

妄想ADV

Chaos;Child

-Children's Collapse-



FIRST TIME GOING OUT

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PRESENTED BY: NS2C

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Chaos;Child: Children's Collapse — Bonus Story

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The following story takes place during the year after Kunosato Mio met Makise Kurisu, as mentioned in Mio's monologue in Chapter 3 of *Children's Collapse*.

“I refuse.”

A voice rang out within Viktor Chondria University’s campus grounds. With just two words, the young woman sitting on one of the campus’s benches—Kunosato Mio—flatly rejected the man standing before her.

In response to her curt words, the man froze up. His expression quickly shifted into one of immense disbelief—then, in a voice like he was struggling to maintain his composure, he continued to speak.

“Do you not understand my invitation...? I’m asking you if you’d go out with me on our next day off. It’d be a date, basically.”

“Yeah, I get what you’re asking, and I refuse,” Mio said curtly.

The man’s British accent and the scent of his cologne alike were quite strong. He was a man twenty years of age, his looks awfully attractive and his body slender. His shiny blond hair was tied into a ponytail, which, perhaps, was a source of pride for him. However, a few stray hairs had escaped his hair tie and were hanging down over his face.

One look at the coat the man wore, or perhaps the dark jeans accompanying it, would tell anyone that they were of incredible quality.

There are way too many of these kinds of people, Mio thought to herself.

“Miss Kunosato, you’re probably not familiar with how this university works yet, which is why you may not quite understand: turning me down isn’t going to be of any benefit to you at all,” the man warned.

“Maybe not, but there’s no need for me to waste one of my few days off.”

Following her blunt reply, Mio waved her hand at the man in an attempt to shoo him away. Despite that, the man made no move to withdraw. After heaving a sigh, Mio continued.

“I have another commitment that day. A date.”

“With someone more important than myself?”

“Yeah,” said Mio, rising from the bench as she nodded. She then began to walk away from

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the scene, unwilling to converse with the man any longer.

“...You’re going to regret this,” the man called out, addressing Mio’s withdrawing form. She ignored him, all while managing to bite back the urge to stick her middle finger up at him. “Eric Baker, hm? I’ve heard your name before,” she said as she continued to walk away. “My father sponsors this school, and, by extension, its research institutes! Still planning to turn me down?!” Baker’s voice echoed throughout the campus grounds as he called after her.

Mio had arrived at Makise Kurisu’s laboratory, a place that had practically become a second home to her during her time on campus. While she nonchalantly described her encounter to Kurisu, the latter woman’s expression quickly morphed into one of astonishment.

It seemed as though it was strange for anyone at the university to *not* know of Baker. When she asked, Kurisu explained to Mio that Baker was the only child of a man who ran an enormous firm headquartered in the United Kingdom.

“Was he making you uncomfortable?” Kurisu asked.

“He was... and it pisses me off that I can’t tell anyone,” Mio replied. “After all, when it comes to research activities, the most important element isn’t the subject matter, how much it’ll contribute to society, or even the results—it’s the sponsor’s mood.”

“That’s awfully cynical.”

“Maybe.”

Kurisu shrugged her shoulders, to which Mio returned a bitter smile. She poured a cup of coffee from the laboratory’s coffee maker—the very same one she had used to perfect the process—and handed it to Kurisu.

“Well, it’s not like I’m an official member of this research institute. It should be fine,” Mio remarked.

“You may not be an official member of the institute, but that doesn’t change the fact that the people around you view you that way,” said Kurisu. “The reason this is even an issue in the first place is because that’s what people think you are.”

Mio clicked her tongue in annoyance. After a brief pause, she said, “...That’d only end up being an issue for you to deal with, so I won’t worry about it.”

It had been a month since Mio had become a visiting audit student at Viktor Chondria University, as well as an acquaintance of Makise Kurisu. Though she had been attending lectures that she was generally interested in prior to meeting Kurisu, she had grown dissatisfied with their subject matter. As a result, she began to frequent Kurisu’s research

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institute instead.

