling, Komatsu-kun's sister drained another cup of shochu. It has been about half an hour since we started eating, but she already reeks of alcohol. Her dignified face is red as well. By the way, this has also happened yesterday. It doesn't happen to be an established part of the work done by the volunteers, right...?

– Come on, it was nee-san who called us, wasn't it!

– Haha, that's right. Well then... Ichijou, do you have a girl you like?

– Not really...

– Oh, a yes-face...&j Haa... Aren't you guys in second year? This place is close to the sea, there are both men and women lying around there. As they are not here, why don't you just go and pick them up?

– What's with that way of talking, as if it is about picking up shells...

– After all, rooms are empty for so long, they will soon stink... right? Here, you guys, have a cupful as well.

– Nee-san, please stop...

– It's fine, it's fine. Rei and Jun too, aren't you already seventeen? Come, come

– I won't be drinking, absolutely

– Che, ain't you a Serious-kun... It would've been more fun if someone more easy-going came. Alas. How I want to have a chat with a cute girl

– Nee-san, Ichijou-kun is here, please stop it...

It's difficult, but comfortable at the same time. Both of them don't know about my circumstances. Even my aunt and little sister suspect that I was rejected. Thinking about that, I'm so happy to be able to work hard.

Even though it is only the second day, I started being pleased with this situation. After working and working and then keeping company for idle talk, there is only sleep.

– Ahaha... Sorry about my sister, okay...?

– She is an excessively easy-going person.

11:30 pm. Well-regulated life. Urging my tired body, I swiftly finished laying out the futon. I want to quickly sleep. I still worry, but I can easily sleep if I'm this tired. The only thing left is to wait before Komatsu-kun finishes his preparations, but...

– Hey...? Isn't it, summer-like?

– Ha, huh? Which part of it?

Youth with a childish face and visible freckles shyly laughed.

– Like staying together overnight with a friend. Somehow, it's a bit fun... maybe

– ... Basically, we're only working

– Even so. Ichijou-kun, didn't you hate being a loner?

Hate being a loner...? I have never thought about it.

– Did you... hate it?

– I don't know... but. After ceasing to be a loner, I started thinking that I don't want to return to being one, um. That it would be great to further get along with everyone. Is it... impossible?

As I tried to move my head, his butt fell down on the futon with a thump. Seeing that, Komatsu-kun smiled with a "Hahaha, sorry, sorry".

– Fu-aah..... At any rate, if you want to get along with everyone, you're not supposed to be here. It is indeed summer, so let's rest.

– Yeah... Ah, right!

– Hm...?

For some reason Komatsu-kun rustled behind him and took out his smartphone. And what he has shown me was the chat history with classmates.

– What?

– You know, Hyoudou-san, she asked if Ichijou was together with someone. Haven't you got the message?

– It's noisy, so I turned it off

– Come one... Isn't having smartphone ringing supposed to be part of the job? Has something happened?

– Well... I wonder...

Has something happened? There shouldn't have happened anything concerning Hyoudou. Why is it Hyoudou? The more I thought, the more something cold has been running down my spine. Among my classmates, the only one who is supposed to know that I am here is Komatsu-kun.

– Anyway, Ichijou is not with me. It would really help if you sent that.

Sea continued to faintly resound in the distant night air. It seems tonight I won't be able to sleep soundly once again.

Chapter 42 - Prison Labor

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– ...Rei! Jun too! Come on, wake up

Voice, which I'm still not used to hear, has called for me and my companion who is sleeping next to me. Husky female voice of a young adult. The way she calls me is for sure rude, but there is also a degree of familiarity mixed in her tone of voice. Despite the fact that we have met for the first time just yesterday. 5:30 in the morning, tatami room. Smell of the sea breeze came in through the open window. The sound of waves can be heard from the other side of the morning air. It is quiet, but there are certainly sounds of water rushing. I can't help but feel the summer and it feels weird. Because for me, summer was always about playing games or reading manga nonstop, all day long.

Right now, for some reason, that has completely changed. Fatigue from yesterday and heat were gradually pressing my back and...

– Hey! I won't repeat myself. There's lots of work to do today as well

– Hnn... Yeah, right away...

– Good. Rei too, should I wake you up roughly?

– Understood

This is the second day since I left home. I rose up. Today as well, I have to work and work and deeply sleep.

Luckily, it appears that in this coastal private lodging "Hiiragi Manor" there is absolutely no free time. Even though apart from having delicious seafood for dinner I'm working for free, I don't mind. That is because what I need to do right now is only to work and to forget.

Morning duty starts from picking up rubbish in the swimming area. Holding tongs and plastic bag, I was earnestly walking on the beach for the first time in several years. Due to the early morning, there were hardly any people. Only sounds of the wind and waves were resounding gently.

But still, before long, this area will likely become bustling. Whatever is said, it is summer, what's more, it is sea. Yesterday, just a little, I have seen for the first time in my life how crazy, vigorous, normie party animals were coming and going. It felt like going to the zoo.

I wonder if we are, after all, errand-boys (un-normies), as we clean the garbage that those guys have dropped. It is a fresh feeling, somewhat like prison labor.

... Let me see, still, prison, huh? Have I committed some sort of a crime? And yet mysteriously, my will to work surged. I had a feeling that as long as I do my best, I'll get liberated from some crime, which I don't really understand myself.

– Ichijou-kun.....! Wait, too fast, too fast!

I stopped walking. As I turned around, my youth companion, Komatsu Rei, came running. It seems we are both lacking in physical training.

– Haa... Haa... You've been trying so hard since yesterday, haven't you Ichijou-kun...

– Hm, does it look like that...?

– Nee-san was grateful as well. She said "That guy, strangely has some guts"

This loner-colleague classmate has saved me again.

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c43

Chapter 43 - Class Trip

"Jun, I want to meet... I like you..."

Her voice pleasantly reverberated somewhere deep inside. I know. This is a dream. Noticing that it is a dream within a dream is a common thing. Location, myself, everything is vague. Only the familiar blonde girl and my naked consciousness were in that space.

"Why have you disappeared when I like you so much? Dummy..."

If I'm told such a thing, a pure feeling of happiness will gush forth. However, what I felt right after was the feeling of guilt. What am I making her say inside my head? Can it possibly mean that I wish for it somewhere inside my heart? That I actually want her to want me in that way?

What do I... wish for myself? Even though she won't touch my body ever again.

"Come on, I'll make you happy. Come to like me already..."

Within the dream, she puffed out her cheeks. Only, it's not that fake angry face she often makes while she says "Ghmm!". She is desperately appealing with wet eyes. As if she will start crying right now.

"Like this, I will start hating Jun, you know?"

... That alone, is unacceptable. I will do anything. Embarrassing things, it's fine to say anything. Also, I'm sorry I kissed you because of the mood the other day. Forgive the stupid me. I still can't believe it. That I have really done that.

"It... It really is impossible. I can't hate you... I'm sorry, Jun... I love you"

As if I can hate you. As I wanted to put my arm around her shoulder, I reached out with my hand--

– Ha...!

I woke up on futon. Early hours, it is still twilight. It seems I have gotten completely used to waking up early. Quite a number of days has already passed since I came to this rural area of tranquil beach. This will be the fifth day.

That is to say, more than two weeks has passed since I last met with Tachibana. I feel like I'm about to go crazy. That I can feel so flustered just from her not being there.... Feeling lonely, is it something like this? Gentle warmth left where she was clinging is now replaced with a feeling of emptiness as if I'm falling to the bottom. Even though it was so hot yesterday that I couldn't sleep, there was chilliness coming from inside of my body.

-Nn...

Komatsu-kun was sleeping on the futon beside me. If someone I know has seen such a dumbfounded appearance of myself, it is certain that I would die an agonizing death from embarrassment.

... Damn, I have perhaps reached my limit. I might... want to meet.

What? Want to meet? Want to, meet? And what would I do if we met? I have no face to meet her anyway. Hmm, sounds like lame J-pop song which has its popularity go through a three-year cycle. I crashed into the futon with a sense of self-deprecation and looked up at the ceiling, but naturally, I found no comfort in that.

Probably, I'm not working enough. Although I'm trying so hard, I still can't get over it. In any case, with nothing happening, only the time was slowly passing. It is my first summer holiday when I'm covered with sweat and tiredness.

The room's fusuma was opened.

– Oh, it seems you have gotten used to getting up early, Jun. Way to go, way to go!

Komatsu-kun's older sister smiled as if in admiration. While my chest is in such a chaos, I can only make a short greeting, but this person is smiling without a worry. Still, what has happened? I'm sure it is still not 6 o'clock in the morning and her usual hot pants figure is already here.

– Quickly make preparations. And also wake up that blanked out brother of mine

– Ye-, yeah...

– Well, let's do it! ... Today, there's lots of work to do

She was in extremely good mood as she said that. To the point that she was humming.

– Hmmm. So excited, so excited&j Good things do happen, right

What? Excited about what?

Well... It has been several days since I came here, but today is strange. To start with, morning and noon I

was only cleaning guest rooms. So far I was only doing things like helping out in the kitchen or going for shopping.

There was no deceit when she said that there was lots of work to do, finishing one room after the other, me and Komatsu-kun were going around cleaning with masks put on. Altogether, there are 10 rooms, so it is quite a heavy labor. I don't mind the labor itself. I feel like working right now anyway.... Only, even though the family which checked-out yesterday were out of money by the end.... Even though, private lodge business didn't seem to flourish even at the best of times. In that case, what am I made to do?

Despite the kitchen being so busy right now, why?

For this reason, at the time when sun started to go down after the midday.

– Seriously, what is happening? This room and the previous one were heavily covered in dust. As if there were no guests there for quite some time. Mn... what is it, Komatsu-kun?

I only intended to put my thoughts into words. However, as I turned towards my companion Komatsu-kun, I believe that he opened his eyes wide for just a moment and fearfully looked away.

– Hi, hiii... I, I haven't...

Suddenly my classmate turned towards the window. This is obviously suspicious... I have believed that we are certainly merely making preparations for a full sell of the rooms in this private lodge, but in that case there should be nothing to hide from me.

As I made just one step towards Komatsu-kun, he made two steps back. And as I was about to make the second step, he fell onto the floor with his butt.

– It, it wasn't me! Forgive me!

– I haven't said anything yet...

– You're my first ever friend, I wouldn't betray you... But how should I put it, I am surprised as well, Nee-san let me know only yesterday..... Hoydou-san is

– Hoydou, what? Could it be that you have spilled that I am here?

– Ugh...

It was silent for about a second. Komatsu-kun's expression was trembling and I felt as if that fear was infecting me too.

– Rei! Jun! Come do-o-own!

Ririka-san shouted from the lower floor. At that, my companion turned pale. But nothing can be done as she has called for us. Despite being bewildered, I nodded to suggest that we go together. And then... My face twisted as I saw a familiar face.

– Oh, Ichijou-kun is here as well. He's really here! Eeh, I thought it was a lie!

Iidzuka... From the football club... And yet, it was not the end of it. He was not the only one coming through the entrance.

– Ichijou-kun, long time no see. So you're still alive

Figure of one more football club member of our class, Ogino, as well. It seems condition of both of their hairdos is good.

– Shii... Hey, is it true you were rejected by Karen?

– Ha, haa!?

– ... A rumor is going around the class

This information could only be leaked by either me or Tachibana. Just what the hell is happening? I can only think of it as if the whole universe is set on bullying me. Too many event are happening at once.

How am I supposed to deal with it?

Other came in succession... Classmates, whose faces and names I tried hard to remember, passed through the entrance.

– Hey, hey, everybody come in! A delicious dinner is ready!

– Komatsu-san, this is...

– Aren't these obviously your classmates? Hasn't Rei told you?

– I-, Ichijou-kun. I...

Oi, this can't be... This is going really bad...

– Ah, Ichijou-kun, hello. Yayoi has told me, but you really are here

As Tenjuin-san made an adult-like sweet smile... Mastermind behind the present case, smoothly entered

the scene in a detached manner while yawning.

Always sprawled on top of the desk, an unmotivated gyaru. Tachibana's stylish friend who has a short bob with a touch of a gray.

Our seats were close during the school term, so we have talked a bit, but it doesn't mean that I know her well. And yet, when she saw me, she sent a cold gaze at me as if displeased. Jiii~

– ... Hey, useless guy

– Wh-, what...

– Aren't you useless? A high school student with his smartphone turned off nowadays, that is unheard of. However, Hyoudou... gradually started grinning. It seems like it is fun when I turn pale.

– Well, it doesn't matter now&j I was told Ichijou is here, so I thought a class trip might be fun, you know. If Ichijou can participate, isn't it killing two birds with one stone?

– Oi! Who let it slip that I am here?

– Ah... Also, word has it... that Karen rejected you?

– Ha, haa?

– So sorry... It's bad that you're still having a heartbreak, but I brought her. Karen!

– Ye-, yeah...

Tachibana Karen. A flashy girl with blonde hair. Even with so many people around, she still stands out. As she finally entered, a mix of boys and girls reaching about 20 people overall, completely filled the wide entrance.

But seeing that figure, I wonder what have I thought about? Like it's embarrassing, or there's a strange rumor going around the class, or how I felt lonely. At any rate, I have stolen that lips- no, were my lips stolen? At this point, I can't even remember- She stood there. Looking worried and with a glum face.

Fusama

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– Hey, hey, everybody come in! A delicious dinner is ready!

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– Aren't these obviously your classmates? Hasn't Rei told you?

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But seeing that figure, I wonder what have I thought about? Like it's embarrassing, or there's a strange rumor going around the class, or how I felt lonely. At any rate, I have stolen that lips- no, were my lips stolen? At this point, I can't even remember- She stood there. Looking worried and with a glum face.

Fusama

Chapter 43 - Class Trip

"Jun, I want to meet... I like you..."

Her voice pleasantly reverberated somewhere deep inside. I know. This is a dream. Noticing that it is a

dream within a dream is a common thing. Location, myself, everything is vague. Only the familiar blonde girl and my naked consciousness were in that space.

"Why have you disappeared when I like you so much? Dummy..."

If I'm told such a thing, a pure feeling of happiness will gush forth. However, what I felt right after was the feeling of guilt. What am I making her say inside my head? Can it possibly mean that I wish for it somewhere inside my heart? That I actually want her to want me in that way?

What do I... wish for myself? Even though she won't touch my body ever again.

"Come on, I'll make you happy. Come to like me already..."

Within the dream, she puffed out her cheeks. Only, it's not that fake angry face she often makes while she says "Ghmm!". She is desperately appealing with wet eyes. As if she will start crying right now.

"Like this, I will start hating Jun, you know?"

... That alone, is unacceptable. I will do anything. Embarrassing things, it's fine to say anything. Also, I'm sorry I kissed you because of the mood the other day. Forgive the stupid me. I still can't believe it. That I have really done that.

"It... It really is impossible. I can't hate you... I'm sorry, Jun... I love you"

As if I can hate you. As I wanted to put my arm around her shoulder, I reached out with my hand--

– Ha...!

I woke up on futon. Early hours, it is still twilight. It seems I have gotten completely used to waking up early. Quite a number of days has already passed since I came to this rural area of tranquil beach. This will be the fifth day.

That is to say, more than two weeks has passed since I last met with Tachibana. I feel like I'm about to go crazy. That I can feel so flustered just from her not being there.... Feeling lonely, is it something like this? Gentle warmth left where she was clinging is now replaced with a feeling of emptiness as if I'm falling to the bottom. Even though it was so hot yesterday that I couldn't sleep, there was chilliness coming from inside of my body.

-Nn...

Komatsu-kun was sleeping on the futon beside me. If someone I know has seen such a dumbfounded appearance of myself, it is certain that I would die an agonizing death from embarrassment.

... Damn, I have perhaps reached my limit. I might... want to meet.

What? Want to meet? Want to, meet? And what would I do if we met? I have no face to meet her anyway. Hmm, sounds like lame J-pop song which has its popularity go through a three-year cycle. I crashed into the futon with a sense of self-deprecation and looked up at the ceiling, but naturally, I found no comfort in that.

Probably, I'm not working enough. Although I'm trying so hard, I still can't get over it. In any case, with nothing happening, only the time was slowly passing. It is my first summer holiday when I'm covered with sweat and tiredness.

The room's fusuma was opened.

– Oh, it seems you have gotten used to getting up early, Jun. Way to go, way to go!

Komatsu-kun's older sister smiled as if in admiration. While my chest is in such a chaos, I can only make a short greeting, but this person is smiling without a worry. Still, what has happened? I'm sure it is still not 6 o'clock in the morning and her usual hot pants figure is already here.

– Quickly make preparations. And also wake up that blanked out brother of mine

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– Well, let's do it! ... Today, there's lots of work to do

She was in extremely good mood as she said that. To the point that she was humming.

– Hmmm. So excited, so excited&j Good things do happen, riight

What? Excited about what?

Well... It has been several days since I came here, but today is strange. To start with, morning and noon I was only cleaning guest rooms. So far I was only doing things like helping out in the kitchen or going for shopping.

There was no deceit when she said that there was lots of work to do, finishing one room after the other, me and Komatsu-kun were going around cleaning with masks put on. Altogether, there are 10 rooms, so

it is quite a heavy labor. I don't mind the labor itself. I feel like working right now anyway.... Only, even though the family which checked-out yesterday were out of money by the end.... Even though, private lodge business didn't seem to flourish even at the best of times. In that case, what am I made to do?

Despite the kitchen being so busy right now, why?

For this reason, at the time when sun started to go down after the midday.

– Seriously, what is happening? This room and the previous one were heavily covered in dust. As if there were no guests there for quite some time. Mn... what is it, Komatsu-kun?

I only intended to put my thoughts into words. However, as I turned towards my companion Komatsu-kun, I believe that he opened his eyes wide for just a moment and fearfully looked away.

– Hi, hiii... I, I haven't...

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As I made just one step towards Komatsu-kun, he made two steps back. And as I was about to make the second step, he fell onto the floor with his butt.

– It, it wasn't me! Forgive me!

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– You're my first ever friend, I wouldn't betray you... But how should I put it, I am surprised as well, Nee-san let me know only yesterday..... Hoydou-san is

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Chapter 44 - A Game of Getting a Ribbon

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Aaaaaaaaaa, I should have gone to Braziiiiiiiiil.

Is this what they call looking at the world with vacant eyes¹. With the inside of my head boiling, I can't fix the focus in my field of vision.

Anyway, immediately after the circumstances became chaotic, I was desperately arranging the dishes in the kitchen. One bowl of curry, two bowls of curry, three bowls of curry... By the time I finish arranging this curry, I will probably die too. Despite being short, it was a blessed life. I wanted to meet my little sister and aunt before the final moment, but now, it won't come true.

