

XVIII

Yuuto lay on the couch with his hands behind his head. He sighed to himself. *Well, there's a test tomorrow, and then I'll have a weekend to take a break. I guess that's a win for me,* he thought. In the background, he heard the thunder roar once more. *But goddammit, this rain is getting on my nerves. After all, first I lose my room for the night and now I can't sleep? What is the meaning of this?*

Turning over a little, Yuuto looked over to the coffee table beside the sofa he was sleeping on. *Maybe I should get some warm milk or something to calm me down,* he thought. Getting up, he rubbed his eyes sleepily and turned towards the kitchen. With a yawn, he opened his eyes fully.

He was face-to-face with Yuina, who was shivering and holding her pillow tightly to her chest, wearing nothing but her underwear.

"U-uhh...good morning," Yuuto chuckled, keeping his eyes locked onto her face. "What's up?"

Yuina looked to the ground bashfully. Her eyes darted back and forth between Yuuto and his makeshift bed for a moment. "S-sorry about this," she whispered. "You can't sleep well because of me, huh?"

"N-no, it's not your fault at all," Yuuto replied with a smile. *That was a lie,* he thought, *but who am I to say that to her?*

"W-well...I can't sleep either," Yuina admitted.

"Ah. As I figured, it's probably uncomfortable in a boy's room, huh? And my room of all of 'em."

"W-what? No! I...really do enjoy it...but I'm..."

"You're...?"

"I'm...scared of lightning!" Yuina confessed. "I've always been scared of it, but it's been more serious since my mother passed away..."

Yuuto paused. "Oh crap, sorry...I didn't mean to bring back bad memories for you or anything."

"It's...alright but...could you please come and stay a while with me? I just want someone to comfort me a little..."

Yuuto froze. *Wait, COMFORT you a little? Like, in bed? Yeah, no, not doing that. It's too friggin' risky.* He sighed. "I-I dunno, that sorta situation is...I mean..."

"Please?" Yuina begged. "I just want someone nearby...just for a little while?"

Yuuto sighed in defeat. "Alright, I guess." He smiled. *Fuck it, it's not like I was gonna fall asleep anyways,* he thought, *and besides, if I can at least help her out then maybe failing my test tomorrow due to lack of sleep is worth it...especially since it's not like I'd do well on that test either way.*

Yuina nuzzled Yuuto's arm, her cheek pressing up against his hand as she held it tightly. "Thank you for doing this, Yuuto," she whispered, "I know you haven't slept well either but here you are, busy helping me..."

"I-it's no problem, really," Yuuto answered. *Except for the fact that I'm stressing out over here! And what do you expect me to do? There's a borderline naked girl lying in my friggin' bed in the middle of the night cuddling with my arm. Why? Just...why?*

"Y'know, my mother passed away when I was two years old," Yuina whispered suddenly, causing Yuuto to snap back to attention. "It was raining really hard that night, and while she was driving a car skid out of its lane thanks to all the rain making the roads slippery, and we crashed. All I remember from that night is the sound of her scream and the thunder in the background, and a sky filled with strikes of lightning. My infant self was already scared, but I've developed an almost irrational fear since then."

Yuuto watched her in silence as she continued her story.

"As a child, I didn't show many signs of trauma, except for that extraordinarily prominent fear of lightning. My father raised me alone, never remarrying. However, a few years ago I ended up so scared that I was sent to see a therapist for a week or so. She told me that this was due to the accident that night. This is its lasting effect on my psyche," Yuina explained. "I was always comforted by having something—or preferably someone—to hold on to. It gives me warmth. It gives me joy. And above all, it just makes me *feel* safe." She nuzzled Yuuto's arm again. "So please stay like this with me for a bit longer..."

"Sure," Yuuto answered. "I'll keep you safe, so don't worry about a thing and go to sleep." He gave her a gentle pat on the head.

"Fuck," Yuuto sighed, "I guess that's another 59% for me."

"Was it that bad, darling?" Hanae asked. "I didn't find that test particularly hard."

"I agree," Yuuto answered, "but I'm sleepy as fuck again today so I don't think I was thinking straight. I dunno, maybe I actually did better without knowing it. Or maybe I'm slowly becoming Nori."

"Oh no!" Hanae cried in despair.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN?" Nori cried.

"I mean I need some naptime," Yuuto chuckled, "just like when I was in kindergarten." *After all, he thought to himself, Yuina fell asleep last night holding on to me so tightly, I literally couldn't move without disturbing her so I sat there for another two hours waiting for her to let go, and I still couldn't sleep after! I ended up sleeping at three in the friggin' morning!*

"What happened to you?" Sayaka asked Yuuto as she walked over at the sound of the lunch bell ringing. "You look like you slept at three in the morning."

"That's...oddly specific," Yuuto answered, "but yeah, you got me."

"What, was the rain too loud?" Sayaka giggled.

"Yeah, that's it," Yuuto replied. *Well, that AND something else, but she doesn't need to know about that.*

"Well, let's eat!" Nori laughed, taking out his lunchbox.

“Right, let’s eat—oh my God I forgot my lunch again,” Yuuto said, rolling his eyes. “Fuck my sleepiness.”

“Well crap,” Sayaka said. “I guess you don’t have anything to eat, huh? I suppose I can—”

“Yuuto!” Yuina called running into the classroom. She ran over to his desk, placing a lunchbox onto it. “You left this in the kitchen at home this morning! You seem tired, did you not sleep well?” She looked up, only to see both Hanae and Sayaka glaring at her. “U-umm...did I do something wrong?” she asked.

“Well, looks like everything just got more complicated for you, huh?” Nori chuckled, looking over to his friend.

Yuuto sighed. *I’m too tired for this shit right now*, he thought.