The fact that Mio, an audit student, was directly contributing to the institute's research as opposed to merely observing was exceptional in and of itself. The others at the institute rarely assisted her in her efforts, but because Kurisu acted as her intermediary, and because she had demonstrated excellence in her work time after time, Mio's presence was at least tolerated.

The reason Mio had even managed to secure such a prestigious opportunity was because of a presentation that had been held the month prior; it had been run by two or three guests visiting the campus from a private scientific institute located at another university.

Kurisu had also participated in the presentation, which was where the trouble began. While Kurisu was presenting, Mio had taken issue with the collection method used for the data in the presentation, which she considered completely nonsensical. Spurred on by that motivation, she promptly put forward data that she herself had been gathering during the presentation, stating that using it and recalculating would allow for far more promising results. This, in turn, sparked a debate between her and Kurisu.

By the end of their argument, Kurisu had similarly countered Mio's claim, stating that even the objectivity of *Mio's* data could be called into question. Following the presentation, Mio was chastised about the source of her data within the institute; even so, it was undeniable that she had pushed the conference's debate to the next stage, and that she had inspired a permanent improvement in the verification process behind Kurisu's research.

While she was enduring the criticism leveled against her source, Mio had interrupted her detractors by demanding, "What do you really care more about? The minute details in the rules and the fact that I'm an outsider, or the actual results?" The staff members could not help but smirk at her outburst, with one half-jokingly saying, "If you really care that much about this, you might as well just hurry up and become an official member of this institute."

However, in terms of the results of the debate alone, Mio had been dissatisfied.

Much like she had back then, Kurisu was now smiling at Mio, who wasn't even trying to hide the bitter expression on her face.

"Hmm... You were pretty quick to reject him, weren't you?" Kurisu commented.

"Something wrong with that?" Mio retorted.

"That guy's fairly obstinate, and he's pretty well known, too. He'll keep on coming after you until you give in."

"Has he asked you out before?"

"Several times. Though I'd rather have a lively conversation with a wall than go out with him, or go to any of those post-conference 'soirées' or whatever else," Kurisu said. "I've managed to put him off every time he's asked, but to be completely honest, I've had it up to here... How did you say no to him, anyway?"

"I told him I had another date lined up."

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“Wha—?!”

Kurisu’s eyes went wide. She was so surprised, in fact, that she dropped the coffee cup she had just picked up; a few drops of hot coffee came flying out of the cup and landed on one of her fingers.

“Ouch!” Kurisu cried out. As she treated her burned finger in her mouth, Kurisu stared at Mio in bewilderment. “Y-You’re dating someone?”

“I was lying, obviously. I say that to the persistent ones.”

“...Why doesn’t that surprise me?” Kurisu sighed, shooting Mio a reproachful look.

But, not even a moment later, Kurisu continued speaking as if she suddenly understood something. “...I see. That explains that...” she murmured.

Mio, noticing something was off about her statement, sent Kurisu a questioning stare. For her part, Kurisu looked as though she wanted to explain, but what she had to say was difficult to talk about, forcing her to choose her words carefully. Eventually, however, she seemingly decided she was getting caught up over something silly; she took a breath and began to speak.

“It’s a bit of a rumor that’s been going around. That you... um... mess around.”

“...Excuse me?”

Mio scowled. When she had said “mess around,” Kurisu essentially meant “mess around with men.”

“Also, that you let various people treat you to meals...?”

“Well, that’s because I don’t have enough money,” Mio explained, nodding her head once in affirmation. She was living her life off of an allowance her parents periodically sent her via bank transfer, but she spent most of the money she received during the same week she received it.

The society they functioned in was one where the power of the internet was praised to no end; and yet, the forefront of academics was still quite reliant on physical publications. It was more difficult to make the text of a technical book publicly available online than it was to do the same for an image or a video—thus, the supply of technical books on the internet was meager.

The cost of buying those books rose continually, so at times when Mio didn’t have the means to pay for a meal, she would often let other people treat her instead.

“Some of the people who treated you would’ve been guys then, right?”

“It’s more like most of the ones who treated me *ended up* being guys.”

Kurisu was, once again, astonished. “...You may not have thought about it this way, but there’d be a lot of people who would think that counted as going on a date with you. Not to mention the fact that you yourself have told plenty of people that you had dates planned...”