Because after all, inside that dining room separated by one door, there are swarms of familiar faces. Finishing to arrange this curry is not acceptable. If I leave this room, my head will go crazy and I will die. Anyhow, there is a large enemy force of 25 energetic normies. It seems that starting today, they will be monopolizing this room of the private lodge.

And then we, of the loners' camp, including Komatsu-kun, are just a small force of two. As if the Spartan army meeting Persia. What a Three Hundred. No, no, this is merely Two. It's just two, you know, two. What am I supposed to do? Was there a night flight in the Battle of Okehazama²? No, this case should rather be Tennou-ji³...

Tachibana is right there. Tachibana, she... Karen is... I...

– Yo, young boy!

– Hii...!

As my back was slapped, I overreacted and my body twitched. Long red ponytail was before my eyes. My employer.

– Just what are you doing, Jun? I'll finish arranging the dishes, so you go join there as well

– After all I have come here not as a guest, but a helper

– Haa? My little brother is on the other side too. Everyone is asking where is Ichijou-kun.

– I just...

Even though I have looked away, she has probably noticed. Ririka-san has suspiciously narrowed here eyes and grabbed my arm.

– I don't know what happened, but there's no helping it if you don't meet

– U-, uwaa! What the...

Can you imagine? This private lodge, which was full of strangers, now only has people who know each other. Although I thought that I have to go to a place where there are no guys who know me. That disappeared in an instant.

The moment that I was dragged into the dining room, it started to slowly get noisy inside the room with a long table in it.

– Ah, it's Ichijou

– I heard he confessed to Tachibana

– Eh! Him? I'm surprised...

– Eh, Isn't Tachibana free then? I should go after her then

... By what means has this rumor been circulated? To begin with, was it true that I have been rejected? I can't say for sure, because my memories are vague, but at least, Tachibana has not said anything to me. At this point I'm not confident. Has Tachibana spread the rumors? Was she a person who would do something like that?

In case it's someone else, then who and with what intention...?

While I was stooping so as to not stand out, I approached Komatsu-kun and sat next to him. It's just like the usual clamorous atmosphere during the lunch break. However, the location is rural town at the distance of two hours by bus. I still can't believe in that.

– Ichijou-kun. Ha-, haven't things somehow become difficult?

– It's difficult for both of us. Coming so suddenly like this... I feel you Komatsu-kun

– It's not like that. Doesn't it seem like... we can make a lot of friends?

I swallowed my "This is not the time to say that" grumble. It's no use telling it to others. What would happen if I told it to Komatsu-kun? A normal extra-large sized embarrassment would just double. Tachibana is in this room. We haven't met for like, forever. No, is it really forever? Thinking carefully, although I say we haven't met, it was just me being alone for two weeks. I'm overreacting. Ah..... It's her. She's just two rows from here. Ugh, just now, our eyes met!

"Ah, Jun...! Hey, Jun...?" "..."

I looked away at once, but it was obviously not good. Because right after, I could see Tachibana's discouraged face. She was nervously playing with her hair near her red cheek. I didn't want to see that sort of face. Even though she would always grin and touch me instead of a greeting...

I... What can I do? Can we truly, not go back to how it was? If we can, I will do anything. I finally realized. That she is after all, an important person. Most probably, she is certainly the most important person in the school.

– Yo, Ichijou?

– Mn? ...Ah, Nakamura, so you came as well

– I've heard some things. That is... about Tachibana. Is it true? I couldn't believe it Nakamura Rento. Various things have happened in regards to this otaku boy, but it seems he can already speak with me normally. As if really concerned about me, he started speaking more quietly.

– You were together before the trip, right? With Tachibana. I still remember

– That was, we only went together for shopping

– Is that so? She called you Jun. Didn't the two of you get along well?

– That's because at that time, you were annoyingly picking a quarrel. Tachibana, who saw that, was concerned about it in her own way and simply wanted you to think like that

– Can it be... really true? That you were rejected...

– At the very least, there wasn't anything like me confessing... Hmm...

– Ichijou, you're hiding something... Aren't we friends, isn't it fine to let me know...

Then, Komatsu-kun butted in from the side.

– Other guys. They are glancing in Tachibana-san's direction... It looks like they are excited And the "excitement" that he has smelled, was exactly what was happening. As Hyodou stood up and made clanging noise with tableware, it gradually became silent. She somehow squeezed out an unenergetic voice which resounded nearby.

– Hey, hey, Attention! Is everyone listening?

Classmates raised a gaudy cheer. Let alone dining room, we are monopolizing this whole building. No matter how noisy we get, Ririka-san who is watching with folded arms on the other side with a smiling face is not disturbed.

– Thanks for gathering here today for a special class reunion. Somehow, I haven't thought that so many people would gather, so I'm surprised as well... First of all, as previously said, rules should be explained. We have come up with them in our own way! Please, a round of applause

After the applause, the noise inside the room became cheerful and loud. Rules? As previously said, what sort of rules? As Hyodou took out a red ribbon, attention of the class was drawn to that one point.

– Rules are simple! Umm, yeah, that is... this kind of ribbon will be distributed among the girls, so before the last night, please choose one boy and give it to him. Those who can participate in the test of courage on the last day are merry pairs who could match, so boys, make some good impression. That should be it, does anybody have questions?

Wh- what the heck is she saying...? However, it seems that class has basically agreed, this is just raising the excitement. Curry has started going completely cold.

– Yes, yees!

Iidzuka has raised his voice like a fool.

– Do the girls have to absolutely give the ribbon?

– Isn't it fine? That is why, if she can't choose someone till the very end, it's just watching the couples going back from test of courage and feeling envy. By the way, if boys don't want to take the ribbon, it's aaaalright to refuse

Ogino crossed his legs and lightly raised his hand.

– About that good impression, what are we going to do before the last day...?
– It's a secret...&j It's just playing a game with everyone
Still, I see... Tachibana is free, huh?It is no wonder that everyone was suddenly excited.
If Tachibana gives her ribbon to someone else, just the two of them in a dark forest...You idiot! I feel sick in my chest just from thinking about it. So effeminate, damn it...!
– Well. That. Is. It. Everyone, do your best, alright...?
I'm feeling envious of something that has not even happened yet.Feeling disgust towards such a me, I was cramming my mouth with curry.

It was rape eyes in Japanese. Basically what they mean is something like
Info. basically a smart move of showing that you are in the place that enemy where enemy thinks you are, but in truth you are somewhere else
And this one is about suicide when you know that you will definitely lose.

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Chapter 44 - A Game of Getting a Ribbon

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this one

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Chapter 45 - Status

Coming to the sea with everyone from class, playing around in a swimsuit, being lovey-dovey secretly in the night with the boy I like so much ... Stuff like that, I always dreamed of it. And although Jun is finally close, it can't be helped that I feel awkward right now.

Moreover... Moreover! It was me who was rejected! I did not reject Jun!

There is a strange rumor going around about him. I troubled him again. I was in a tough spot as it was and now he'll hate me even more. What should I do? No matter how many times I asked Yayoi who started this rumor, she would just grin. Seriously, why has she started this rumor in LINE?

– Fufu. Karen, cheer up already

– It's impossible! It's really painful. Why have you started that sort of rumor!

– Men do not get fired up for an easily obtainable woman. If you do it like this, even that bookworm will get fired up, right? If he sees how other guys are courting Karen, surely he won't be able to sit still

First night of coming to the neighboring town. We left the lodge and went to the hot spring nearby. Although it is such a fun event, I feel super blue. That is why, while watching the night sea in the open air bath, I was avoiding this feeling by chatting with Yayoi, who was behind me.

Haa... Why did I do something like kissing him...? I want to die just from remembering it. I haven't even thought of Jun's feelings...

– Despite my eyes meeting with Jun's, he turned away at once. If he accepts some other girl's ribbon, I might even die, you know...? Sob... He absolutely hates me

– Hmm. Well, as for me, I have an intention of firing up Karen as well

– Me...?

– Yeah. Isn't it fine to forcibly give the ribbon and decide the contest before the end of the day? That way, you can play in swimsuit without a care, right?

I see, that's right... I wonder if he will forgive me if I apologize? If this time I properly confess, become his girlfriend and kiss him in front of everyone else... Oh my gosh. My heart beats faster just from thinking about it.

Still, lovey-dovey test of courage, huh? Sounds nice. Joining hands before entering the forest and kissing the cheek. I want to let the whole class know that I belong to Jun. I want to flirt so hard, that the people responsible for playing the role of the ghosts would be cringing and finding it difficult to do their job.

– ... I say, I didn't know. Karen and Ichijou-kun...

– That's right, Momoko! ... They were secretly being lovey-dovey. And even though they were...

Inside the bath, Momoko, who took her glasses off, curiously said so. Combination of me and Jun, is it after all surprising?

Mn... Momoko who took her glasses off? Right now she has a serious-looking sullen face and black hair... Right, if it is like this.

– Hey, hey, Momoko... Momoko!

– Ye-, yes! What is it?

As I was continuously drawing near, Momoko blinked several times as if surprised.

– Hey, please help me...? Look, from now I will be thinking that you're Jun and confess...

– Ha, haa...? Wait, what are you talking about, Karen? Has the blood rushed to your head...?

– Pff... What are you planning to do with Momoko nee-san, Karen fool?

– Err... Err...

Momoko's... No, Jun's face is before my eyes. Look, a pretty, cute face... What wrong, Jun, are you feeling nervous? Your face is very red, you know? Noo, I ended up remembering about the first term. Haven't we done some stupid stuff, just the two of us...

Haa, I like you so much. I want to tightly hug you for a long time.

– No way, hey, what are you... Hey! Hng...

– Ho-ho, what a superb view, superb view...

– Jun. Hey, Jun...? Ehehe, that's wrong after all. It's Momoko&j Because, these boobs are so fluffy. They're really big, huh

– Ugh. Lewd Karen! Don't bury your face, dummy...

– Not Jun, but Momoko. I like you so much...

– Hya.....!? Come on, what are you saying...

Ehehe, somehow, I got energized by my friends. By the time we stepped out of the bath, everyone was gathered in the room near the lobby, drinking milk and watching TV. A table near the TV was free, so we sat there. But Jun was sitting at the edge of the room. Which reminds me, it was always like that even in the classroom.

– Ah, Tachibana-san has come

– Poor Karen-chan. Being confessed to by such a gloomy boy...

– Hey... Stop that, before the tests, didn't you receive Ichijou-kun's help with your studies

– But still, it is Ichijou, you know? They are too much of a bad match

Everyone is making a fuss about me and Jun.... Could it be, that its hurtful how everyone is saying what they want?

Isn't that right? Me and Jun. Our statuses in class and our personalities... are totally different. I wasn't aware of it. I thought that even if I haven't thought about it, it would be okay as long as we got along. I was an idiot. If this type of rumor spreads, it's not me they will talk about, but him.

... I, is it that I have not thought about anything but me? Realizing that, I suddenly thought that I need to do something. Nothing will happen if I'm just constantly feeling depressed, right? I have to help Jun. In that case, wouldn't we get along once more?

– Hey, Yayoi, Momoko. Thanks... Somehow, I might have gotten over it

– Hmm. I only had my chest groped

– Come on, don't hold it against me&j Although it was extremely good...

– Haha, yeah, yeah. Well then, go and say it. Cause I will be monopolizing Momoko-chan's boobs&j

– Yayoi, leave some of it for me...?

– You two, are really idiots...

I felt my mood getting lighter. Anyway, if he already hates me, I have to earn some points.

As I stood up and started walking in Jun's direction, everyone started getting noisy. And even when TV's volume was decreased, I stood near Jun without a care.

Nishishi... Even if it was forced, I did my usual smiling face. As if surprised, Jun drew back his waist, but I don't mind. Because even when we first met, it was like this.

– Jun... Ehehe... Jun?

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– Hey, hey, Momoko... Momoko!

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As I was continuously drawing near, Momoko blinked several times as if surprised.

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Isn't that right? Me and Jun. Our statuses in class and our personalities... are totally different. I wasn't aware of it. I thought that even if I haven't thought about it, it would be okay as long as we got along. I was an idiot. If this type of rumor spreads, it's not me they will talk about, but him.

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– Hey, Yayoi, Momoko. Thanks... Somehow, I might have gotten over it

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Chapter 46 - Lovey-dovey hug friends

The backside of the building was dark, but even on a night with nothing but moonlight, Tachibana Karen's figure stands out. Right now it is a figure in a white T-shirt, so tight that it clings to the body. It seems like the heat from coming right after bath passes on to me just from watching.

And then, thinking of the pathetic gloomy guy who was dragged by his wrist and pulled to the wall surrounding the bath-house. If it was the time when we first met, I would freak out, thinking that it was a case of money extortion, but I can no longer see myself as that sort of a target.

The girl closest to me in the school. Girl who I'm a bit interested in even now. Just how interested am I? When my heart can't stop beating rapidly from meeting her after having stopped contacting each other for about 10 days, just how should this interested be called?

– Hey, Jun...? What, are you getting nervous from meeting me again?

Blonde girl grinned just like usual and whispered. Tachibana Karen, who is so disappointingly just like always, is right before my eyes. Even though she nervously looked away when our eyes met in the evening... it looks as if she has gotten over it. Right now, she is continuously closing the distance between us, so my back is about to get stuck to the wall.

Yeah, this is it. This provocative smile. The itchy feeling that I was starting to forget has been restored. However, this situation...

– What's the matter, Tachibana? So suddenly...

– And what is the matter with you...? Acting awkwardly all this while, being silent...

– Because, that is... That matter from before...

Nervous, I stopped talking. Happy from meeting her and feeling as if my heart was jumping. Feeling my blood freeze when she called me by my first name in front of everyone. Almost wriggling as I recalled the kiss from before.

She probably read my mind, how everything inside me was in chaos. Giving up the usual smile, Tachibana made an apologetic gloomy face. It appears that after all, she was forcing it.

– Sorry, it's a lie... In truth, I wanted to properly apologize...

The girl looked down and lightly pulled my sleeve. And still looking down, she stuck her head against my chest with a bump. Even though she gripped my hand without any hesitation just a little earlier. I wonder when was the last time when she was touching me so moderately like this? Feeling as if the distance between us increased, I started feeling down.

– Apologizing, for what...

– My first kiss... I forced it on Jun...

– Tachibana...

..... In truth, I have known from the start. That all I was doing was running away for a long while.

I was rejected. The rejected one is me. Everything becomes convenient when I think like that. But... it's wrong.

"Chu... Jun..."

On the way home on that day, park in the night. In truth, how she forced it, I remember all of it. However, I couldn't accept that thought, lightly squirming at the rear of my head. I thought that the more we were together, the more she would find out what a pathetic guy I am. Thought that, wouldn't I get betrayed? I, was scared.

– Sob...

Tachibana's head trembled on top of my chest. She is desperately holding back her tears.

– Jun... Forgive me. Please don't hate me... Uu...

Please don't hate me... Just how touching is such a very frank feeling? My legs started shaking little by little, my hands hung in the air as I couldn't find a place for them.

I can no longer be a nice plaything. It is not simply letting her tease me and play with me anymore. But at the same time, I have to treasure the feeling of excitement that I can sense in her. I have to simply... face it. No matter how much time it may take.

A girl close to me. I'm so interested in her, she even appears in my dreams. Most likely... in this small world of mine, she is the most important being of the opposite sex.

– Fufu...

Determination calmed down my chest. My voice is trembling, but I put my hand on Tachibana's shoulder as it was. As she slowly raised her head, she questioningly stared at me with wet eyes.

– Jun...?

– Have you heard? They say that I, was rejected by Tachibana. Sounds terrible, right... Haha

– That's a lie... A lie...!

– You don't have to worry

– Eh...?

Tomorrow will be lively for sure. That I have something with her, everyone might find out at last. But still, I wonder why? Even though previously, I have thought that world would probably end if that happens.

– That is... About the first kiss, I forgive you. Let's go to that test of courage together...

– No way, really...? Here, this is my ribbon...

– No. The moment when you give it has to be shown in front of the whole class...

– But Jun, is it okay to make it known...? Our, lovey-dovey feeling...

– Ugh... Lovey-dovey, it's rather embarrassing deliberately saying like that, or should I say I can't clearly define it, but well, it is that kind of feeling...

– Will you, make up with me...?

– ...From the start, it's not like I have been angry. I felt awkward, but... I didn't hate you or anything

– Ehehe, making up with Jun...&j

The usual smile returned to the girl's face. And as her thin arm hugged me, I once again felt the warmth that I'm still not used to. With a still trembling hand, I similarly crawled my hand to her delicate back.

– Make up hug...&j

– Uh... That is... Make up hug

– Hey...? We, just what are we...?

– I don't know... Hug friends...?

– That, sounds good... Lovey-dovey hug friends...

– Oi, why did you add lovey-dovey...

Lightly dressed... Tachibana's appearance in a T-shirt and jersey. I can feel a moist warmth coming from the soft body. With my back pressed against the wall, tension in my body was only amplified, but now that we have made up, there is no mercy for me.

– After all, it's so good... It's too good, Jun...

As our bodies rubbed against each other, a cheerful feeling was rising from the bottom of my stomach.

Surely, this is... happiness. That is the name of the itchiness that I felt every time Tachibana touched me. It doesn't seem that I can bear this excessive happiness. Moreover, I guiltily wonder if it is okay for someone like me to taste this feeling?

– He-, hey, it's about time we...

– Noope. You don't have to hold back Jun, it's fine to be more greedy&j

– I'm running out of breath. I'll die...

– Well, I'll follow you to the grave then...

– What do you, mean...

– Isn't it lonely by yourself...?

My lovey-dovey hug friend has naughtily shown her teeth. It seems like it is fun playing with the pitiful bookworm, who was rejected by heroine of the class. Just when I thought of the tousled abundant blonde hair by my chest, she looked up with a challenging grin on her face.

A short time later, she put her ear against the left side of my chest placing the weight of her head. She breathed out as though she relaxed. A whisper came out just like a sleeping breath. As I noticed, my hand was carefully combing her blonde hair.

– I'll make Jun, the prince of the class... I stole your kiss, so take it as an apology, okay?

It's not like I want some apology. How I said that I forgive you is an method as well. Even though there is no need to worry about that...

– It appears that there are many guys who are aiming for Tachibana. Tomorrow, everyone will certainly

try to show you their good points.

– I don't care. This ribbon, I'll tie it to Jun in front of everyone...

