

I

"For the love of God, why me?" Yuuto mumbled to himself under his breath as he walked towards the front doors of the school. All around him, students were walking together and chatting. They already seemed to know each other, or at least know *somebody*, despite school only having been in session for a week. Everyone seemed content to enjoy the high school life and make friends. Sadly, though, Yuuto wasn't so lucky.

As he walked, Yuuto felt a hand grab his shoulder. He sighed and smiled. "And how're you doing today, Nori?" he asked.

"Awww, ya got me!" Nori laughed, appearing from behind Yuuto. "How do you keep guessing that it's me though?"

"Well, for starters, who the hell else could it be?" Yuuto laughed. "I mean, who the hell else would be bugging me first thing in the morning? Or at all, for that matter?"

"Good point, good point," Nori nodded in agreement. "Wait, HEY! I ain't bugging you for nothing here! It's a matter of *absolute* importance!"

"Knowing you, it can't be that important."

"Oh, but it is, my dear amigo!"

"Oh really? Alright then, lay it on me," Yuuto said. "Err...metaphorically, of course. I don't swing that way."

"And neither do it," Nori added, chuckling. "But seriously, I need your help, man! It's such a difficult choice for me, so I wanted to ask for your expert opinion on it."

"Huh. 'Expert,' eh?" Yuuto asked, raising an eyebrow suspiciously.

"Aside from me, you're the closest thing to an expert on this subject that I know!" Nori said confidently.

"Oh, God, please no."

"Oh yeah."

"Oh no."

"Oh *yeah*. So I realized that I spent a bit too much this month on back-to-school supplies, so I couldn't afford everything *else* I wanted. Therefore, I'm afraid sacrifices must be made," Nori continued sternly.

"I don't like where this is going," Yuuto mumbled. *Mostly*, he added to himself, *because I already have an idea of what Nori's gonna ask.*

"Should I buy this month's edition of Big Busty Babes or Sultry S—" Nori began.

"NO. NO. JUST NO," Yuuto cried. "NOW IS NOT THE TIME." He sighed. "Think it through first man. What if—"

"Wait, you're right, man! Now's not the time. I must think it through," Nori decided.

"R-right! Exactly!" Yuuto laughed. *Oh wow*, he thought. *That...actually worked! I dodged that bulle—*

"I've gotta analyse the contents of both magazines before I even try to come to a conclusion! What was I thinking?" Nori finished, shouting passionately and drawing the attention of all the students around them.

God friggin' dammit, Yuuto thought. He took a deep breath. "Well then, now that we're done with *that* topic, wanna actually get to class?" he suggested, trying to change the subject.

"Sure!" Nori laughed in response. "By the way, wanna help me with a project?"

"It's been a week and we already have a project? How come I didn't hear about it? Damn, high school must be tough if they're giving us work already! I may not have thought this enrollment through!" Yuuto cried nervously.

"Yeah, I know right?" Nori chuckled. "I can't believe it's only been a week and I *already* have to make a list of all the hottest babes! It usually takes a month or two for that phase to begin!"

"And yet again, you didn't say what I thought you would," Yuuto mumbled in disappointment. "Wait, 'usually,' you said? How many times have you done this? Please let it be three or less..."

"Why three? I've been doing this for seven years now! This is the eighth list I'm making here, man!"

"Seven—wait, what the fuck? If you're in tenth grade now—holy shit you've been doing this since the third grade."

"Yeah!" Nori declared proudly.

"Don't wear that as a badge of honor!" Yuuto cried. "You've been a perv king since the *third friggin' grade*?"

Nori laughed and gave Yuuto a thumbs-up in response as the two continued to head to class.

"So, you want in?" Nori finally asked as they approached the classroom door.

Yuuto sighed. *Well, as they say, you only live once*, he thought. "Ah, screw it, why not?" he smiled. "Could be fun, I guess. I mean, sure it's kinda strange, but I suppose such a list could at least help the *other* guys out, so in a way it's making a contribution to our school community."

"That's the spirit! But wait, just the *other* guys? What about you, man?"

"I don't think it'll help me much."

"No way!"

"Yes way."

"How's that even possible?" Nori asked, his hand ready to open the door to the classroom. "Knowing the hottest babes in class has gotta give us *some* advantages, right? Like knowing who to ask out later on! Don't you wanna find love? Don't tell me you don't believe in it, man!"

"Dude, let me tell you something. There is what we know as real love. And then, there's what we know as a mere illusion. And, still then, there's me," Yuuto said. "True love is one thing. False love is another. And me, well, all I can say is I'm just kind of a 'False Romeo' of sorts, y'know? Always trying to get my metaphorical

'Juliet,' but having nothing to show and to impress her with. A failure at love. The pretend romantic who's really no good at romance. I try to be like Romeo and get the girl, but I fall flat on my face. Like you."

"Well, don't get too down on yours—hey, what's *that* supposed to mean?" Nori asked, suddenly realizing what Yuuto had said.

"Never mind, dude," Yuuto laughed, opening the door to the classroom. "Let's go." He walked in, smiling casually as another school day began.