“I’ve done my best to avoid getting treated by the same people over and over, though.”

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"That's not the issue! In fact, wouldn't it be *because* you've gone to so many different people that all this stuff is being said about you?!"

Mio frowned at Kurisu, who had raised her voice all of a sudden. "Calm down. What's got you so agitated?"

"...Listen," Kurisu began. "For better or for worse, you stand out. You're a grade-skipping high schooler auditing classes here. You're fairly tall for an Asian woman. Also, despite how young you are, your... uh..."

"...?"

Kurisu had begun to stare intently at Mio's body, which only puzzled her further. Eventually, Kurisu lightly shook her head as if to shake some thought off, and continued.

"...Anyway, just stop letting people treat you to meals. If you need any materials, I can loan you whatever you need. Also, there's Chinese food delivery available to us staff members for cheap. You could live reasonably well off that."

"Funny that you didn't mention the taste, considering how much you like junk food."

"Oh, be quiet," Kurisu grumbled, and she promptly began tapping away at her laptop's keyboard; perhaps she was writing a message requesting permission for Mio to utilize the food delivery service. Not long afterward, however, her fingers stopped moving, and she suddenly looked in Mio's direction.

"Just to be sure, you haven't been treated to anything other than meals by people, right? Nothing expensive, for example?"

"Well, I got these clothes as a gift, too. Don't remember how much they cost, though."

Mio pulled at the sweater she was wearing, as if she was showing it off to Kurisu. The latter's mouth went agape in shock.

"I've grown taller since last year," Mio began to explain. "I didn't have the money to pay for new winter clothes that fi—"

"Okay, okay! I get it already," Kurisu cut in. "Next time we've got a day off, you're going out with me for a bit. The least I can do is buy you some clothes."

"I can't do that," Mio protested. "Someone from NU is presenting their thesis that day, and even if I can't attend the presentation itself, there should at least be a summary posted on the bulletin board at the institu—"

"Stop making excuses and just clear your goddamn schedule!" Kurisu shouted.

Exasperation filled Mio's expression. "What's your problem? Why are you so worried about me?"

"...Because you don't have any self-awareness," Kurisu responded, a weary sigh escaping her lips. *I'm the one who should be exasperated here*, she thought to herself, her shoulders sagging.

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“Oh, so that’s a top, huh? Hold on a sec... All right, you can try that on next, then...”

The day off on which Kurisu and Mio had promised to meet had finally arrived.

Kurisu stood before a changing room, holding out a new outfit for Mio to try on. Mio, on the other hand, could only heave a sigh as she stared at Kurisu and the outfit in question. In her other hand, Kurisu held a bundle of clothes that she was most likely going to have Mio try out next—in the time that had already passed, however, that bundle had done anything but decrease in size.

“Come on, be reasonable about this...” Mio complained. “I told you I’ll take anything as long as it’s warm.”

“I’m the one paying today, so you might as well give up on trying to weasel out of this. Just play along.”

“You’re just as, if not more hopeless than I am when it comes to fashion, so just forg—”

“Sh-Shut up! Here, just try this one on already.”

Realizing that arguing further would get her nowhere, Mio took hold of the clothes in Kurisu’s outstretched hands and pulled the curtain to her changing room closed.

Inside that box-like room was a mirror in which Mio could distinctly see her own irritated expression reflected. Naturally, she wasn’t about to pick a fight with the exasperated girl in the mirror—instead, Mio obediently began to change into the new outfit, uncomfortable all the while.

The store Mio had been dragged into was one where outdated name-brand clothes were sold at inexpensive prices. She had essentially been made to be Kurisu’s dress-up doll for nearly an hour by that point, and she had quit counting how many outfits she had been forced to try on after the seventh.

In complete contrast to Mio, Kurisu had been far more eager to get started when she had rushed into the store. In spite of her excitement, however, it seemed Kurisu was not very experienced when it came to picking out clothes. At every chance she had, she would pull out a tablet and start tapping away at it—perhaps she was looking up reference images for guidance.