– It's a fixed game, huh, humph... What a farce...

– Hey? Hug, feels so good...

– Umm, Me too..... very good

Hugging with Tachibana, I like it. It is still early to say that. I still need just a little bit. My thoughts regarding her, I have to further sort them. Without putting on airs, so that I can properly put everything into words in front of everyone.

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Chapter 46 - Lovey-dovey hug friends

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Chapter 47 - Produce \$`

As beach ball flew, water splashed in the bluish-white background. At the same time, when the girls in swimsuits cheerfully laughed, the voice of innocence resounded in the atmosphere filled with the feeling of the middle of the holiday.

Guys with familiar faces were playing on the midsummer sandy beach. It's not like we have rented the beach, so it's crowded with ordinary guests, but in any case, despite being high school students, they are a group who already have the aptitude of party animals. They totally blend in. Though generally they are divided into several groups of friends, all of them are enjoying the sea.

What should I do, somehow, I have a feeling that I have to absolutely avoid this place...

– Yo, Ichijou-kun

– ... Hm?

Feeling very lazy, I planned to be assimilated by the chair when classmate Ogino started a chat. Being a part of the football club, he indeed looks tan and toned. Normally, he would be mixed in a lively gathering, what's the deal with him?

– Well, um... About Karen... No need to worry?

... As a matter of fact, it has been like this since last night. There were 5 guys in the room, but just everyone had to give their comment of sympathy one at a time. Come on, I'm not mourning. I wonder if they think that I ran away to this beach because of excessive disappointment. Well, it's not like they are really off-target...

That said, I still ought to keep my mouth shut. Um... yeah. That in truth, it is not about rejecting or being rejected, that we are simply hug friends. Seriously, just what is hug friends? I can't help but feel embarrassed myself, really.

Seeing how Ogino had a worried face, I resisted the grin, which was trying to show on my face.

– She always only rejects

– I heard so

– Did you go for it knowing that hurdle is high...?

– It's not really like that... It was simply, on impetus, you know. You get it, right?

I could see Tachibana playing in the water with other girls over there. There was that thing from yesterday, so now I can once again see her radiant smile. Look, even just by looking at her from afar like this... she's too cute. Clear weather suits her after all. That bright hair, it really shines under the blue sky. I'm, going crazy. Calling her cute and all. Not only that. As girls of the class gather, by the time I notice, I start looking for her...

Still, normie bastard's next words shocked me.

– Is it... appearance, after all? Ichijou, are you unexpectedly a sucker for a pretty face...?

– ...

My thoughts, in regards to her. Even though I have to properly sort them. Even though, without putting on airs, I have to be able to properly put everything into words in front of everyone.

... Is it, about pretty face? After all...?

While that thought was stuck in my chest and wouldn't come out, my face rapidly stiffened. It seems Ogino couldn't simply watch as gloominess appeared on my face. I caused a useless concern again.

– Ah, sorry, sorry... Did I ask something strange?

– ... I'm just asking for reference, but still. Ogino, what about you? Do you, go for looks...?

It appears he was surprised that I have asked such a question. Looking at me for a while, he blinked several times. It's understandable. He probably guessed from my usual speech and conduct, that I have no interest in other people.

And it was, well, truth. I didn't have any interest. But as Tachibana's face flickered in my head, I couldn't help but ask.

– Let me think... I guess... I go for looks?

– What's that. You admit it so easily...

– Because, isn't it unbelievably annoying when others say "Are you going out with that?". And I feel sorry for the girl who is told so. Everyone sees boyfriend and girlfriend as a set, no matter what.

– Being a good match, is that about it? That, does everybody care about it?
– Well. To be honest, there is also a question of how to fall in love with something other than the appearance.

I don't understand. But it's not like I know what is correct.

– I don't get it... Then, for example, and I mean for example. If it were a guy like me and Tachibana, would the two of us had to be laughed at behind our backs?

– Who knows? Ichijou, you're generally clever and it's not like you are hated. However, realistically speaking, you will get watched. It's like a sort of an appraisal.

– Are a boyfriend and a girlfriend something that should be shown off to others...?

I don't know of the worries of the normie bastards. And I don't even want to. Girlfriend... and possibly a friend, is not a trophy. Moreover, she is not just some appearance. Does that way of thinking smell of a virgin? And yet, I don't care. I can't become normie-like after all.

For a moment, my eyes met with the blonde girl in the distance. She cutely winked at me. And just with that, I have, unlike the usual me, gently looked at her. Adult-like black swimsuit with frills that we have bought together when I was her boyfriend.

"Ehehe. Hello... Do you want to hug?"

"Dummy. Don't look here, just play..."

"Jun... Jun... &j If we stare at each other, we'll get caught... &j"

But I ... was looking for a more convincing reason. If it wasn't her, I wouldn't get along with her so much, right? Surely, what is there in the root is not some appearance.

Stop, stop, if I stare too much, we'll get caught.

– Well, there are other cute girls as well. Even if it is Ichijou sucker for a pretty face, shouldn't there be a girl for you?

– Humph... Don't know what you're talking about...!

– Let's join them soon. Summer and sea, this is a rare chance

Summer, and what's more, sea, huh? Even if you search the whole world, is there any other situation as bright as this one? And yet, I kept worrying about one girl. While I felt dispirited.

A grinning person not caring about that approached.

– Hi, Ogino. Ichijou too&j

Hyoudou came wearing a sporty swimsuit. Yet behind her, she even brought elder sister Komatsu with her. For some reason, both of them seemed to be in a good mood.

– Heave-ho, heave-ho...

Several guys were transporting... a rowboat? I haven't noticed before, but there are some boats lined up on the beach. As though even Ogino wasn't informed, he is standing with folded arms and seems very curious.

– Hee? What... are you doing?

– Something like a group work game? Well, I will be doing explanations after this&j

And then she came one step in front of me and whispered,

– Yesterday. Did you... make up with Karen?

– Ha, haa? What's that all of a sudden...

– Well. She seemed to be in a good mood since last night, so I guess you did. Fufu...

– What... Grinning so much...

– Don't worry. You, I will produce you as Karen's boyfriend. Be ready, okay...&j

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Summer, and what's more, sea, huh? Even if you search the whole world, is there any other situation as bright as this one? And yet, I kept worrying about one girl. While I felt dispirited.

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Chapter 47 - Produce \$`

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Guys with familiar faces were playing on the midsummer sandy beach. It's not like we have rented the beach, so it's crowded with ordinary guests, but in any case, despite being high school students, they are a group who already have the aptitude of party animals. They totally blend in. Though generally they are divided into several groups of friends, all of them are enjoying the sea.

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– Well, um... About Karen... No need to worry?

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That said, I still ought to keep my mouth shut. Um... yeah. That in truth, it is not about rejecting or being rejected, that we are simply hug friends. Seriously, just what is hug friends? I can't help but feel embarrassed myself, really.

Seeing how Ogino had a worried face, I resisted the grin, which was trying to show on my face.

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Chapter 48 - Produce \$a

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Today, the weather is clear and waves are gentle. Sun is shining down upon the skin, unobstructed by any clouds... but.

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However, it seems the distance between the boats was not that big. I can hear most of it even if they say it in a subdued voice.

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– Eeh... What were the circumstances?

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We haven't! Going to the sea together with her is so out of question...

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No, well... I have decided to let everyone know already myself, but still. When the two of us are together like this before everyone, I can't look reality in the face. However, my blonde partner doesn't care about that. No, far from caring, she entered showing off mode.

We have been together for a long time, so I have learned. Tachibana and me, rule number one. There is a certain trigger that makes Tachibana switch the flirting mode on. For example, ... When there is an embarrassed expression on my face and I'm silent.

– Eeei. Kyahahaha, so fun...

– St-, stop... It's ticklish. Oi, I'm rowing!

Her white bare feet were nudging me around the knees. The more I grinded my teeth, the more blonde girl joyfully showed her white teeth. Rule number two. There are not many times when Tachibana and I are laughing at the same time. This is an extremely structural problem. The development of my frown is simply her favorite food. Furthermore, right now, due to the fact that we are in public presence, she is in an extraordinary perfect form.

– Jun, you suck at rowing! Ei. Take this...

If I get repeatedly nudged by a girl's feet, of course the paddle will be disturbed. Even though we are under blazing sun, my body's core started generating embarrassment. I feel cold sweat on my warm back.

– Is your face becoming red? Isn't it too late for stuff like that...&j

Still, Tachibana has strangely emphasized the "too late" part. I mean, I already can't hear any voices from around us, eh...?

– Tachibana, oi.... Everyone is put off...

– It can't be helped... We have a relationship that puts people off after all... Hey, clumsy guy? Should we change so I can row?

– I won't change. My seat is on the rowing side. By the way, if you stop meddling, it'll be a bit better

Blonde girl's face darkened for just a moment. But it seems that yesterday, I might have been too kind. As if instantly coming up with some bad idea, she looked at me with a meaningful suggestive face.

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– U, uwaa! Don't come close!

White bare skin covered my field of vision. Like this, it is a perfect pitiful shitty small fry bookworm bastard, on whom a gyaru sits. She stuck her bulging ass against my lap.

– Umph... Jun's lap is so warm...

– Wa, wawa... What are you doing!!

– Eh? I'm sitting on the lap of the boy I'm close with... Not good?

It is not! As I said so with my face, Tachibana puffed out her cheeks as if displeased.

Tachibana Karen always pays her debts. This time I think she is getting back for escaping to this rural area. She is liberally leaning her body against me... Her naked back is touching my chest. Apparently, she has not forgotten about changing with me to row, so she put her hand on top of mine in a way that I'm sorry for it.

– Hey...? Your thoughts about the swimsuit!

– Cu, cute... Extremely...

– Jun, it's getting hot... In a place like this, in front of everyone... Are you excited?

Aaaaaa... Her temperature... Bare skin, on my bare skin, whole body, sticking... Her soft blonde hair is directly touching my face, our cheeks are rubbing against each other.

– Hey there, you two. Cheese

As Hyoudou's boat passed right beside ours, she turned her smartphone at us. Tachibana smiled with her whole face and made double peace sign. Both physically and mentally I have an ahgao1, so let alone peace sign, I couldn't even lift my hand.

– I took a very good one!

– Thanks, Yayoi! Ehehe, nice timing...

– Well, I've been aiming for the best shot? Okay, okay, combining you two, it would be a double peace ahgao2, huh

What, did you plan to say something clever? I say, it wasn't clever at all. Long story short, time has passed. Flirting that could make the gauge swing without stopping even more than usually, put me off myself. Even the person concerned feels so, so it should be intolerable to the people who see it. This is completely spreading the damage.

– Ichijou..... That guy~~! Shiet, I'm envious...

If it was two months earlier, he would have said it differently. But now the circumstances are complicated. I myself... stopped thinking poorly of him or something.

– What are those two doing, as expected, that's too much...

Sounds reasonable. Everyone, I think it's okay if you hit me later. Turn me into a sand bag. I think that I'd rather make my death meaningful.

– It's such a big lie that he was rejected. Aren't they completely going out...

Stop, don't say that we're going out. I worry even without you putting it into words...

– Just go and isolate yourselves somewhere... Arrange yourselves a room or something...

Jeez, I'd rather drown myself. Sea is right here, should I maybe die... Probably because it was, in fact, too much, elder sister Komatsu raised her voice from the boat behind. It was mixed with a sigh too.

– You guys, listen here. I don't mind your passion, but it's dangerous. Alright? Sit apart

– Yeees... Ehehe, we were scolded&j

– This kind of treatment... What a shame... I'm gonna die...

Before separating from me, the blonde girl whispered in my ear,

– Lovey-dovey with Jun. It will be the best memory... That's why, won't you accompany me for a bit longer?

Before the emotional burden broke through my limits, we finally arrived to the destination. A little further from the swimming area, there was another beach with no people to be found around. Surveying just a bit, trees growing in abundance on the other side can be seen. Also, on the shore, there was a row of disassembled tents.

No shit, he says ahegao

No shit, she somehow sees an ahegao on his face too

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It is not! As I said so with my face, Tachibana puffed out her cheeks as if displeased.

Tachibana Karen always pays her debts. This time I think she is getting back for escaping to this rural area. She is liberally leaning her body against me... Her naked back is touching my chest. Apparently, she has not forgotten about changing with me to row, so she put her hand on top of mine in a way that I'm sorry for it.

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As Hyoudou's boat passed right beside ours, she turned her smartphone at us. Tachibana smiled with her whole face and made double peace sign. Both physically and mentally I have an ahogao1, so let alone peace sign, I couldn't even lift my hand.

– I took a very good one!

– Thanks, Yayoi! Ehehe, nice timing...

– Well, I've been aiming for the best shot? Okay, okay, combining you two, it would be a double peace ahogao2, huh

What, did you plan to say something clever? I say, it wasn't clever at all. Long story short, time has passed. Flirting that could make the gauge swing without stopping even more than usually, put me off myself. Even the person concerned feels so, so it should be intolerable to the people who see it. This is completely spreading the damage.

– Ichijou..... That guy~~! Shiet, I'm envious...

If it was two months earlier, he would have said it differently. But now the circumstances are complicated. I myself... stopped thinking poorly of him or something.

– What are those two doing, as expected, that's too much...

Sounds reasonable. Everyone, I think it's okay if you hit me later. Turn me into a sand bag. I think that I'd rather make my death meaningful.

– It's such a big lie that he was rejected. Aren't they completely going out...
 Stop, don't say that we're going out. I worry even without you putting it into words...
 – Just go and isolate yourselves somewhere... Arrange yourselves a room or something...
 Jeez, I'd rather drown myself. Sea is right here, should I maybe die... Probably because it was, in fact, too much, elder sister Komatsu raised her voice from the boat behind. It was mixed with a sigh too.
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 Before the emotional burden broke through my limits, we finally arrived to the destination. A little further from the swimming area, there was another beach with no people to be found around. Surveying just a bit, trees growing in abundance on the other side can be seen. Also, on the shore, there was a row of disassembled tents.

No shit, he says ahead

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Chapter 48 - Produce \$a

Produce. Let me get straight to the conclusion and say that it was a game of shame on a summer day. Full picture became clear just several minutes later. All of us were floating in the sea. More accurately, divided into groups with such a number of people, so that Ririka-san who has qualifications as a lifeguard can look after the whole group at the same time, we were slowly advancing along the beach on the boats in pairs.

Today, the weather is clear and waves are gentle. Sun is shining down upon the skin, unobstructed by any clouds... but.

– Look, there... See, it's Ichijou

– What the, so he wasn't rejected after all... Even though I was aiming for her

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That's right, rowboat for pairs. As if there was some trick in the lottery, just like the seating order in the classroom, I was facing the familiar face like this.

– Hey, how is it...? My swimsuit...

Tachibana put her hand on the swimsuit's string and provocatively grinned. Black swimsuit... it matches well with the bright blonde hair and healthy white skin. She is showing her thin waist full of confidence, but, umm... I mean, her body is so womanly, I can't look at it directly.

That being said, even if I try to look away, I'm still the one rows the boat. Without being able to look away,

– Ugh... Didn't I see it before...

However, it seems the distance between the boats was not that big. I can hear most of it even if they say it in a subdued voice.

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– Eeh... What were the circumstances?

– Have they gone to the sea together...?

We haven't! Going to the sea together with her is so out of question...

– Ehehe, going to the sea together, huh... Wanna go?

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– No... Haven't we made up, don't be mean...

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No, well... I have decided to let everyone know already myself, but still. When the two of us are together

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We have been together for a long time, so I have learned. Tachibana and me, rule number one. There is a certain trigger that makes Tachibana switch the flirting mode on. For example, ... When there is an embarrassed expression on my face and I'm silent.

– Eeei. Kyahahaha, so fun...

– St-, stop... It's ticklish. Oi, I'm rowing!

Her white bare feet were nudging me around the knees. The more I grinded my teeth, the more blonde girl joyfully showed her white teeth. Rule number two. There are not many times when Tachibana and I are laughing at the same time. This is an extremely structural problem. The development of my frown is simply her favorite food. Furthermore, right now, due to the fact that we are in public presence, she is in an extraordinary perfect form.

– Jun, you suck at rowing! Ei. Take this...

If I get repeatedly nudged by a girl's feet, of course the paddle will be disturbed. Even though we are under blazing sun, my body's core started generating embarrassment. I feel cold sweat on my warm back.

– Is your face becoming red? Isn't it too late for stuff like that...&j

Still, Tachibana has strangely emphasized the "too late" part. I mean, I already can't hear any voices from around us, eh...?

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– It can't be helped... We have a relationship that puts people off after all... Hey, clumsy guy? Should we change so I can row?

– I won't change. My seat is on the rowing side. By the way, if you stop meddling, it'll be a bit better. Blonde girl's face darkened for just a moment. But it seems that yesterday, I might have been too kind. As if instantly coming up with some bad idea, she looked at me with a meaningful suggestive face.

... Surrounding air calmed down and her gaze pierced. It's just like stopping to breath and waiting for the moment of a thrown grenade's explosion.

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– U, uwaa! Don't come close!

White bare skin covered my field of vision. Like this, it is a perfect pitiful shitty small fry bookworm bastard, on whom a gyaru sits. She stuck her bulging ass against my lap.

– Umph... Jun's lap is so warm...

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c49

Chapter 49 - Lovey-dovey Team

What, tents on a rather close uninhabited island? Wait, wait, you're not planning to camp, right? Despite the absence of any changing clothes? Do you plan to sleep in swimsuits inside the tent?

If my aunt, who is an ardent outdoor person, heard this, she would start a safety lesson in a frenzy... Therefore, let me state my professional opinion. Don't you dare underestimate camping.

However, as if sensing my bewilderment, Ririka-san with her red ponytail said,

– Mm? What are you worrying about? This is not an uninhabited island, nor is it a floating island. It is an adjacent beach. You can pick necessary stuff later.

– Th-, that so...

– Also. With so many ordinary guests around, you can't let everyone play, right?

Well, that's true. Seducers are troublesome. The sea is, um, sea. A group of excited surfers are just like very high level monsters for the high school students. Underage girls shouldn't be thrown into such a space. Rather than a camp, it has a bigger nuance of being a segregation.

The boats all assembled one after another. Being able to occupy a beach with no people on it, guys of our class started noisily chattering. Still, they probably want to do some outdoor activities now that there are tents...

Poke, my butt got poked. As I turned around, Hyoudou Yayoi was sinisterly grinning.

– Yo, master Ichijou! Fufu... Karen's boyfriend?