This time around, Kurisu had handed Mio a dress so frilly that it was absolutely atrocious, as well as a bolero-esque coat with clumps of fur attached to the cuffs and collar; the coat alone looked as though it would be a constant annoyance to the wearer. Mio haphazardly threw on the getup she had been handed and pulled the curtain open once again.

Kurisu frowned. “Huh? Aren’t you supposed to wear that underneath your top?”

“...What the hell are you using as a reference?” said Mio, baffled. “Look, I’ve had enough

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of this, just—”

“Okay, try this on next!”

And with that, the curtain was closed once again.

In the end, Mio was only set free after another two hours or so had passed. During that time, one of the store’s employees had joined in on the conversation, as if they couldn’t bear to be a bystander to the unfolding chaos any longer. They had added their own pushy advice to the pile, which only served to further complicate matters. By the end of it all, Mio was drained of all her remaining energy, and everything following the employee’s arrival felt like a blur to her.

At some point, the pair had decided to eat dinner and head home afterward. When Mio came to, she found herself seated at a table in an Italian restaurant, with a paper bag chock-full of clothes occupying both of her hands.

The outfit she was wearing was drastically different from before: the employee had forced her to wear a small, yet thick undershirt, a rough men’s jacket over it, and of all things, a rather short skirt—the latter piece was a type of clothing she could hardly remember ever wearing, even when she thought back to her childhood. A pair of stockings covered Mio’s legs, though she had no memory of ever sticking her feet into them. It seemed that the clothes she had tried on last at the store were the very same clothes she was now wearing at the restaurant.

The final piece of her outfit—the crown jewel that pushed the entire ensemble into absurdity—was a necklace with a shiny ring attached to it, which lay over her chest. As she glowered at Kurisu, who had not so much as bought a single piece of clothing for herself and was still in casual wear, Mio complained in the lowest possible voice she could muster.

“...I’m going to eat as much as I can as payback for today. It’ll be your treat.”

Not at all bothered, Kurisu brushed Mio’s complaint aside. “Go ahead, I suppose. I figured you’d do that, so I chose a cheap place.” She began to order her meal. Then, after a glance at Mio and her outfit, she smiled in satisfaction.

“...Yeah, you look good. Really cute. Glad it all worked out.”

“It better have, considering all the time we spent there.”

Kurisu didn’t respond, letting Mio’s cynical retort fly. Figuring that no matter what she did, Kurisu would get some form of entertainment out of it, Mio remained silent until the waiter arrived with their food. As soon as the waiter left, Mio wasted no time in digging into her pasta

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and pizza.

On the other hand, Kurisu began to slowly gulp down her glass of champagne, so as to savor its taste. She was twenty years old, so there was no issue with her doing so—yet, for some reason or another, Mio felt surprised. Then, just as the majority of children would, Mio thought to herself, *She's an adult, so I suppose that's normal.*

She had not yet realized it, but spending time shopping for things she was so unaccustomed to shopping for had left Mio quite hungry. Just as she had declared, Mio ate a great deal more than usual, only stopping when her stomach was satisfied and she had calmed down.

Suddenly, Mio felt a sense of unreliability at her feet. She began to restlessly move her legs in an attempt to rearrange them. When she saw this, Kurisu began to chuckle.

“Do you really hate skirts that much?” she asked. Mio pursed her lips in response, realizing she had been seen right through.

“I can’t stand them, but it’s not because of the underwear—it’s because it feels like people can see right into my stomach.”

“That’s... definitely not a reason I’ve heard before.”

As if she found the situation humorous, Kurisu’s smile intensified. “Well, think of this as a lesson on how the world works. If you really do have that much trouble with skirts, you don’t have to wear them all the time—just be sure to choose the clothes you buy carefully so that they match the rest of your wardrobe.”

That’s rich coming from you. A monkey would have better fashion sense than you, Mio thought bitterly, though she chose not to express her complaints aloud.

“And also, just as a reminder, I want you to avoid letting different people treat you all the time. Though, when it comes to materials and the like, I’d say it’s fine.”

“Aside from food, I refuse to accept resources from others,” Mio replied reflexively. Kurisu blinked at her in confusion.