... Seeing this triumphant face, various stuff is probably her doing. Such an unrestrained Tachibana, no matter how you look at it, it was my first time seeing it. Just how do you inspire a person to become like that?

– What's that, ain't I a prince now. That was a damn public execution!

– Eeh. Then... are you angry? Should I make her stop?

– Ugh, that is...

I am angry? Am I angry? I couldn't say so right away. In order to clearly say so, that situation, I would have to... No. It was so fun, there's no way I can say that as well! Still, just remembering it. The itchy feeling... I have admitted it as a kind of joy just yesterday, and now that itchiness inside my chest boils with an inexhaustible supply.

– Well, it would be troublesome if you gave up just from that amount. Yeah, I will be starting some things again

– Some things...?

– That is, a game that will turn the bookworm of the wilds into a prince?

Bookworm of the wilds...? Come to think of it, when I first met with this girl, she called me like that...

Anyway, at her order, class spread in this sandy place assembled. Rules are simple. With teams of four decided, boys and girls have to respectively set up the tents and do the BBQ with charcoal or something.

– Boys, show us your manly side, alriiight? Because boys and girls who don't participate in the test of courage, will be given the roles of the ghosts instead

The team which makes the most tasty outdoorish meal wins, or so she says. What the heck is that. If we're not fishing or something, we definitely have to go to a supermarket. It's not outdoor or anything.

– Well then, let's start the lottery without delay!

Class was excitedly shouting "Ooh!" and "Yaaay!" Gathered together with guys having familiar faces at the beach in the middle of the summer... Only now I got surprised. Cheerful voices in the vicinity gradually faded together with the buzz in my ears.

Such a situation, I wouldn't believe it even in my dreams. No, I can assert that I only hoped for it. Summer holidays were no more than playing games in the dust filled room either alone or as two. I still can't believe it. To the point that I wonder if I will return to my own room if I blink one more time. Not in the swim shorts, but in pajamas, having bed hair...

But right now, Tachibana is so close. I am honestly delighted. I'm happy! It's like a dream come true!

What happened? Even though earlier, I would be obstinate and persuade myself that it is nothing special.

– Jun...?

No, no, if it was me from a little while ago, yesterday, I would probably run away when she advanced to

me with a great number of classmates around. And yet, seeing Tachibana, my body moves of its own accord as if it has to face her... it's this situation.

Summer, sea, together with Tachibana. Not good, me. Don't jump the gun, haven't you been together all the time since the first term? Summer and sea, just what's so special about it? Yet, and yet! She has been so happy since yesterday...

... What happens when the two of us are together, everybody has seen it. Mysteriously, an uplifting feeling surges inside me.... But right now, I might want to be alone with her just a little bit.... As I want to put something into clear words, a whirlpool swirls at the bottom of my stomach.

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– Oh, come on, Jun!

– Ta-, Tachibana!

As I came to my senses, a blonde girl with red cheeks stood before my eyes. She gallantly and loveably held her hand in front of her big chest. Cleavage can be seen right there, shiny white skin... stop, damn virgin! Really, absolutely, any more than this is seriously not allowed.

– Ehehe, Jun and I, we're in the same team, you know?

– Humph... Well, it should have happened so

– I say, it's fate. Hey, we're in front of everyone, you know? They can see us?

Tachibana put her hand on my wrist without any hesitation. That's right, in front of everyone. To show everyone how we get along, I have just suggested doing so if you like. As expected, I didn't think it would be unrestrained to this extent.

– I ended up showing it. In truth, for a long time, I wanted to do it like that, you know. Lovey-dovey expose...

If she makes such a satisfied face, then there was worth in my execution. No, is it truly unpleasant for me? I'm tolerating it because I want to see Tachibana's happy face, is it really only that? It will get exposed. It will get lovey-dovey exposed... A strange feeling of fear and pleasure being the opposite sides of the same coin ran along my spine.

– I-, Ichijou-kun!

– Karen and Ichijou-kun! Oh, you two!

Rushing over from behind Tachibana were Komatsu-kun and Tenjuin-san. My loner mate doesn't really seem so, but class president seems angry. She puffed up her cheeks with folded arms and serious face.

– Er... Everyone is looking, okay? Now that we are in the same team, I want you to consider it a little, or something

– No way... Momoko is in the same team? Aren't we invincible then? Jun is together too... Is it then one they call lovey-dovey team?

– Karen! That one just earlier was too much. Sitting on Ichijou-kun's lap in swimsuit... Ecchi. Everyone is there okay?

– N-, now, now... Hey, Ichijou-kun, let's put up the tent!

Komatsu-kun butted in. Nice timing. Honestly, if any more is dug up, I'll die from shame, so I want it to stop. On Ichijou-kun's lap in swimsuit, don't say that. Now that she expressly said it, I'm feeling so embarrassed.

– Ye-, yeah... Let's finish that, quickly

Escaping to work is a usual measure from my days as loner. I'll get killed again anyway. Running away while I still can, I quickly walked towards the tent.

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– Ehehe, Jun and I, we're in the same team, you know?

– Humph... Well, it should have happened so

– I say, it's fate. Hey, we're in front of everyone, you know? They can see us?

Tachibana put her hand on my wrist without any hesitation. That's right, in front of everyone. To show everyone how we get along, I have just suggested doing so if you like. As expected, I didn't think it would be unrestrained to this extent.

– I ended up showing it. In truth, for a long time, I wanted to do it like that, you know. Lovey-dovey expose...

If she makes such a satisfied face, then there was worth in my execution. No, is it truly unpleasant for me? I'm tolerating it because I want to see Tachibana's happy face, is it really only that? It will get exposed. It will get lovey-dovey exposed... A strange feeling of fear and pleasure being the opposite sides of the same coin ran along my spine.

– I-, Ichijou-kun!

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– Er... Everyone is looking, okay? Now that we are in the same team, I want you to consider it a little, or something

– No way... Momoko is in the same team? Aren't we invincible then? Jun is together too... Is it then one they call lovey-dovey team?

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Komatsu-kun butted in. Nice timing. Honestly, if any more is dug up, I'll die from shame, so I want it to stop. On Ichijou-kun's lap in swimsuit, don't say that. Now that she expressly said it, I'm feeling so embarrassed.

– Ye-, yeah... Let's finish that, quickly

Escaping to work is a usual measure from my days as loner. I'll get killed again anyway. Running away while I still can, I quickly walked towards the tent.

Chapter 49 - Lovey-dovey Team

What, tents on a rather close uninhabited island? Wait, wait, you're not planning to camp, right? Despite the absence of any changing clothes? Do you plan to sleep in swimsuits inside the tent?

If my aunt, who is an ardent outdoor person, heard this, she would start a safety lesson in a frenzy... Therefore, let me state my professional opinion. Don't you dare underestimate camping.

However, as if sensing my bewilderment, Ririka-san with her red ponytail said,

– Mm? What are you worrying about? This is not an uninhabited island, nor is it a floating island. It is an adjacent beach. You can pick necessary stuff later.

– Th-, that so...

– Also. With so many ordinary guests around, you can't let everyone play, right?

Well, that's true. Seducers are troublesome. The sea is, um, sea. A group of excited surfers are just like very high level monsters for the high school students. Underage girls shouldn't be thrown into such a space. Rather than a camp, it has a bigger nuance of being a segregation.

The boats all assembled one after another. Being able to occupy a beach with no people on it, guys of our class started noisily chattering. Still, they probably want to do some outdoor activities now that there are tents...

Poke, my butt got poked. As I turned around, Hyoudou Yayoi was sinisterly grinning.

– Yo, master Ichijou! Fufu... Karen's boyfriend?

... Seeing this triumphant face, various stuff is probably her doing. Such an unrestrained Tachibana, no

matter how you look at it, it was my first time seeing it. Just how do you inspire a person to become like that?

– What's that, ain't I a prince now. That was a damn public execution!

– Eeh. Then... are you angry? Should I make her stop?

– Ugh, that is...

I am angry? Am I angry? I couldn't say so right away. In order to clearly say so, that situation, I would have to... No. It was so fun, there's no way I can say that as well! Still, just remembering it. The itchy feeling... I have admitted it as a kind of joy just yesterday, and now that itchiness inside my chest boils with an inexhaustible supply.

– Well, it would be troublesome if you gave up just from that amount. Yeah, I will be starting some things again

– Some things...?

– That is, a game that will turn the bookworm of the wilds into a prince?

Bookworm of the wilds...? Come to think of it, when I first met with this girl, she called me like that...

Anyway, at her order, class spread in this sandy place assembled. Rules are simple. With teams of four decided, boys and girls have to respectively set up the tents and do the BBQ with charcoal or something.

– Boys, show us your manly side, alriiight? Because boys and girls who don't participate in the test of courage, will be given the roles of the ghosts instead

The team which makes the most tasty outdoorish meal wins, or so she says. What the heck is that. If we're not fishing or something, we definitely have to go to a supermarket. It's not outdoor or anything.

– Well then, let's start the lottery without delay!

Class was excitedly shouting "Ooh!" and "Yaaay!" Gathered together with guys having familiar faces at the beach in the middle of the summer... Only now I got surprised. Cheerful voices in the vicinity gradually faded together with the buzz in my ears.

Such a situation, I wouldn't believe it even in my dreams. No, I can assert that I only hoped for it. Summer holidays were no more than playing games in the dust filled room either alone or as two. I still can't believe it. To the point that I wonder if I will return to my own room if I blink one more time. Not in the swim shorts, but in pajamas, having bed hair...

But right now, Tachibana is so close. I am honestly delighted. I'm happy! It's like a dream come true!

What happened? Even though earlier, I would be obstinate and persuade myself that it is nothing special.

– Jun...?

No, no, if it was me from a little while ago, yesterday, I would probably run away when she advanced to me with a great number of classmates around. And yet, seeing Tachibana, my body moves of its own accord as if it has to face her... it's this situation.

Summer, sea, together with Tachibana. Not good, me. Don't jump the gun, haven't you been together all the time since the first term? Summer and sea, just what's so special about it? Yet, and yet! She has been so happy since yesterday...

... What happens when the two of us are together, everybody has seen it. Mysteriously, an uplifting feeling surges inside me.... But right now, I might want to be alone with her just a little bit.... As I want to put something into clear words, a whirlpool swirls at the bottom of my stomach.

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Chapter 50 - Just Some Tent

Once upon a time, there were pitiful brother and sister who had an aunt with a loose screw. Every summer, she would take them around the campsite, saying something like "It is a rehearsal for the time when you become a normie". Has she really not thought that it is impossible for such a day to come, when she saw the two of us who were walking around as if we were disappointment wearing clothes? And mysteriously, it seems she hasn't.

"Fufu, don't worry. Because influence graph of the youth can change in an instant just by some chance!"

Well, I got used to it. Both me and Keyaki would just laugh and joke in return.

"It can't be helped, we do this every year. We are mobs in any case."

"It's exactly as aniki says. We can't even play games here. By the way, I think of this every time, but, aunt, why is it always a mountain?"

But talking like that, we naturally stepped on aunt Arika's landmine. She would put both her hands on my shoulders and shake my body. It's the usual passion coming outside when she has bloodshot eyes.

"Come on, Jun-kun! Keyaki-chan too. It is not for that reason! Even if I say that there is a chance, if you don't notice it, it will pass you at the speed of sound! Fufun!"

Usually, she is a guardian who wouldn't annoy you even if you laze around in the room a little, but it is her theory that whatever motivation is important. Particularly, summer is different. In the world of youth, summer is special. That's the way it is.

"Do you understand? Summer is a season of reversals. Even girls raise some fighting spirit and come to decision during summer! And how should I put it... That is because boys are skillful"

"Haa. Skillful..."

"What I mean is that it is best to be able to do anything! Come, come, let's put up the tent!"

Speaking of my memories of summer holidays, well, that's how they are. Everything like mountains or sea gives off a smell of family. When I put up a tent, I feel like I'm together with my aunt or little sister. An event unrelated with the existence of something like classmates. Originally, camp should have been something like that.

That is why I pointlessly concentrated on the familiar handwork. In any case, the pair of girls said about something like shopping and went somewhere. I am deceiving my mental condition, which is tired because of certain someone, with a seemingly lonely simple work.

And then... as I came to my senses. When I nailed the last stake, Komatsu-kun was standing nearby with a wry smile. Also, his elder sister stood with folded arms and was looking at me with admiration.

– Hee... Amazing, Jun. You're really quick

– So, so fast... Sorry, Ichijou-kun, I couldn't do anything...

Wha... This brother and sister, were they staring at me all this time?

– Wh-, what? This much is...

– 'Cause you know, Ichijou-kun, you've done it alone in just ten minutes!

– Ten minutes? It should have been a bit longer. At best it would be fifteen minutes

– It doesn't matter how many minutes. Jun... look around you?

As I checked around... Ouf. Miserable state.

– Eh, what kind of structure is this? Isn't it impossible? lol

– Ogino-kun, you look like you can do this! You're for sure good at this

– Nah, I'm non-normie. Haa... What's is this, I just don't get it

Better ones are just having trouble with tying the cord, while in the group, which doesn't know from where to start, all four members are at a loss, just fumbling with the cloth. ... Also, when it came to Iidzuka, he was having a sword fight with a tarp pole, while yelling like a monkey. Hey, it's dangerous. Every single one of them, according to the popular romcom mangaka of the Ichijou household, they would be on a trial by the court martial. If you make her angry, she becomes very dispirited, that person...

Ririka-san sighed with an amazed expression seeing the class that lost its fighting spirit a little.

Now that I think about it, I don't understand Komatsu-kun's sister as much as I thought I did. If I said that I don't have a girlfriend, she would just reply and say to pick one up since it is sea nearby. How should I

put it, she's like a man. And right now, as everyone from the class crowded, her eyes became lively. By the way, the planning this time, isn't it a bit too good? Hasn't she heard anything from Hyodou? As my intuition proved to be right, she looked at me... and broadly grinned.

– Oi, everybody! Come here! If you do, Jun will show you the pattern

– Haa? Komatsu-san, why are you saying whatever you want...!

The woman, who is currently our guardian, wildly stuck out her chin. But still, pattern? This, is this something that needs a pattern to be shown?

– Jun? What, is it about Ichijou?

– Whoa, isn't this really nice! Who made this...?

– All of the appeal comes from Ichijou! And that thing with Tachibana just earlier!

Please, really forget that last part, I'll do anything... Anyhow, at Ririka-san's order a ring started forming around me little by little and bewildered, I started panicking. My loner colleague Komatsu-kun worriedly looked at me, but it doesn't really help. Anyway, looks of either admiration or curiosity were directed at me.

What have you done? I made a protest with my eyes to Ririka-san, but

– Girls' tents have to be put up anyway. Just do it along the way

– ... I have many responsibilities

– I just couldn't look at your face that looked worried ever since you came here. What, it's fine to just show them how to construct it. Your mood will change a bit as well

– Somehow, I feel like it's becoming a spectacle

– Haa? It's not like that at all. In order to also remove that kind of strange suspicions, you should help out your buddies.

Well, even if I remain silent, the gazes turned at me will simply become painful. Certainly, just as she says, it's only putting it up just like I did earlier...

– Well, um... Those who don't understand, it's fine if they just stand there and look...

Humph, being worried just because of some tent is so foolish. It's merely putting it up like usual.

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– Wait for me, Karen. You're in too much of a hurry...

– I can't help it! I want to meet soon!

– Haa... You do get along really well... with Ichijou-kun

– Ehehe... For rushing the shopping, I'm sorry, okay?

After picking up a change of clothes from the room and buying some meat for BBQ from a nearby supermarket, we walked in the direction of the beach.

Haa.. Summer holidays are very fun after all. Excitement just won't stop. Even Momoko is getting put off...

– Um, it's good that the two of you made up, but... Even so, don't do sneaky, strange things with Ichijou-kun, okay?

– Eeh? What are strange things?

– Uh, that would be... Strange things are, um, strange things... There's everyone too

– Momoko, your face is deep red. Hey, is it something embarrassing...?

– Wr-, wrong. I don't mean anything weird...

– Noo. Dirtyyy. Momoko ecchi&j

Isn't it me who is embarrassed? However, even if it is embarrassing... today, I will absolutely monopolize Jun. When everyone will fall asleep in their tents, I'll wake him up and walk on the beach with him... So cool, I'm eager to do it just thinking about it.

I'm rapidly becoming bold... I like him so much. So much... But, it can't be helped, right? Yesterday, there wasn't any disagreement at all on his face when I called us lovey-dovey hug friends. He hugged me so gently, I can still feel his touch...

Haa... Even though I feel sorry for stealing his first kiss, in truth, I am inevitably happy about it. It's probably a mutual love already. It should be decided with just another push.

While I was drifting inside of my head, a rash hoodie, that was put on top of my swimsuit, got pulled. It was abrupt, but I turned to Momoko with a smile. But as Momoko looked worried, I felt a bit uneasy.

– Eh, what...?

– He-, hey, Karen... Look, there.

Jun was putting up a tent over there. However, it's not the guy from our team. Eh... why?

– Eeh, amazing! Ichijou-kun, turns out you're good at taking care of others

– This much is nothing, really, don't mind it...

– No, no, the only one from class who could do it is Ichijou-kun. As for thanks, come later to our team to have a meal?

– I don't really...

Eh...? Him, Jun speaking with some other girl alone, I'm, seeing it for the first time...

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Chapter 50 - Just Some Tent

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"Fufu, don't worry. Because influence graph of the youth can change in an instant just by some chance!"

Well, I got used to it. Both me and Keyaki would just laugh and joke in return.

"It can't be helped, we do this every year. We are mobs in any case."

"It's exactly as aniki says. We can't even play games here. By the way, I think of this every time, but, aunt, why is it always a mountain?"

But talking like that, we naturally stepped on aunt Arika's landmine. She would put both her hands on my shoulders and shake my body. It's the usual passion coming outside when she has bloodshot eyes.

"Come on, Jun-kun! Keyaki-chan too. It is not for that reason! Even if I say that there is a chance, if you don't notice it, it will pass you at the speed of sound! Fufun!"

Usually, she is a guardian who wouldn't annoy you even if you laze around in the room a little, but it is her theory that whatever motivation is important. Particularly, summer is different. In the world of youth, summer is special. That's the way it is.

"Do you understand? Summer is a season of reversals. Even girls raise some fighting spirit and come to decision during summer! And how should I put it... That is because boys are skillful"

"Haa. Skillful..."

"What I mean is that it is best to be able to do anything! Come, come, let's put up the tent!"

Speaking of my memories of summer holidays, well, that's how they are. Everything like mountains or sea gives off a smell of family. When I put up a tent, I feel like I'm together with my aunt or little sister. An event unrelated with the existence of something like classmates. Originally, camp should have been something like that.

That is why I pointlessly concentrated on the familiar handwork. In any case, the pair of girls said about something like shopping and went somewhere. I am deceiving my mental condition, which is tired because of certain someone, with a seemingly lonely simple work.

And then... as I came to my senses. When I nailed the last stake, Komatsu-kun was standing nearby with a wry smile. Also, his elder sister stood with folded arms and was looking at me with admiration.

– Hee... Amazing, Jun. You're really quick

– So, so fast... Sorry, Ichijou-kun, I couldn't do anything...

Wha... This brother and sister, were they staring at me all this time?

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- 'Cause you know, Ichijou-kun, you've done it alone in just ten minutes!
- Ten minutes? It should have been a bit longer. At best it would be fifteen minutes
- It doesn't matter how many minutes. Jun... look around you?

As I checked around... Ouf. Miserable state.

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Better ones are just having trouble with tying the cord, while in the group, which doesn't know from where to start, all four members are at a loss, just fumbling with the cloth. ... Also, when it came to Iidzuka, he was having a sword fight with a tarp pole, while yelling like a monkey. Hey, it's dangerous. Every single one of them, according to the popular romcom mangaka of the Ichijou household, they would be on a trial by the court martial. If you make her angry, she becomes very dispirited, that person...

Ririka-san sighed with an amazed expression seeing the class that lost its fighting spirit a little. Now that I think about it, I don't understand Komatsu-kun's sister as much as I thought I did. If I said that I don't have a girlfriend, she would just reply and say to pick one up since it is sea nearby. How should I put it, she's like a man. And right now, as everyone from the class crowded, her eyes became lively. By the way, the planning this time, isn't it a bit too good? Hasn't she heard anything from Hyodou? As my intuition proved to be right, she looked at me... and broadly grinned.

- Oi, everybody! Come here! If you do, Jun will show you the pattern
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The woman, who is currently our guardian, wildly stuck out her chin. But still, pattern? This, is this something that needs a pattern to be shown?

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Chapter 51 - Demotion

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Eh, but, but! The one who said that she wants Jun to fit into the class, it was me! This, is a really good thing, you know? In the beginning, it was simply gazing at the loner bookworm from afar... and willfully getting interested in him. Although it was me who truly wanted him to merge into the class.

... "Don't worry. I would've taught anyone, even if it wasn't you"

Ugh... After all... it's no good, maybe. He is kind and he is really good at this and that, his face is so cute, lips so soft when I kissed him, smell so good when I hug him, and also, absolutely, absolutely..... it seems he will be the best papa.

Thinking normally, isn't it impossible for him to be unpopular...? Now it will become known that Jun is a good person. Despite me being the first to find them, now all of his good points will be exposed...

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– I know... That that much is fine, I think so myself as well, but...

I think, that right now is still fine. However, Yayoi's plan is literally to form couples in the class! The more Jun stands out, the more he will catch the attention of the other girls. He will become liked. I have to do something...!

As I clasped her wrist, Momoko made a troubled expression. But still, most likely, Momoko should have at least understood, that I have seriously fallen in love. Because before meeting Jun, I have always been together with the usual pair of people. And suddenly, I stopped constantly hanging out with them ...

Yayoi has been saying all along that I have gotten myself a man.

– Err, let me sort this... Karen likes Ichijou-kun and the ones who know it are me, Yayoi and the people who saw that thing earlier?

– That was not enough! 'Cause, they still think that he is free! Hey, what should I do? Can't I, show more? ...Like earlier on the boat

– Not allowed anymore, that kind of thing! Even I was put off, even though I'm a friend...

– Momoko. This, is my first love... If I and Jun become lovey-dovey, how do you think the class would turn out to be...?

– ...Eh?

– For example. Day after day, I want the two of us to be made fun of by everyone

The two of us becoming officially recognized couple in the class. On the school festival, we would obviously be having the roles of prince and princess. During a play before the audience, we would earnestly kiss and I would be later scolded by both Jun and teacher. During the sports festival, I would cheer only for him. I would shout only "Jun", so he would be sitting in the batter's box with red face. We would plan the Christmas party together and invite the whole class. Then, we would be told jokes of how that is a small wedding.

I and Jun, we can certainly make a cheerful class, you know? Perhaps, some other girl could be a good girlfriend for Jun, but it still is not good if it is not me. The reason why it's not good if it is not me, it certainly exists.

When I finished speaking, Momoko was glancing at me, embarrassed at the same time.

– Uum. Well, I certainly want Karen to be happy, but...

– Right, right? Isn't Momoko smart? Isn't there... something that can be done?

– ... There is, but, um..... It's embarrassing, geez... That I can come up with something like this of all things...

– ... What is it? Is it a situation that Momoko yearns for, or something?

– It, it's not like that! Uuh, here... lend me your ear for a bit

– Yeah...

... ..

Turns out, Momoko can come up with some unexpectedly daring ideas...

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Across the blue sky, fluffy clouds are gathering. Pitiful bookworm in his swim shorts was simply setting up several rods over the sea on top of the concrete pier. Today I learned that angling with the rod is boring. As long as you finish the preparations, there's nothing after that, apart from waiting.

"Ahem... Umm, Ichijou-kun. Cooking preparations, we will be doing what we can, here"

While I was setting up the tents for other teams, Tenjuin-san demoted me. Well, how should I put it, this type of work itself is very reminding of me, it's just as a plain. Of course, as I have enough understanding of fishing for an amateur standard, I couldn't refuse.

And I guess that if it wasn't Tachibana Karen sitting next to me, I could've calmed down more.

– Humph

Tachibana huffed very unnaturally. What is this situation? This is too sly, considering her emphasis on bad mood. No, in the first place, if she was displeased because of me, why would she specially come after me to this place?

What does it mean? Should I involve myself with this?

– Erm, Tachibana... Have I done something weird...?

– Not at all... I just thought how you're getting popular. That you're no longer a loner

– ... Just earlier. Have you been watching from afar?

– Yeah...

And yet Tachibana... doesn't seem to be angry. Still, Tachibana sadly narrowed her eyes. As she came closer and naturally got into a sitting position, we were at a distance where our shoulders touched. And by some tacit understanding we joined hands.

It was a quiet place. Of course it is the same beach, but we have walked fairly long to this pier. That is to say, well, the two of us are alone together just as usual. Just a regular situation...

– I, am strange, right...? I am a bit worried even now...

She said so with a face meant to badger. What, are you an idiot...? I just helped the guys from class a little. What are you worried for?

Feeling like laughing a bit, I combed the long blonde hair with my hand. As I did so, the silence between us deepened. At such a distance, as if our hearts are just about to touch. But I still want to enjoy it when they are about to touch but still haven't. At any rate, she is really an idiot. Is it even possible for two lovey-dovey hug friends to exist?

– Fufu, what are you getting worried for? I've just helped them a bit, nobody thinks anything of it. The only weirdo who keeps clinging to me is Tachibana, before now and after.

– Wha-, whaaat...

– The one who named herself a lovey-dovey hug friend yesterday night. She was angrily sulking just earlier. Really, why is she now not angry?

I can't believe it myself. Even though my eyes are locked with Tachibana's at a very close distance, I am this calm right now.

... Now that I think of it, when I was putting up tents within the mess of classmates.... I thought how I wanted to slip out of the crowd of people and be alone together with her.

How is it right now? I simply chatted a bit with my other classmates and she is pouting as if jealous. Just what kind of punch does she have to make in regards to the virgin's heart to be satisfied?

Yesterday, I have admitted that the itchiness in my chest is happiness. We might already have the winner at this point.

– Jun... Hair, it's ticklish...

– So-, sorry. I'll restrain myself...

– No, don't stop... If you don't caress it a lot, I won't be able to have a peace of mind...

The first feeling that rises up when our eyes meet is kindness. Well, there is still some shyness present. Nowadays, I think that I am accepted. That is why, even in front of such a great girl, I can puff out my chest.

The longer I gently caress her hair, the shorter the distance between us becomes. When I noticed, the girl with a hoodie on top of swimsuit, was in my arms. Even though it is so bright and hot, even though the inside of my chest is thoroughly warmed by kindness, I can still feel a person's dear warmth.

Gulp... I swallowed my saliva.

– Jun... Hey, I, am I still your number one?

– Hmm... Of course

– Not good. I have to be in the first place with a large margin from the second. Hey, what I want to say, do you understand...?

I understand. I almost understand. In the world where it almost became just the two of us together, I...

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As I clasped her wrist, Momoko made a troubled expression. But still, most likely, Momoko should have at least understood, that I have seriously fallen in love. Because before meeting Jun, I have always been together with the usual pair of people. And suddenly, I stopped constantly hanging out with them ...

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Chapter 52 - Shower

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Drop, drop. The heat and humidity brought my delirious self back to reality.

– Um, sorry... I've been caressing your hair all this time...

– No, there's no way I could mind that...

Tenderness and awkwardness blended, alternating with each other. We were quietly crossing our trembling gazes. But in contrast to several days ago, it's not just awkward. I... No, we. Even this awkwardness, surely we are enjoying it somewhere inside.

– It, started raining, huh...?

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I'm just thinking, but we are sticking our bodies to each other too naturally. Since when has it become like that? What made us so?

For the several days since I have escaped to this town, I was embracing this huge hole inside my chest. Last night, just how happy I was that we have made up. This feeling of the hole being filled. The sense of fulfillment much stronger than even satisfaction of simply being together.

But then, what is it right now? Just from separating our clinging bodies a little, I feel down in my chest. I'm a fool. This is a serious illness. Is it inevitable that I will be downhearted every time we separate?

Hmm, It's rather good that it started raining. It is a good medicine...

– Wait a bit. Gosh, the rain is getting heavier...

– Yeah, it's true. Before we get soaked...

Let's leave. As I thought so and stretched my hand towards fishing rod,... drop. A large raindrop hit my arm. In several seconds, heavy rainfall started resounding in the air. This is bad. We'll get soaked if just we stand here.

– We might not be able to return. We have to first find a shelter from the rain, it is indeed shower-like

– Ye-, yes... Ehehe... Jun, you're so reliable after all!

– Is it the time to say that? Let's go.

We stood up, held our hands with no particular initiator and looked around. There is a heavy cloud right above us, but the sky is blue. The bright sunlight is still shining through a big rift.

Luckily, there was a nice place in the immediate vicinity. We rushed over to the beach hut. It is an isolated old wooden hut with an open door located on the sandy beach. There is a drum left outside of it. I wonder if fishing tools were stored here in the past? It seems that it hasn't been used for a very long time. Leaving the fishing tackle around there, I breathed a sigh of relief.

– Can't be helped. For the time being, let's use this place...

Weather forecast was for a clear weather. Even though the waves were so gentle when we were riding the boats.

– This is the worst. I got so wet...

– Same here. What are others doing...

– The sound, is getting terrible, right...?

– What should we do, seriously...

The more we look through the window, the darker outside is getting and sound of the rainfall is simply becoming louder. Oi, oi, this is a shower... right? Really, what's the deal with this? If it goes on like this, we won't be able to return to where everyone is. This sucks, should we return even if we get wet? But I'm not alone, Tachibana is here too. It would be a great trouble if she caught a cold. In this case, we should at least make a call...

– Hey, Tachibana, I didn't bring my smartphone with me, so could you...

As I turned around, I could see Tachibana who now took off her hoodie. Well, that's understandable. It was so wet, it would be unwise to keep wearing it. I understand. I do understand. Still, we are in a dark, small hut with just the two of us...

--"Ehehe, now we're alone... Nobody can see us..."

It's overlapping with the dressing room on that day. It happened now more than a several weeks ago. But still, at that time, there was considerably more distance between us than there is right now. Right now is different. The feeling of distance became so small, that it is difficult for me to admit it. And also, I am accepting it enough for me to be embarrassed myself.

As for that, that person stirs up a different kind of nervousness in me. This is... bad.

– Um, a call... Can I ask you to do that? I don't have it with me, so....

Silence descended between us. Within that silence, a notification sound rang from Tachibana's phone. As she picked it up, she apparently has noticed something. She playfully smiled as she gazed at me.

– Not a chance

– Wh-, what are you saying? What are we gonna do if they are worried? We have to at least let them know that we are here, it will become a strangely serious matter otherwise...

– It's fine like this for just a bit longer. Isn't Jun actually thinking the same? The two of us, in swimsuits, in such a place, truly just the two of us... Haa... It's like a dream

A usual face has returned to the blonde girl with wet hair and skin. She left the smartphone on the dirty desk as it was. Before long, signals stopped coming and she got closer to the window step by step. She stood right before me and started lightly wiping me with the rolled up hoodie. She used her hands carefully. Stop this, I said so with my eyes, but she's not paying attention.

– Fufu... Hey, you'll get cold if I don't do this, you know? Haven't both of us gotten dripping wet?

– That, that is so...

– Jun, you're so nervous... Just like when we have just met..... Virgin&j

This, this girl... She always uses the opportunity to have fun in this situations when you have to seriously do something. She has already entered the usual teasing mode. By now, there's nothing that can stop her.

– Sh-, shut up... You're a virgin yourself...

I somehow resisted with words only, but it doesn't seem that it was effective. Tachibana's red face gradually turned pleased. She put her white, soft hand against my shoulder and let her weight press on me. As her lips drew near to the side of my face, her voice brushed my cheek.

– If you don't warm up, you'll catch a cold...

– Ugh... There's no need for this much...

– Jun, despite not being nervous up till just now. Ehehe, is this still not good?

– I, I give up. Let's just settle this with my defeat...

– Nooope. Aren't you already a little cold?

Damn Koumei, I mean, damn rain! Making the south-east wind blow...!

Until now, she was dressed all over, so I tolerated the touching, but now that it is a direct contact, it feels like my insides are completely out. In a situation where my sense organs exceeded their processing ability, the core of my body started generating heat. Far from being calm, the accumulation inside my heart is blazing without being used, but Tachibana's pursuit is not stopping.

– Hey, Jun...?

– ... Let go of me already...

– Being your girlfriend for a day... I truly enjoyed it a lot...

Her lips... are soft. She put them against my cheek and pressed them just like that, chu... It took two seconds for her to separate. Darn, I'm about to turn bald. I feel like I'll become older from the two seconds between her touching and separating.

– Ehehe... Sorry, I touched carelessly...

– I-, idiot... You...

– Hey, that's why... Before we leave this hut... okay?

Be my boyfriend, again...?

Sweetness, sourness, thump-thump, beat-beat. All sorts of feelings mixed up so much that I can't understand them anymore, creating a chaos inside my chest which... doesn't stop. But still, this chaos is pleasant at the same time. Just like a storm raging inside my body, it excites my blood flow.

I put my hand on Tachibana's shoulder. Her ear is right there. It is at a distance where I can reach it immediately, so to speak.

– Okay... Until we leave this hut is... fine

For now, we can't leave this hut. Most likely, we felt the same about that.

Initial phrase is supposedly from Romance of Three Kingdoms "Stop, don't be hasty. This is Koumei's trap". Describes how Sima Yi was constantly afraid of getting into Zhuge Liang's trap (Koumei is Japanese pronunciation of his courtesy name [Tf])

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Let's leave. As I thought so and stretched my hand towards fishing rod,... drop. A large raindrop hit my arm. In several seconds, heavy rainfall started resounding in the air. This is bad. We'll get soaked if just we stand here.

– We might not be able to return. We have to first find a shelter from the rain, it is indeed shower-like

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– Hey, Tachibana, I didn't bring my smartphone with me, so could you...

As I turned around, I could see Tachibana who now took off her hoodie. Well, that's understandable. It was so wet, it would be unwise to keep wearing it. I understand. I do understand. Still, we are in a dark, small hut with just the two of us...

--"Ehehe, now we're alone... Nobody can see us..."

It's overlapping with the dressing room on that day. It happened now more than a several weeks ago. But still, at that time, there was considerably more distance between us than there is right now. Right now is different. The feeling of distance became so small, that it is difficult for me to admit it. And also, I am accepting it enough for me to be embarrassed myself.

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– It's fine like this for just a bit longer. Isn't Jun actually thinking the same? The two of us, in swimsuits, in such a place, truly just the two of us... Haa... It's like a dream

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– Fufu... Hey, you'll get cold if I don't do this, you know? Haven't both of us gotten dripping wet?

– That, that is so...

– Jun, you're so nervous... Just like when we have just met..... Virgin&j

This, this girl... She always uses the opportunity to have fun in this situations when you have to seriously do something. She has already entered the usual teasing mode. By now, there's nothing that can stop her.

– Sh-, shut up... You're a virgin yourself...

I somehow resisted with words only, but it doesn't seem that it was effective. Tachibana's red face gradually turned pleased. She put her white, soft hand against my shoulder and let her weight press on me. As her lips drew near to the side of my face, her voice brushed my cheek.

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– Being your girlfriend for a day... I truly enjoyed it a lot...

Her lips... are soft. She put them against my cheek and pressed them just like that, chu... It took two seconds for her to separate. Darn, I'm about to turn bald. I feel like I'll become older from the two seconds between her touching and separating.

– Ehehe... Sorry, I touched carelessly...

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– Hey, that's why... Before we leave this hut... okay?

Be my boyfriend, again...?

Sweetness, sourness, thump-thump, beat-beat. All sorts of feelings mixed up so much that I can't

understand them anymore, creating a chaos inside my chest which... doesn't stop. But still, this chaos is pleasant at the same time. Just like a storm raging inside my body, it excites my blood flow. I put my hand on Tachibana's shoulder. Her ear is right there. It is at a distance where I can reach it immediately, so to speak.

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Chapter 52 - Shower

When we have been hugging for so long that my vague feelings almost turned into words, it started raining. As the small droplets started falling down, we, who were clinging to each other until then, came to ourselves and separated.

Drop, drop. The heat and humidity brought my delirious self back to reality.

– Um, sorry... I've been caressing your hair all this time...

– No, there's no way I could mind that...

Tenderness and awkwardness blended, alternating with each other. We were quietly crossing our trembling gazes. But in contrast to several days ago, it's not just awkward. I... No, we. Even this awkwardness, surely we are enjoying it somewhere inside.

– It, started raining, huh...?

– Ye-, yeah...

I'm just thinking, but we are sticking our bodies to each other too naturally. Since when has it become like that? What made us so?

For the several days since I have escaped to this town, I was embracing this huge hole inside my chest. Last night, just how happy I was that we have made up. This feeling of the hole being filled. The sense of fulfillment much stronger than even satisfaction of simply being together.