In a manner almost like she was grumbling, Mio continued. “...And I don’t want to rely on you for anything beyond research.”

“Now listen, Mio...” Kurisu began in an exasperated tone, resting her chin in her palms. But, instead of continuing, she merely stared motionlessly at Mio. Uncomfortable with her silence, Mio pressed her to carry on.

“What?”

“That attitude of yours is really charming and all, but you need to realize something.”

“Oh? And what’s that?”

Slightly irked at her words, Mio glared at Kurisu with narrowed eyes; she felt as though Kurisu was making fun of her. However, with her expression unchanged, Kurisu continued to speak in a tone of admonishment.

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“It’s certainly true that as a researcher, depending on the situation, your research data may be more important than a human life. That’s why it can be a bad idea to rely on others,” she said. “However, when you work at a research institute with other researchers, you pretty much *have* to work together. Researchers lend each other materials, papers, and the like every day.”

“I don’t work at a research institute. Not officially, at least.”

“That’s why no one around you values you, or so you said.” Kurisu paused. “...I’m the same way.”

The tone of Kurisu’s declaration was strong. Mio, slightly surprised by it, began to digest her words.

“Mio. Learn to rely on others. If you don’t, nobody will find themselves able to rely on you.”

“...”

That’s a tired old complaint, Mio thought to herself. Still, though she had long avoided addressing it, hearing it from the prodigal genius sitting in front of her gave it considerable impact.

“You’ll have to learn to do that for the sake of your research. Of course, you’ll have to experience it in order to truly understand it—it’s not just something you’d know intuitively. Oh, and just to be clear, this isn’t about relying on others to treat you to meals, okay?”

On hearing Kurisu’s joke-like clarification, Mio finally returned a wry smile and shrugged her shoulders.

With that, Kurisu bent forward slightly and broached a different subject. “Now, I’ve finally got the chance to ask you: Have you always been like this? Y’know, ever since you were a kid?”

“Where’s this coming from?” Mio quizzically answered Kurisu’s question with one of her own. It was the first time she had been asked about her past by Kurisu.

Is she... Mio wondered, glancing at Kurisu’s glass.

Sure enough, before she had realized it, the amount of champagne in the glass had greatly diminished. When she took a closer look at Kurisu’s cheeks, Mio noticed that they were dyed ever-so-slightly red.

“C’mooon, have you?” Kurisu drawled.

She’s drunk, Mio realized as she stared at the woman in front of her, who increasingly looked as if she was about to fall over.

Any more than that and she’s gonna be on the floor, Mio thought to herself. Remaining silent, she pushed a glass of water toward Kurisu—and as she did, the restaurant’s doorbell rang, signalling the arrival of a new customer.

When she caught a glimpse of who had entered, Mio could not help but scowl. An unpleasant premonition invaded her mind, and as if to support that foreboding feeling, the

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customer walked straight toward Mio and Kurisu's table.

"...My apologies for intruding on your conversation, Miss Makise, Miss Kunosato. Incidentally, were you not supposed to be on a date today, Miss Kunosato?"

His British accent and the odor of his cologne buffeted the pair from above.

Mio remained silent, irritation written all over her face. Kurisu, meanwhile, sat up straight in her seat, as if she had sobered up in a single breath. She assumed a business-like smile, much like one that would be seen on her face at the institute, as well as in other similar situations.

"Fancy meeting you here, Mr. Baker. We haven't spoken in quite some time."

"It has indeed been a long time, hasn't it? But no, to be frank with you, I just happened to see the two of you from outside the building."

"Figures. I'm surprised you're willing to even step foot into such a low-class place," Mio cut in, her words laden with scorn. Kurisu shot her a look like she was urging her to stop. Nevertheless, the target of Mio's remark smiled as if her biting tone hadn't even registered.

"Of course. I wouldn't spend my time at a place like this; rather, my regular place is one that I think you would find to your liking too, Miss Makise. We should go together sometime."

"Is that so? When I have the time then, perhaps," responded Kurisu. Despite her best efforts to remain amiable, her smile was beginning to stiffen up.