But then, what is it right now? Just from separating our clinging bodies a little, I feel down in my chest. I'm a fool. This is a serious illness. Is it inevitable that I will be downhearted every time we separate?

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– Wait a bit. Gosh, the rain is getting heavier...

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Luckily, there was a nice place in the immediate vicinity. We rushed over to the beach hut. It is an isolated old wooden hut with an open door located on the sandy beach. There is a drum left outside of it. I wonder if fishing tools were stored here in the past? It seems that it hasn't been used for a very long time. Leaving the fishing tackle around there, I breathed a sigh of relief.

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Chapter 53 - The World of Only Two

Once upon a time, I was Tachibana Karen's boyfriend for just a few hours. That time is something that makes my face red and makes me think of some things.

... Can you believe it?... Will it work for me?... In other words, such a thing, is it something that is allowed for a gloomy bookworm loner?

Well, although I have been thinking of various matters, I couldn't care less at that time. Because I made light of it, thinking that it was a joke anyway. And as I haven't made a proper response, I ended up hurting this important person.

So, what about now...? The circumstances are a little bit different. There is not much change to the fact that it is a half-joke, but this is playing around and not playing at the same time. It is a dangerous game, where two of us are probing each other's feelings. Even though I have lost the sight of my own true feelings.

– Jun... Hey, Jun...?

– Wha-, what...?

– Anything is fine, say something... boyfriend-like?

Tachibana commenced straight away. She wiggled her hand which was on my shoulder and put her finger on my nape.

– It's fine even if it is a lie? Something, boyfriend-like. Nfufu...

Boyfriend-like. I clung to the cliff of reason so as to not to fall into the abyss of nervousness. And I have to somehow carefully choose my words. But still, it is a probe after all. Let's give it a try and take a look at her attitude.

– It's about time you introduce me to your parents

– Fufu, dummy... Not stuff like that...

Familiar small laughter brushed my ear. I wonder if it was a bit too much of a joke. Still, Tachibana is not the one to reject an invitation.

– How many months are we dating as the setting?

– About half a year...?

– Hee? You can decide that so quickly...?

– ... That is, umm, just a joke. What, don't make that serious face all of a sudden...

I tried looking away, but was not permitted to do so. Still glued to me, she held my jaw. The sound of the heavy rain outside could be heard and I felt like we have been like this for several tens of minutes.

As if Tachibana's mood turned better from seeing me flustered, Tachibana's faced relaxed and became full of confidence just like usual. Far from simply probing, it seems she's already excited.

... Humph, get excited all you want. Doing it this way is more fun. That voice in the corner of my heart, it is still a secret.

– After papa and mama are pleased with you, what will happen?

– So them being pleased with me is a prerequisite...

– If it is like that, you won't get told anything by papa and always hang out in my room. After school, day after day, just the two of us will happily... After that, there's only having boyfriend decide...

Tachibana's lips curved like a bow and her white teeth could be glimpsed from the gap. She is a girl, whom a triumphant look really, really suits. There is something I understood. I always yearn for this face which knows that I'm being teased.

– Decide. Decide what...

What if I hated being teased by her? What if I wanted to be dominant? That is simple. I would have to just turn around and show her an attitude of not being interested. Say that I would be going already and rush out of the hut right then. It's probably because I don't want to be dominant, that I'm not doing so.

– Eeh. What it is, isn't it obvious...

I want to make her say what is next. And after making her say that, I want to get even more excited.

... When she was about to start speaking, Tachibana's smartphone left on the table vibrated. Somebody from the class has probably messaged. Surprised by the unexpected sound, we separated our sticking bodies.

– Let's, let's go. Very soon, they will start getting worried...

As Tachibana was somehow hiding her now naked skin with hands, her face darkened as if displeased.

– I don't want to be, disturbed... I still want to be the girlfriend...

Not being able to come to a conclusion, vibration stopped and sound of rainfall returned.

– Jun has tried his best, so... Don't I have to act like a girlfriend?

– Ye-, yeah...

I sat on the old wooden chair with only swim shorts on me, but there's no way I can let Tachibana sit on a dirty chair. And without even arranging it with me... the blonde girl settled herself on top of my lap. Then, she made a direct hit into my ear with a something girlfriend-like.

... Apparently, unlike me, she's going in with a straight.

– From now on, I will tell Jun what part of him I like...

My body twitched from this extra straight surprise attack, but unfortunately, I can't move from here because of Tachibana's weight. I can't escape. While I'm being naked in various ways, I have no choice, but to receive this concentrated fire.

– Ehehe, all of you. I like all of you...&j

– Ta-, Tachibana...! Stop, stuff like that...

– Isn't it girlfriend-like this way, after all? Haa..... I like all of you

She put her slender arm around my neck. We're not in boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, we're lovey hug friends. With her hand around my neck, I must not be in a daze. That would be rude.

– But half-seriously, it is all of you...

– Humph, a girl of poor taste...

Like that, I was caressing her wet back, while calling her names. It would be fine if time such as this continued forever. Most likely, we both thought so. Have my senses numbed from clinging too much? My nervousness was about to dissolve within the mood.

I'll surrender myself to time. I couldn't hear anything apart from the voice of the girl before my eyes.

– Your cold, sullen face, you being kind to everyone, and also how you can do different things...

– You became angry for me. You were together with me and seemed like you always had fun.

– Eh...?

– That is... I mean, that sort of parts of Tachibana..., no, Karen, I like them. I will not be saying this second time...

– No... One time a day... Hey, Jun. Jun...!

– Karen...

Her wet eyes captured me and wouldn't let go. I properly met her gaze without turning away only now. I felt like I could continue being like that for eternity.

..... "Do you know why you are feeling nervous?"..... "Falling in love, you're just enduring not to do it, you know? Isn't it okay just fall in love with me already&j Aren't we boyfriend and girlfriend? Let's just both turn into fools?"

Previously, when I was the boyfriend, she has said so.

The world of only two, where we give ourselves to each other. Like this, I will be completely pulled in. But right now, it is fine to be totally immersed. Surely the two of us can become happy, be unable to leave, lose the sense of time. Getting closer to that soft lips without any hesitation...

The door moved with a clank and opened. Tenjuin Momoko was puffing out her cheek as if displeased. All of the class was waiting behind her in a line. There are also guys who are looking through the window. It seems my sense of time has really gone mad. Also, it seems that it really was a shower. Outside is very clear...

– Umm... It's good that both of you are safe. Although I haven't thought that it would reach this point after all!

It was silent all around. It seems like I even won't be getting teased in this situation.

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– About half a year...?

– Hee? You can decide that so quickly...?

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I tried looking away, but was not permitted to do so. Still glued to me, she held my jaw. The sound of the heavy rain outside could be heard and I felt like we have been like this for several tens of minutes.

As if Tachibana's mood turned better from seeing me flustered, Tachibana's face relaxed and became full of confidence just like usual. Far from simply probing, it seems she's already excited.

... Humph, get excited all you want. Doing it this way is more fun. That voice in the corner of my heart, it is still a secret.

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– So them being pleased with me is a prerequisite...

– If it is like that, you won't get told anything by papa and always hang out in my room. After school, day after day, just the two of us will happily... After that, there's only having boyfriend decide...

Tachibana's lips curved like a bow and her white teeth could be glimpsed from the gap. She is a girl, whom a triumphant look really, really suits. There is something I understood. I always yearn for this face which knows that I'm being teased.

– Decide. Decide what...

What if I hated being teased by her? What if I wanted to be dominant? That is simple. I would have to just turn around and show her an attitude of not being interested. Say that I would be going already and rush out of the hut right then. It's probably because I don't want to be dominant, that I'm not doing so.

– Eeh. What it is, isn't it obvious...

I want to make her say what is next. And after making her say that, I want to get even more excited.

... When she was about to start speaking, Tachibana's smartphone left on the table vibrated. Somebody from the class has probably messaged. Surprised by the unexpected sound, we separated our sticking bodies.

– Let's, let's go. Very soon, they will start getting worried...

As Tachibana was somehow hiding her now naked skin with hands, her face darkened as if displeased.

– I don't want to be, disturbed... I still want to be the girlfriend...

Not being able to come to a conclusion, vibration stopped and sound of rainfall returned.

– Jun has tried his best, so... Don't I have to act like a girlfriend?

– Ye-, yeah...

I sat on the old wooden chair with only swim shorts on me, but there's no way I can let Tachibana sit on a dirty chair. And without even arranging it with me... the blonde girl settled herself on top of my lap. Then, she made a direct hit into my ear with a something girlfriend-like.

... Apparently, unlike me, she's going in with a straight.

– From now on, I will tell Jun what part of him I like...

My body twitched from this extra straight surprise attack, but unfortunately, I can't move from here because of Tachibana's weight. I can't escape. While I'm being naked in various ways, I have no choice, but to receive this concentrated fire.

– Ehehe, all of you. I like all of you...&j

– Ta-, Tachibana...! Stop, stuff like that...

– Isn't it girlfriend-like this way, after all? Haa..... I like all of you

She put her slender arm around my neck. We're not in boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, we're lovey hug friends. With her hand around my neck, I must not be in a daze. That would be rude.

– But half-seriously, it is all of you...

– Humph, a girl of poor taste...

Like that, I was caressing her wet back, while calling her names. It would be fine if time such as this continued forever. Most likely, we both thought so. Have my senses numbed from clinging too much? My nervousness was about to dissolve within the mood.

I'll surrender myself to time. I couldn't hear anything apart from the voice of the girl before my eyes.

– Your cold, sullen face, you being kind to everyone, and also how you can do different things...

– You became angry for me. You were together with me and seemed like you always had fun.

– Eh...?

– That is... I mean, that sort of parts of Tachibana..., no, Karen, I like them. I will not be saying this second time...

– No... One time a day... Hey, Jun. Jun...!

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Her wet eyes captured me and wouldn't let go. I properly met her gaze without turning away only now. I felt like I could continue being like that for eternity.

..... "Do you know why you are feeling nervous?" "Falling in love, you're just enduring not to do it, you know? Isn't it okay just fall in love with me already&j Aren't we boyfriend and girlfriend? Let's just both turn into fools?"

Previously, when I was the boyfriend, she has said so.

The world of only two, where we give ourselves to each other. Like this, I will be completely pulled in. But right now, it is fine to be totally immersed. Surely the two of us can become happy, be unable to leave, lose the sense of time. Getting closer to that soft lips without any hesitation...

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– Umm... It's good that both of you are safe. Although I haven't thought that it would reach this point after all!

It was silent all around. It seems like I even won't be getting teased in this situation.

Chapter 53 - The World of Only Two

Once upon a time, I was Tachibana Karen's boyfriend for just a few hours. That time is something that makes my face red and makes me think of some things.

... Can you believe it?... Will it work for me?... In other words, such a thing, is it something that is allowed for a gloomy bookworm loner?

Well, although I have been thinking of various matters, I couldn't care less at that time. Because I made light of it, thinking that it was a joke anyway. And as I haven't made a proper response, I ended up hurting this important person.

So, what about now...? The circumstances are a little bit different. There is not much change to the fact

that it is a half-joke, but this is playing around and not playing at the same time. It is a dangerous game, where two of us are probing each other's feelings. Even though I have lost the sight of my own true feelings.

– Jun... Hey, Jun...?

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Tachibana commenced straight away. She wiggled her hand which was on my shoulder and put her finger on my nape.

– It's fine even if it is a lie? Something, boyfriend-like. Nfufu...

Boyfriend-like. I clung to the cliff of reason so as to not to fall into the abyss of nervousness. And I have to somehow carefully choose my words. But still, it is a probe after all. Let's give it a try and take a look at her attitude.

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Chapter 54 - Suitableness

– That just earlier was, um... incredible, right...?

Last night was a blast, I want you to please not speak like that. I was earnestly beating the chicken meat with a hammer, while receiving Komatsu-kun's comment, that was rubbing salt into my wounds, from the back.

I'm feeling just like a legendary blacksmith who is forging a holy sword. Considering that my loner trait is the only persistent one, this is an ideal occupation for me, isn't it so? If I went to another world, I have confidence in being able to swiftly find a town smithy and successfully enroll there. Becoming a hero sucks, handwork is the best.

Actually, I have never wanted to be run over by a truck as strong as I do now. Because no matter what, after having been seen at the scene like that...

– So Ichijou-kun is popular... And here I thought he was a loner like me...

– ... Don't say as if friends are having a falling out. I'm still a loner inside...

– Hmm. Normally, you wouldn't call someone with a girlfriend a loner

Startled, I turned around. With a hand on his waist, my loner fellow stood with a displeased face and puffed out cheeks.

Well, girlfriend. Girlfriend, huh... I have already lost the position where I can downright deny it. Although, speaking of the conclusion, she's not my girlfriend. Even so... The words that have rushed out of my mouth because I have been seen doing that stuff with Tachibana, they probably shook the entire class.

To start with, the very first witness Tenjuin has asked the following.

"Umm... Sorry for interrupting you so suddenly..."

The feeling of trying to guess that is seeping out from her face and the atmosphere. As if not accustomed to directly looking at that image, despite avoiding our faces, class representative has said this while glancing at us.

Tachibana in the swimsuit was still sitting on my lap, with only swimming shorts on me. A thin arm was around my neck. A cheek was stuck with another cheek. Crowd of classmates could see that directly.

"... But everyone is interested, so..... Are you... like that?"

I mostly understood the meaning of her question. I answered to that question. But because of my communication ability, I ended up giving an awful reply.

"My..... Gi-, girlfiend..."

"Ah... Is, is that so... We-, well, I wish you happiness for many years to come..."

It would be too awkward to notify them about the "before we leave this hut" condition. Rather, even if I told them about this rule filled with sense of private matter, they wouldn't understand. However, even if they do misunderstand because of that messy way of speaking, I can't make any complaints...

Naturally, Tachibana is not the one who would sit silently in that situation.

"Jun... Chu..."

That touch that I can feel on my cheek, I'm already used to it. After several seconds... by the time when her lips separated from me, a pink colored ribbon that doesn't match me was tied to my hair.

"Ehehe. I will do the lovey-dovey courage test with my boyfriend...&j By the way, everyone. This is not an exhibition, so quickly go that way, okay? Fufu..."

Like this, one lie became an open fact within the class. A misunderstanding of being rejected, a misunderstanding of going out... The situation became so complicated, that it wears me out. In order to avert my eyes from the knot which cannot be untied, I am still continuing to beat the meat.

That we were found out, do I... dislike it? I would run away if I didn't like it. But lately, I have remarkably stopped running away. How I was flirting with Tachibana, it has been seen, you know. No... have we shown it?

Even I am already not sure which one is correct. It's just that, I had a feeling like something that I was desperately trying to suppress has exploded and strangely, I even felt refreshed. Seriously, what's wrong with me?

...

– Yo, Class prince!

The one who lightly poked me in the back was Tachibana's best friend, who's thoughts I can never understand, Hyoudou.

Ah, by the way, what I'm doing right now is preparation of the dinner. The air around the beach is completely dry as everyone is making BBQ or something. And it seems our group is preparing some unknown food called tandoori chicken. Everything is because I couldn't catch any fish.

– I didn't think that Ichijou would go so far. It helped that you have rushed about half of my plans. ... All this time. Have you been lovey-dovey like that while we didn't know?

– ... Well, as expected, not to that extent.

The girl with a slender body laughed as if in a good mood. It seems that the mood of people getting put off has been cleared with great difficulty and a cheerful gahaha laughter is resounding in the vicinity.

Well, only me and Komatsu-kun are silently doing our work at the side.

– I say... Everyone rushing in great numbers, is it your doing? Like, Tachibana has consulted you or something.

– ... Karen, she was seriously worried. That she was rejected.

– ... I feel sorry for that

– Well, isn't it a thing of the past already? Haven't you clearly become a boyfriend now?

– By any chance, has it been you, who made the shower fall when I was fishing...

– Haha, stop saying stupid things. Wasn't it Momoko who told you to go fishing?

Ugh, does that mean that class representative has come up with some bad idea? Demote and isolate both of us and check on us later. If she told Tachibana to flirt in the meantime, later, when she would come to check things, it would have turned into being caught red-handed.

She understood everything up to the shower and the hut and inspired Tachibana, didn't she...? No, no, that's impossible... right?

– I just... thought that if I have shown your strong point of being skilled in outdoor activities before the class, then everybody would approve.

– Approve...? Everyone...?

– As Karen's boyfriend, okay? What I'm saying, do you understand...?

– I don't. That kind of thing, it is our problem. Why is there this "everyone" ...?

– Because... Hey, look there. Yeah, there...

Tachibana was standing with another team. She is smiling so happily in the center of a circle. It's so like her to be like that. Being surrounded by everyone, no matter boys or girls, and having fun.

It seems that she is very happy that we were caught. She is sparkling.

– Hey, hey, since when have you been dating!?

– Eeh? In my mind, it has been forever. Ehehe...

– Have you always been hiding and flirting like that with Ichijou-kun...?

Tachibana silently nodded. Shouts of kyaa, kyaa started just from that. However, Hyoudou pointed in another direction again. The group of people who can be together with Tachibana are innocently clamoring, but apparently there are some guys who are barely away from that circle.

– Tch... Like this, I'm about to play the role of the ghost...

– I wonder, why is it Ichijou...

– Does he have some sort of a trump card? I just can't agree with this...

... Does the class normally look like this? Nobody cares about me. They can't see me. I've always thought like that. No, it probably really was like that. Bookworm at the edge of the class. I only know of one oddball in this world who would be interested in that. Well, she is, however, called Tachibana Karen.

– ... Your thoughts? This, is what it means to be the boyfriend of a girl like Karen.

– I see. I am not suitable... Ah, agreeing with it so readily, I'm so pathetic.

Everybody is looking at Tachibana. That is why, there is a suitable cast for standing beside her. She probably wants to say that. I know very well my own standing so, well, it's not like I don't understand.

– ... Ichijou-kun, you're... a good person, you know?

The one who interjected with a small voice from behind was, unexpectedly, Komatsu-kun. Both me and Hyoudou were equally surprised by this. Still, he continued, albeit with difficulty.

– You help people, no matter what kind of person asks you... Umm, how should I say, I can't properly put

it into words, but...

– Komatsu-kun, you don't really have to push yourself...

– Cause... you know. Is it so important to stand out and sparkle? After all, everyone got helped by Ichijou-kun... Isn't it fine to at least have a cute girlfriend...?

Hyodou sighed and her admonishing look softened. It seems that Komatsu-kun is frightened due to the fact that the other party is a girl. However, what is with this youth? It was the same when he first tried to talk with me. He can muster unneeded courage. Such a courage that you wouldn't think he is a loner.

– I too, am not saying that it is a mismatch if it is Ichijou. There are good points in everyone. I mean, I just wanted you to have confidence and display them, and even though I have come up with various things, they have vanished because of that flirting love, haa... Hey, Ichijou?

– What?

– I hate this tiresome way of speaking, so I'll just ask normally

Hyodou grinned. I gulped and stopped the hammer from beating the meat. On the other side, Tenjuin-san was about to return and take Tachibana along with her.

– Do you... like Karen?

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– Do you... like Karen?

Chapter 54 - Suitableness

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– Hmm. Normally, you wouldn't call someone with a girlfriend a loner

Startled, I turned around. With a hand on his waist, my loner fellow stood with a displeased face and puffed out cheeks.

Well, girlfriend. Girlfriend, huh... I have already lost the position where I can downright deny it. Although, speaking of the conclusion, she's not my girlfriend. Even so... The words that have rushed out of my mouth because I have been seen doing that stuff with Tachibana, they probably shook the entire class.

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c55

Chapter 55 - Friends

– Do I... like Karen?

My heart froze because of that question. However, it happened for only a moment. After that one moment, cold blood started flowing inside my whole body like a muddy stream and my panic grew even worse. This extremely noisy heartbeat. I was afraid that it could be heard in the surroundings.

Answer to that question was on the tip of my tongue. But before it turned into specific words, I continued pondering within that moment.

– Which, would it be...?

Hyoudou, with her arms folded, grinned with a challenging face. Still, while amused, she had an evaluating coldness inside her eyes.

– What's with that question... Considering the flow of our chat right now, I don't get it

While saying that, I pathetically hid how I clenched my fist.

Do I like her, or not? I was certain about that myself. I was supposed to. But that question was always "What do I think about her?". Not "Do I like her or not?". The gap between these two may be small, but they are worlds apart at the same time.

Do I like her, or not? It is not also not "Do you like her or dislike her?". If I was asked like that, I wouldn't have that much worries before saying that I like her. It's impossible that I would say that I dislike her.

Then, by elimination, there is only option of liking. It would be the same as being made to say that. I could have as many excuses as I would like.

Do I like her, or not? Alright, Ichijou Jun. No matter how many days are given to a weakling like you, there will probably be no answer. Rather, the more time there is, the more you will look for a way out.

That's why, let's just simply look at reality.

I can't get her out of my head. I end up unintentionally wondering if we are going to meet today. Day after day I keep her company for studies and on our way home without making displeased face, and then get tired. I have at last, because of her, ran away to such a remote place. That bookworm loner has done things to that extent. Is doing things to that extent. Do I like Tachibana, you say...?

Tachibana has come very close. It is as if she urges me, but still, I managed to squeeze out a single reply.

– I... like her

– ... I'm glad that I asked

– Humph... So that answer was to your liking

– Well, that was...

The present instigator grinned and sinisterly laughed.

– Next time, can you do it manly, just like now...? So that not Karen, but Ichijou can be seen by everyone in a nice way

– Next time? What are you talking about...?

– ... I'm looking forward to it

– Juun! Ah, Yayoi. What were you talking about with Jun!

– Karen, don't run...!

Tachibana and class representative rushed over. Our eyes met and she grinned. It was always like that.

Ever since I could see this, I would uncharacteristically feel cheerful in the school. And when I couldn't, I would feel especially gloomy.

– Sorry, sorry. I wouldn't take away Karen's boyfriend, so don't worry, okay?

– No... Boyfriend, somehow I feel shy when other people say that...

– Karen is finally a girlfriend, huh... Be happy, okay?

Hyoudou poked Tachibana in the shoulder and left to the other side. So, only our team was left. Me and Komatsu-kun in process of cooking. Tachibana and Tenjuin who have returned. Though I do feel awkward with this and that happening between me and Tachibana lately.

Sensing the delicate atmosphere, the four of us exchanged looks. Tachibana let out an "Ehehe..." with a red face while playing with her hair. Despite doing all of that in the public presence just earlier, it seems that her head has cooled down a bit.

"Umm, what should we do...&j Will you, flirt right here...?"

"I won't, fool..."

"Right... Wouldn't it be rude to the two of them?"

– Err, well, this and that happened, but... Let's, let's do it...

– Ye-, yeah...

After all, we managed with great difficulty to break out of the awkwardness and catch a breath when we got to have the dinner at the edge. Every group gathered what they have brought to the center of the arranged circle of tents and turned it into a kind of an eat-while-standing party. Most of the people are making noise around the light in the center.

I was gazing at the violet horizon, that made it seem that night goes only that far. Like. Although not in front of the person herself, I ended up saying it. Is it true? Say, I do like her, which part of her do I like then? Questions still remain, but I don't want to lie now that I have said it.

-- "I wonder, why is it Ichijou..."

As I sat down, that phrase suddenly got into my head and wouldn't leave. Everyone is looking at me. Conscious for the first time of just what kind of guy I am, they shifted their attention to me. I'm getting looked at. They think about me, that Tachibana's partner has to be suitable...

The previous me would probably think that it doesn't matter from the bottom of his heart. But the problem right now is not what they think about me. It's what they think about me and Tachibana. If nothing is done regarding this in particular, I won't be able to protect her as someone who stands next to her.

– Are you, okay...?

A small figure without much of a presence quietly approached.

– So it's Komatsu-kun...

– Haha. As expected, you're alone even here. Can I, sit here...?

As he sat, both of us munched on the meat and whatever was on top of our paper plates. Now then, he is a loner mate. Even if I can't call myself a loner publicly, it's not like Tachibana has substituted my essence. I am still me. Looking at Komatsu-kun made me realize that.

– I wonder if it is... because I'm alone?

– Eh...?

I was surprised myself that I asked someone else for advice. But still, I continued.

– I'm being thought of as lame because I'm alone. I have never though like that until now. I was fine with anything. I seriously thought "just say what you want".

As I thought that Komatsu-kun opened his eyes wide from being surprised, he folded up, grasped his knees, put his face against his legs and bashfully laughed, fufu.

– Wh-, what...?

– You asked for an advice. So I finally felt like I became a friend

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Chapter 55 - Friends

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c56

Chapter 56 - Lovey-dovey Test of Courage \$`

Like that, main event, namely test of courage, started. The briefing for the couples this time is a scary story around the bonfire. Finishing the routine event after some time, couples enter one after another and..... exit with a scream.

– Kyaaaaaa!

... Somehow, it seems that non-normie ghosts burdened with sorrow are serious beyond imagination. I have seen many times how couples who entered the forest would scream and run out while holding their sides before long. During extreme cases, boys had mud balls against their faces. Apparently, a war to explode normies has started.

"... Go explode normies. Though relatively seriously, let's get you guys surprised."

"Ahaha... Do your best, Ichijou-kun..."

These were the appearances of Nakamura and Komatsu when we were entering the forest. Just as announced, ghost army of these guys in white clothing have achieved a lot of war results. Well, everyone getting a laugh is the goal, so it's not serious even if we get either surprised or get chased out, but... speaking of me, my mind is not calm.

In just a bit, we'll get seen. No, it is absolutely necessary to show them. That different from the couples who are there just to enjoy it, the two of us have different circumstances. I... like her. I have ended up saying it. If it was like usual, I would probably say "I was made to say that by the flow of the conversation" and look for a way to escape.

But only this, I don't want it to be a lie. I want to take responsibility for my own words. I'm not going against my feelings by any means. That thought pushed my urge more than usual.

... I want to join hands with this excessively cute girl right now.... I have to properly let her know that this feeling I receive is definitely not a one-way feeling. I have to ease her mind.

– Jun... Will you, protect me...?

– Isn't it just for fun...

– Still... Will you protect me?

– Humph, it's only obvious...

– What's that... Aren't you unusually cool...

Even at that period of time I was thinking of the words that I ought to say to Tachibana.

It is probably because... I continued to run away. The reason that everyone doesn't want to see me as Tachibana's partner is probably that I have been constantly turning my eyes away from the surroundings. That is why this time, even if it is accompanied with an unthinkable embarrassment, it is a chance to let everyone know. How we become. What feelings I have. To what extent am I sincere, serious, and well, it is unbearably embarrassing, but...

– Let's go...? To the lovey-dovey test of courage...

So, us, two old offenders, naturally took the roles of the key performers. We walked in on the muddy forest road. It was silent for a little while. No, it is still silent even while we are walking in the inner segment of the inner segment of the course.

– Nobody... is there, huh

– ... It's not like that? It's just that everybody has turned into a ghost and are looking at us. That's why, if we flirt too much, we'll get in trouble, you know? Ehehe...

Guys from the class probably don't know, but I've been walking her home every day, so our experience differs. We're used to being trapped in the dark of the night. That's why, even if it is dark and we can't see other's faces, if our words get interrupted, somehow we calm down feeling the usual distance.

Despite fidgeting when we first started walking, both of us slowly got closer and in a gentle voice considerate of each other,

– Hey? We ended up saying that we're going out, right...?

– ... Ye-, yeah. Moreover, I was the one to say it...

Her good mood is getting relayed just from her tone of voice. However, it is different from her usual teasing mode. Should I say that it was a bit more calm... a nice mood. No, speaking of it, it was always like that. Even that Tachibana Karen on the road at night, who got tired after having played with the

bookworm, would get silent. Twilight and stars have the charm that can make any girl silent...

My role as the one who walks together with her, is most likely to not spoil this mood. Luckily, we're not on the way home right now. Separation is not approaching yet.

– Was it... unpleasant? Saying that I'm your girlfriend because of the flow...

– It wasn't a lie, right? You were the girlfriend until we left the hut...

As we walked next to each other, our steps matched as if we have arranged them beforehand. We got closer on the muddy road and as our hands unintentionally touched, we joined them just like that. And then we stopped.

– Hey...? Everyone in the class already thinks that we are going out...

– It doesn't feel like we can make a correction, right...

– That's true...

– It's about time, I start calling you Karen

I could hear nothing but the sounds of insects. As our hands entangled, the girl covered the clasped hand with her other hand. I put my free hand on the shoulder of the important person.

– ... Karen

– Jun, I want to cling right now... It's fine, right...

– Yeah...

Karen placed herself on my chest. I tried to calm her excitement by gently brushing her back, but I couldn't hope for much effect. While my chest trembled because of her disordered breath, I moved my hand even more subtly like a brushing wind.

– Is it really not unpleasant? That everyone thinks that we're going out...

– If it was unpleasant, I wouldn't say you're my girlfriend

– From now on, you'll always be my boyfriend in the classroom, you know...? Even though you were a one-day boyfriend...

– Let's get made fun of ourselves a lot... It's fine to let everyone enjoy themselves like that...

– Jun... Jun... I'm so very happy... I feel like crying...

A ray of light was falling on the tiny pair from the gap between tall trees. I gave myself to the mood as it was... No, nothing will change like that. Instead, I firmly gazed at the girl before my eyes. As I did so for a long time, she finally seemed to calm down. She let out a long breath together with a lovely laughter.

– Ehehe... Somehow, haven't we made a... turn-around?

– Haha, what? Turn-around?

– 'Cause you know... Until now, we've been getting along hundred times better comparing to our time in library...

– Hmm... Well, that is, true...

Well then, isn't it fine to continue doing just like until now. That girlfriend's hundred times better. Just as I was about to put that into words, I felt a stabbing gaze. A gaze of outrageous envy. A stupid zombie-like voice sneaked out of the darkness near us.

– Ugh... Ichijou... Even though he's a bookworm...

– Explode... Explode...

– Separate immediately...

We're being watched. Starting now, everything, we as we are, is going to be seen. But what do I care. I don't worry about other's stares at any time. If you want to look, look as you like. You guys have probably seen an extremely obstinate bookworm. I will do what I want.

– Well then, isn't it fine to continue doing just like until now. Getting along hundred times better with "girlfriend", compared to the library...

– Ah, Jun... What happened...?

– Fufu... Some things happened today and I was broken

I broke through, felt refreshed and smiled broadly. I tightly grasped her hand. Unfortunately, we can't afford to get caught by the camp of non-normies right now. I still have things that I have to do. But there are too few spectators for that.

– Let's run away together

– Kya...

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In just a bit, we'll get seen. No, it is absolutely necessary to show them. That different from the couples who are there just to enjoy it, the two of us have different circumstances. I... like her. I have ended up saying it. If it was like usual, I would probably say "I was made to say that by the flow of the conversation" and look for a way to escape.

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Guys from the class probably don't know, but I've been walking her home every day, so our experience differs. We're used to being trapped in the dark of the night. That's why, even if it is dark and we can't see other's faces, if our words get interrupted, somehow we calm down feeling the usual distance.

Despite fidgeting when we first started walking, both of us slowly got closer and in a gentle voice considerate of each other,

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Her good mood is getting relayed just from her tone of voice. However, it is different from her usual

teasing mode. Should I say that it was a bit more calm... a nice mood. No, speaking of it, it was always like that. Even that Tachibana Karen on the road at night, who got tired after having played with the bookworm, would get silent. Twilight and starts have the charm that can make any girl silent... My role as the one who walks together with her, is most likely to not spoil this mood. Luckily, we're not on the way home right now. Separation is not approaching yet.

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Chapter 57 – Lovey-dovey Test of Courage \$a

– ... Should we, run far away just like this?

As we held our breath after escaping, Karen brought her mouth near my ear and said so. Both of us leaned on a big tree, but our hands were still joined.

– You guys search there! We will be looking here!

– Right!

... Look, they'll find us. We have to make our bodies smaller. Hearing the voices of our pursuers reaching us from the distance, we silently huddled together. That both of us are covered in sweat is transmitted only through the heat within the darkness.

Before coming here, we followed a curving path and outflanked our pursuers. Although, due to going according to the course until its middle, the ghosts that have been hiding until then have probably seen us, so most likely we will be found before long. Still, that will increase the amount of spectators without doubt.

And then... For the time being, sound of footsteps became distant. As we slowly returned to the muddy road, a space between the trees appeared. A faint moonlight was shining on a stump in the center seemingly suitable for sitting.

A place like this. Easily viewable, nice location...

After I suggested to take a sit together, we sat glued to each other. Even though there is enough space to sit without sticking to each other.

– So beautiful...

– That's true...

Karen looked upwards with glistening eyes. I haven't said anything unnecessary. Giving myself to the atmosphere, I crawled my hand to her lower back. The girl placed her head against my shoulder without saying anything. Then, after savoring some silence, I jokingly said

– So, isn't being a boyfriend more or less something like this...?

Nufufu, a laugh mixed with a sigh touched my ear. As I strongly pressed my hand against the lower back, her face suddenly came close to mine. Our eyes met. Her mouth looks relaxed now, but there is still some sadness present on her face.

What is stirred up inside me right now because of the contact over the thin T-shirt is not nervousness. I'm no longer holding myself back. Relief and feeling of sufficiency. And also kindness.

– Jun, you're really assertive... Is that payback for earlier...?

– That's right...

– If you do nothing but this... I'll seriously fall in love with you, you know?

– Fufu... Well, that's effective...

Chu... My cheek got hot from the kiss that replaced the reply. I caressed her hair with an intention to retaliate, but instead, my chest started boiling, so it is a double-edged sword.

... Then.

– Oi, there, Ichijou and Tachibana--

A voice came from the thicket, but it was interrupted midway. Looking at our situation at the moment, it doesn't seem like they would rudely jump out. That's good. Just look with envy in your eyes. I won't be running anymore. Still, a serious conversation probably doesn't suit us. That's why not daring to poke at the core... I'll tickle the surface.

– Say. Do you want to, play a game...?

– I want... What is it? What are we going to do...?

– From now on, we will be describing good things about each other and if we start to like the other one even just a little bit more... there will be a penalty

– Well... That's good... Something like games with Jun, I only have good memories about them...

– Penalty is, doing something that will make the other one happy...

– I'll play, I'll play... I'll make you really happy...

– What's that. It's only if you lose.

I felt the tension in the surroundings. She probably noticed it too. She noticed that for a second the space

around has gulped. We're being watched. While knowing, we pretended to not know. But still, I won't be stopping yet. Even though I know, I'll further enter the world of only two.

– Then, I'll start-

... Good thing about Tachibana Karen. If I were to choose one, I wonder what would I say? Her excessively cute looks? The smile that she always gives to everyone? Her silk-like blonde hair that stands out anywhere? Wrong, that's not it. The reason I have accepted her right here and now is because I have understood the truth.

– Karen is, kind. You always tease me, but... you're kind. You're so kind, it makes me feel unpleasant and sad.

Being together for so long, I realized. What I have lost on that day when she disappeared from my sight.

– That's why I always think how I should be as less displeased as possible. Your kindness even made me kind... Having such warm feeling, it is a first for me. There is no replacement for it anywhere.

She pulled my white T-shirt as if nagging. Probably because she has been running, Karen's blond hair was disorderly swinging. Her lips twitched as if she is holding back some words, her eyes so wet, that my feelings are overflowing.

"Don't worry" ... I quickly conveyed that by caressing her cheek with my finger. "Beautiful", she sure is. But if she was only pretty, I would be only nervous. Honestly, me being anxious because of her looks being too good, is not necessarily a lie. There are times when I complain how it would be better if she had a bit more normal face.

Still. But still.

– If it is about kind people, I'm sure there are other such people. But I think that only Karen can truly reach my heart. Affinity? I wonder how I should call it... I have a feeling that thanks to you, I have become a little more honest.

Being next to Karen is probably good for me. Better than anyone else... There's no one else like her.

Did my feelings reach her through those words? A single tear fell down the girl's cheek. "Oi, I didn't want to see that kind of face" ... I conveyed that by laughing, but it seems to be useless.

– Haa... I, lost... I'll give you a lovey-dovey hug...

– Haha... Hey... Fine, I get it, haa...

The warmth that comes from the sense of being glued to each other turned into the happiness inside. This is ridiculous, there's something wrong with it. The same old I, am now used to this. Now I'm even smiling while we embrace each other.

Suddenly, a chilly wind took our sweat and all that was left was the warmth gathered by the two in one place. As we separated, we stared at each other with reluctant eyes. Inside, someone let a small "Kya...". But I can't stop anymore. Do you know, right now, I'm already carried away.

– Jun... Were you, happy with my hug?

– There's probably no one who wouldn't be...

– Stop... Saying it as if I would do it with someone other than Jun... I don't want to speak about others.