"It's a promise," replied Baker. He then turned to face Mio, his expression abruptly morphing into one of utter severity as he looked down at the girl.

"By the way, Miss Kunosato, it's not proper to lie to people, you know. The most important quality in a researcher is their trustworthiness, is it not?"

"..."

So that's where you're going to take this, huh? Mio thought to herself in disgust. Kurisu grimaced, having also sensed the poor direction the conversation was headed in.

"You may be a visiting audit student, but you're also a part of Miss Makise's research institute. There's nothing praiseworthy about lowering its value through your own actions. Are we going to need to reexamine the status of the institute?"

"Hold on, Mio's—"

"What are you even talking about? I haven't lied about anything," Mio said, cutting off Kurisu's attempted explanation. "The two of us are in the middle of a date. You want to talk about things that aren't praiseworthy? I'd say interrupting a date is at the top of the list."

"...You're what?"

The confusion on Baker's face showed he didn't quite grasp what Mio had meant yet. In response, Mio only pressed him further with a mocking smile on her face.

"What, do you only accept heterosexual love or something?"

Heterosexual love—love between two different sexes.

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“Wha...” Baker looked as though the words he wanted to speak were caught in his throat. Kurisu, meanwhile, had half-risen from her seat, flustered.

“Hold on, Mio—”

Before she could finish her sentence, Mio took her partially-eaten slice of pizza and stuffed it into Kurisu’s half-open mouth.

“Taste good?” Mio asked, forcing one of her eyes closed in a wink. Kurisu, meanwhile, was unable to respond, her mouth full of pizza. Instead, her clenched fists trembled.

And suddenly, Baker, who was watching the pair from beside them, appeared to stumble where he stood. With one hand, he clutched at his head, and he began to babble to himself in a low voice, like he was just barely squeezing his words out.

“You’re having me on... You must be joking...”

“You really need to watch your tone.”

In an awkward, yet clearly exaggerated motion, Mio readjusted the position of her legs. As Baker’s gaze shifted to her skirt, she continued speaking.

“I went out of my way to dress up for this date, and I’m having the time of my life. Any more discrimination from you, and I’ll be forced to have a talk with someone who can deal with it accordingly.”

At some point, the other customers at the restaurant had all focused their attention on the situation. Their whispers flew about the restaurant, and from what could be heard of them, it seemed rumors were being formed very quickly.

Baker, having wholly shut up by that point, didn’t so much as say another word to the pair, and in the end, the man simply staggered out of the restaurant.

“What the hell were you thinking?! ” shouted Kurisu.

Mio and Kurisu had left the restaurant, unable to stand the countless inquisitive stares pointed in their direction any longer. The second they had turned the first corner, Kurisu had begun to heatedly probe Mio.

“Great idea, wasn’t it?” said Mio proudly.

“What part was even remotely great about it?! Seriously, I’d love to hear it!”

“We can keep doing what we’re doing without worrying about him screwing with the research institute. Also, thanks to what I said, he’ll never ask you *or* me out ever again,” Mio explained.

“And what do you think’s going to happen to my reputation....?!” cried Kurisu.

“Huh? What, do you *want* to be popular?”

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“That’s not what I mean!”

“Oh, calm down already. You’re the one who told me to rely on others, right?”

“You know that’s not what I meant...!”

Ignoring Kurisu’s continued outcries, Mio walked on.

The sun had long since set.

The chilly wind of the night blew against Mio’s hands, which were still clutching the bottom of the heavy paper bag full of clothes.

As the pair mixed in with the crowd of people walking about the city, Mio could still hear Kurisu’s ongoing complaining from behind herself.

“Hm...?”

Suddenly, Mio came to a halt; she had realized something. Kurisu, who had been staring down at the ground as she complained, lightly collided with Mio’s motionless back.

“Wha... Why’d you stop?” Kurisu asked in a low voice, one hand pressed against her forehead.

“...It’s nothing,” Mio responded. She began to walk once again.

Mio smiled wryly at herself and the silly little thing she had realized.

Even thinking back as far as her childhood, Mio realized that this was her first time doing something like this... Her first time going out on a day off, not with an acquaintance, but with a friend.

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