– Fufu, sorry, sorry. But, this should have been the end of penalty

– Nope, one more time... Jun, you're not that happy yet

A passionate breath at a very close distance paralyzed my ear. Unintentionally, I also let my breath near her ear. Acting in unison, we confirmed each other's existence just from our breaths. When we separated, both of us were full of smiles for each other. Apparently, Karen was satisfied with that and let me go, but the game has not ended yet.

– Mn, now it's my turn

– Please don't say anything very embarrassing, okay...

– Noope. Hasn't Jun come up with this game?

Nfufu, she replied with a teasing smile. Close. Awfully close. Still, I won't be keeping distance right now. While directly facing her, I looked firmly into her eyes.

– Ehehe, Good things about Jun? All of them, isn't it so...?

– If it was a legit answer, I would've said so too...

– Look, um... haven't you noticed? I'm steadily becoming more dere-dere... I mean, I can't find things about you that would make me turn sullen at all. The more we meet, the harder my heart beats when we

see each other...

– Guh...

– There is no other person like that...

Her fleeting teasing smile crumbled.

– You've said that you have become kinder after meeting me. Certainly, Jun was a good person from the beginning, you know...? I feel like we can get along even better. Still, it's still not enough... Jun...

– Karen...

– Being so kind to each other with another person, it's the first time in my life... Surely, today, we're getting along better than yesterday... And most likely tomorrow as well...

Thump, my heart beat. These soft lips are right here. I always wanted to clear up the misunderstanding.

"My first kiss... I forced it on Jun..."

It isn't unpleasant. Well, I was surprised, but it was in no way unpleasant. As if I hated even one millimeter at that moment... That kind of thing, it's absolutely impossible.

I have decided. That I like Karen, I have decided that myself. I have already decided. There was only one thing to do.

– It's my defeat... This is a draw due to an injury...

Capturing that lips in my field of vision... I steal them in an instant. Karen's surprised voice sounded a little, but she immediately relaxed and we leaned on each other. My brain became numb and was about to melt, but I endured. Rules are rules. If you lose, you have to make the other party happy.

After rubbing in the night, we separated once and there was a dark shadow on her pleading face. Of course it won't end with this. For the second kiss I strongly hugged her body. Passionate, sweet, painful eternity came to swallow us. I want us to be secluded for a long time. Here, just the two of us, just the two of us until the world comes to an end...

.....

– First kiss was yours, and second, and third too. Starting the fourth and up to the last one, I want all of them to be with you...

– Me too...

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Chapter 57 – Lovey-dovey Test of Courage \$a

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c58

Chapter 58 - Self-Introduction

We walked with linked arms in the completely silent forest. I don't know how much time we have spent in the dark, but it got late at night at this time. We can't be like this forever. Naturally, just like on the usual way home, we walk slowly. If only this time could continue forever. I understand. I and Karen too, have probably always thought like that...

Slowing our pace even more, we tightly intertwined our arms. As our sideway glances met, she lightly smiled and happily laughed "Nufufu"

– Ghosts, they disappeared, right...?

– Ye-, yeah...

She whispered in a lovely quiet voice and I smiled back as well. While I still felt a bit awkward, I turned away before my smile, which I couldn't maintain for even two seconds, was erased from my face. Even if the distance got so short... I'm still not done.

– Is that because we have been seen doing this and that...

– Hmm? This and that...?

– The two of us, together, umm...

– We've kissed... Four times even...

– Ha-, have we done so much?

– We totally became normies. So happy...

Today only, four times with Karen... I noticed that I got drunk from the atmosphere and not being able to immediately digest it, stopped. With Karen, a kiss, four times, in front of the class to boot. Although it was by no means something casual and it's not like I didn't understand what I was doing, but...

– They call it a test of courage. But it was us who made everyone scared&j Did we put them off...?

– Uhh, I have just realized some things just a moment ago and even felt terrified...

– What-what? Now you're getting embarrassed?

One more time...? We stood at place and met eyes within the silence. The interval between the words increased and the longer I stood silent, the more boldness appeared on Karen's moderate smile.

– Come on... How many times will it take for you to get used to?

– Whatever

– Hey, Jun? One more time, want to kiss...?

Truly typical of herself, blonde girl lifted her eyebrow full of confidence. Well, much less first time, since we already came to fifth time, I can't say there will be no sixth time. Right now I'm even feeling comfortable while we're pressing our bodies like this. Even though in the beginning, I felt that nervous just from joining hands.

– I want to

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Silence. However... clap, clap. As I thought "Were they put off again?", a clap sounded and then a second, gradually they became concentrated.

clap, clap

Were they put off again?

– Yo, bookworm! Lady-killer!

– What loser, speaking sharply however you want... Fufu

– Don't show off. Explode right away! lol

With her hands still joined with mine, Karen was pleasantly smiling next to me. The shirt was sticking to skin in the night air. It may be called a test of courage, but my liver is getting crushed in more ways than one. 1

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... Still, this is only the beginning. I've come this far in order to clear the misunderstanding, but I still haven't said the important words. Also, this boyfriend-girlfriend arrangement can be invalidated anytime without the gazes of the class. The essential part is still suspended.

As summer holidays came to end, I felt relieved. That a long journey has started at last.

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– It's okay, it's okay. Haa... In any case, you're so cute...

– Ya... I'm feeling shy...

Tachibana-san who doesn't seem so shy. You would get it if you were together with her. She has a trait of considerable self-confidence in her own looks. So, as she is only feeling shy in her words, this girl is most sly.

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As I met eyes with my little sister, a delicate silence descended on the dining table. Most likely, aunt has thought of the same thing and is worried. Moreover, I was out of house for a long time. Keyaki made a displeased face, but well, I certainly ought to make amends. But right now, about me and Karen...

– Umm, I...

When Karen wanted to leave, I stopped her with my hand. It's fine, I'll speak.

– Err, Keyaki... This is my classmate, Tachibana-san

– Right. ... I'm Ichijou, Keyaki

Keyaki has said only that and reached for food, but I still kept my eyes on her.

Although I was feeling completely awkward, I tried to hold my next words. Somehow, this is funny. This maybe the first time that I'm thinking how I want somebody else to understand something so much.

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She is a kind person. Very kind.

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– That is to say, I have an onee-san now... huh

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And as that fact was encouraging the completely transformed me, I started wanting to shrug my shoulders.

While I was doing that, a familiar face of the blonde girl suddenly reflected in the room's window.

– Jun? I've already taken a bath ahead...?

– Okay

As I turned around, Karen was standing near the door in wrong-sized pajamas. It's most probably Keyaki's or aunt's, but she's taller than both of them. It was too tight and even she herself was embarrassed. Even so, she showed me her relaxed face and it made me feel kind. That's right, it's exactly how I have said in that forest. This girl's kindness makes even me feel kind. That's why I can be so strongly connected to her.

She sat down on the bed with a thump. I knew that I would be bringing her today, so I moderately cleaned up the room, but I can't calm down. Blonde girl is making herself comfortable in my room. Getting uneasy about it now, I think that it is somehow funny...

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"What is it?"... As I asked with my face, Karen smiled with upturned eyes as if teasing.

– Just a bit... let's talk?

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Huddling together, for a while we were looking fixedly at each other in a peaceful atmosphere. Now, we have even silence and awkwardness on our side. As both of us were silent, Karen decided to amuse herself and poked my side with finger. What, so I did the same thing. Kyahaha, as I looked at her laughing, I let out a small voice of happiness, ahaha.

– Fu. Fu, fufu... Hey, didn't you want to talk about something?

– Earlier, I've gotten along with Keyaki-chan...&j I've made a braid out of her beautiful hair...

– She is kind at her core, but she likes to be alone. Don't cling to her too much

– Jun was like that too... right?

– Well, that's not wrong

– Hey? It's like, you accepted me into the family, right...?

That right, I replied with a silent smile without saying anything. It seems she's happy that I haven't denied it. Both of us silently grinned at each other, it turned into a sweet calm atmosphere. And then, clasping each other's hands, bringing our shoulders close, falling on the bed just like that...

– We have done something like this in the infirmary before, right...

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– There's no one, to hinder us now. Hey, let's flirt...

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After I did that, as if feeling relief, she completely relaxed her body... After some time of stroking, her breath soon calmed down.

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Still, in any case, it's Keyaki and Karen. They are too much of opposites. Whether they get together or not, I don't have any confidence.

As I met eyes with my little sister, a delicate silence descended on the dining table. Most likely, aunt has thought of the same thing and is worried. Moreover, I was out of house for a long time. Keyaki made a displeased face, but well, I certainly ought to make amends. But right now, about me and Karen...

– Umm, I...

When Karen wanted to leave, I stopped her with my hand. It's fine, I'll speak.

– Err, Keyaki... This is my classmate, Tachibana-san

– Right. ... I'm Ichijou, Keyaki

Keyaki has said only that and reached for food, but I still kept my eyes on her.

Although I was feeling completely awkward, I tried to hold my next words. Somehow, this is funny. This maybe the first time that I'm thinking how I want somebody else to understand something so much.

– It's not like I'm telling Keyaki and Tachibana-san to forcibly get along. But I want you to at least understand... I've been telling aunt utter lies, but exactly as you have suspected, I've always been a loner. Thanks to this person, I stopped being one. Therefore, what I'm trying to say is, what I mean, umm, that is...

She is a kind person. Very kind.

After I finished speaking, my face turned red from realizing what I was saying so desperately. Actually, it seems that strangely tense older brother was weird in this little sister's eyes. She shrugged her shoulders with composed face and said,

– That is to say, I have an onee-san now... huh

Even without making a joking face, that was a joke told in my sister's manner. Both me and aunt understood that, so gradually, the tension surrounding the table dissolved. Karen seemingly relaxed as well and her trademark complacent smile immediately returned.

– Ehehe, that's right... I'm onee-san, you know...?

And then, she was supposed to sit next to me, but she carried her chair next to Keyaki's. My younger sister drew her small body back as if bewildered, but that reaction is a road that onii-chan has thoroughly used. Obviously, if Tachibana Karen is the other party, the effect will be lacking.

– Keyaki, chan...

– Y-yes...

– Call me, Karen nee-chan...? Come on, please...?

– Uh. We're dining... We have to eat...

– It's fine, it's fine &j Just once &j

– Karen, nee-chan... Look, it's fine now, right...?

– Ya, she says nee-chan... I'm truly happy...

I exchanged glances with aunt, without saying or exclaiming anything, having warm feelings, I smiled. A tsundere-like young girl and a girl whose smile is like a sun. This is an actual observation, but it is the best combination.

My dear sister, just wait and see. It is alright if it is Karen, I guarantee.If it is her, she'll surely pry open the door to anybody's heart.

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Now that it has come to this, it seems that I am the nuisance instead. As the three ladies of the house including Karen have started a lively conversation, I went back to my own room and made a start on the summer homework.

This is something unusual for me.The practice drills, which I would normally finish by the middle of the holidays, are now completely covered in dust because of the dates in the city, trip to the sea and stuff.

And as that fact was encouraging the completely transformed me, I started wanting to shrug my shoulders.

While I was doing that, a familiar face of the blonde girl suddenly reflected in the room's window.

– Jun? I've already taken a bath ahead...?

– Okay

As I turned around, Karen was standing near the door in wrong-sized pajamas. It's most probably Keyaki's or aunt's, but she's taller than both of them. It was too tight and even she herself was embarrassed.Even so, she showed me her relaxed face and it made me feel kind. That's right, it's exactly how I have said in that forest. This girl's kindness makes even me feel kind. That's why I can be so strongly connected to her.

She sat down on the bed with a thump.I knew that I would be bringing her today, so I moderately cleaned up the room, but I can't calm down. Blonde girl is making herself comfortable in my room. Getting uneasy about it now, I think that it is somehow funny...

– Well, I've got to quickly take a bath too...

However, my sleeve got pulled.After a long time, the sleeve... Indeed, it was like this in the beginning.

The time to leave the library, when we were not yet going home together. When she has something left to say, she will certainly hold my sleeve.

"What is it?"... As I asked with my face, Karen smiled with upturned eyes as if teasing.

– Just a bit... let's talk?

– Okay, yeah...

Huddling together, for a while we were looking fixedly at each other in a peaceful atmosphere.Now, we have even silence and awkwardness on our side.As both of us were silent, Karen decided to amuse herself an poked my side with finger. What, so I did the same thing. Kyahaha, as I looked at her laughing, I let out a small voice of happiness, ahaha.

– Fu. Fu, fufu... Hey, didn't you want to talk about something?

– Earlier, I've gotten along with Keyaki-chan...&j I've made a braid out of her beautiful hair...

– She is kind at her core, but she likes to be alone. Don't cling to her too much

– Jun was like that too... right?

– Well, that's not wrong

– Hey? It's like, you accepted me into the family, right...?

That right, I replied with a silent smile without saying anything.It seems she's happy that I haven't denied it. Both of us silently grinned at each other, it turned into a sweet calm atmosphere.And then, clasping each other's hands, bringing our shoulders close, falling on the bed just like that...

– We have done something like this in the infirmary before, right...

– At that time, I was sullen

– There's no one, to hinder us now. Hey, let's flirt...

– Yeah, yeah, flirt...

Hot, close, I could feel her pulse. Karen's warmth started to numb my five senses. Clinging like this, cuddling, frolicking. Even her faint emotions that I was rejecting with "This is impossible" somewhere inside, I can honestly accept them now.

And as we were gazing at each other, the girl's gaze started being filled with passion.

– I always wanted to do stuff like this with Jun... I'm so happy...

– ... Sorry I was always tsun-tsun...

– No, it's okay... I have gotten along with Jun and understood your feelings, which I previously didn't...

Haa, it makes me happy

– That's exaggeration, being happy from something like this

– I mean, you'll be my family from now on...

Just like that... Forever, just like that...

Putting one hand on her shoulder, I stroked her hair with the other.

– Ah.....

After I did that, as if feeling relief, she completely relaxed her body... After some time of stroking, her breath soon calmed down.

– Don't say that you're happy from this. I still, haven't made you happy.

– Jun...

– I may turn into a normie. But I'll make you happy...

Right now, that is the substitute for "I like you".

I like you so much. I love you. The road before I can say so might be long. Still, I have come to the point, where I know my own feelings. You can call it a superior result for a bookworm loner.

This girl... Karen has made my every moment sparkle. I won't ever forget it in my life. As my silent feeling made even the brushing kind, before long, she started sleeping by my side.

Japanese use red rice for .

Chapter 59 - Substitute for "I Like You"

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The long short holiday approached its end. Still, there are several days left, so I was considering how I should deal with that period. Right, presently, Ichijou Jun and Tachibana Karen can't spend even two days without meeting each other. Not to mention that time is the only thing you have during holidays. There could not possibly be a reason not to meet.

However, my wallet is too broke to take strolls in the city every day. I won't push that important person aside ever again. That being said, financial difficulties are either way difficulties... And so, this is the result of the solution born of desperation.

– Ara~. Ara, ara, ara, ara~

My aunt, who came up to the entrance, put her hand against her red cheek while her upper body was shaking. Although, a nephew, who departed for the sea during the summer holidays, bringing a showy blonde girl home is something that would make her raise her voice.

This reaction, it's not something I didn't expect... But, I didn't have other choices...

In contrast to me having my consciousness sinking below the floor from the embarrassment, Tachibana Karen's brilliant smile illuminated the entrance of my own house. And then, my aunt's eyes gleamed from that cheerfulness.

– Jun-kun!! Hey!!!

– Ye-, yeah...

Flooded with boisterous voice of Aunt Arika, who was so super excited that she emitted violet aura, I stood up straight.

– This summer, how far did you go!!!!?

– The way you're asking is too wrong, aunt!? Rather, this is nuisance for neighbors...

– Ehehe... Nice to meet you...

At a time like this, whose side is Tachibana Karen on? That is obvious, if it is to kill me with

embarrassment, she would probably even side with demon. Even right in front of my family, she suddenly gripped my hand. Aunt's bloodshot eyes concentrated on that small dot and her breathing got rough.

– I'm... Tachibana Karen. I'm Jun-kun's, umm... ex-girlfriend?

– Don't, don't ask me!

– Well, after all. Formally speaking, haven't I been a girlfriend for only a day? For the penalty game, you know.

– Ugh...

I can't exactly say ex-girlfriend. In order to say girlfriend, I still haven't said the words that I should have to Karen. There are probably no obstacles to say friends, but... it's not truth in the first place.

Not to mention that I will feel guilty if I declare that we are normal friends with Karen before my eyes, my will would not allow that. We're not just simple friends. She is a much, much more important person. I have to properly say it to the person herself in clear words.

That's why, super rotating bookworm hang his head and somehow said this in a low voice.

– We're, lovey-dovey kiss friends.....

Obviously, this was a case belonging to the immediate family council. It is natural. No matter how well we get along, it was a mistake to bring this showy blonde girl. Is that so? Please go up. No way it could go like that. On the contrary, it of course turned into a dinner course.

Is that so? Please go up.

Rather, what is lovey-dovey kiss friends?

– Weell, what a pity! If I knew Karen-chan was coming, I would've been more passionate!

Oi, there are turkey, red seabream and fried oysters on the same table. Don't say it as if it's always like this.

Well, it's probably today only, that Aunt Arika made an effort. Come on, just how much do you want to recommend protein. By the way, red rice was one of the side dishes. I want to question just what in the world are you planning to celebrate? However, I say, there is absolutely nothing to celebrate.

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I just simply, wanted to be together for a little while...

– Umm, excuse me...&j

– It's okay, it's okay. Haa... In any case, you're so cute...

– Ya... I'm feeling shy...

Tachibana-san who doesn't seem so shy. You would get it if you were together with her. She has a trait of considerable self-confidence in her own looks. So, as she is only feeling shy in her words, this girl is most sly.

... Well, she is cute.....

The four of us sat around the dining table in the living room, with Tachibana next to me and aunt sitting with Keyaki on the opposite side. Before long, the two of them were grinning and in high spirits.

Stories of the time when we just met. Or how we were always together after school.

Should I say naturally, but it seems that aunt has really taken a liking to Tachibana. Even after promptly finishing flirting... I mean self-introduction at the entrance just earlier, unexpectedly, she was polite in her interactions. They even made the dinner together.

However, even if aunt stage is clear, there is still a final obstacle.

– Thanks

My younger sister was looking at that situation with her hand supporting her chin. Just like when a cat beckons to the guest. She's not flaring up, but it is as if she's not feeling good and blaming me without actually saying "This person, how long is she going to stay...?". Well, apparently, it cannot be helped that she's in tsun-tsun mode, since I suddenly brought Karen without any prior notice and even shared the table.

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