

XVII

"I'm home!" Yuuto called, walking up the stairs into his residence. As he opened the door, he saw Yuina sitting with his parents at the dinner table. "Welcome back, son," Goro greeted him.

"Oh, aren't *you* cheerful?" his wife snapped at him.

"Damn, Mom's friggin' pissed," Yuuto laughed. "Pops, the hell did you do?"

"Like I'd know," his father replied, shrugging.

"You know not of the heart of a woman."

"And you do?"

"Ironically enough, he clearly knows more than you," Aoi said, rolling her eyes.

"Alright, Mom, chill," Yuuto said, walking over to the dinner table. "What're we having?"

"Whatever you decide to make," Goro replied with a chuckle. "We got lazy."

"SON OF—err..." Yuuto paused, looking back over at the table, counting the number of people over again.

"Oh, just make enough for four people. Yuina's staying for dinner. I didn't tell you earlier because you seemed to be in a hurry."

"R-right...I'll get on that," he sighed, getting up once more and walking over to the house's kitchen and putting on his apron. "I shoulda stayed at Sayaka's place," he mumbled to himself as he began to work, making noodles by hand and preparing the base for the soup.

"Not bad, hmm?" Goro laughed. "Aside from his foul mouth, our son is quite a capable man. He'll be a good husband someday."

"Yes, and whoever marries him will be a lucky girl," Aoi agreed. "That being said, I want my son to be wed to a woman who can take care of him just as much as he takes care of her, instead of having that kind of one-sided relationship."

"What're you trying to imply here?" Goro asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Nothing, honey," his wife replied. *Only just the fact that OUR relationship is like that, and I don't trust you to find a girl who won't freeload off our son the way you do off of me!* she thought to herself.

"So what do you think, Yuina?" Goro asked, having taken his wife's word.

"I-I think he's w-wonderful," Yuina replied. "Dad always tells me that you were close friends back in university. He says that you tell him about how much your son has matured. He sounded like a wonderful person from the beginning—"

"SO YOU WERE PLOTTING AFTER ALL!" Aoi cried, standing up. "I knew you had to be feeding information in *somehow!*"

"Huh?" Goro asked, scratching his head.

"Oh for—never mind, dammit."

Yuuto brought four bowls over to the table, one by one, each filled with noodle soup. He then walked back into the kitchen and brought out a plate of tsukune and

another with harumaki. Lastly, he went back in and brought eating utensils for everyone. Having finished setting the table, he finally sat down again and sighed deeply. "Alright, we all ready or what?"

"Yep," Aoi replied, "just one second. I wanna text Minori a picture of this meal!"

"Mom, you sound like a 16-year-old girl right now," Yuuto said. "Also, *why?*"

"Your *fiancée* will certainly be proud of you! Even though it wouldn't be the first time you've cooked this well, it *will* be the first time she'll see a *full* meal that you've prepared. I hope next time you can invite your *fiancée* to come and enjoy such a meal with us."

"Mom, why are you stressing the fact that I have a fiancée all of a sudden?" Yuuto asked.

"U-umm...no particular reason," Aoi giggled nervously, "you were hearing things, son."

"B-but—"

"YOU. WERE. HEARING. THINGS," Aoi replied sternly, pausing after each and every word.

"Yes ma'am. I was hearing things, ma'am," Yuuto said, giving in.

Aoi took a photo on her phone and proceeded to text her friend the photo. She giggled. 'go show ur daughter, k?' she texted.

'how old r we?' Minori texted back.

'who tf cares?' Aoi responded. 'we r only mid 30s, we r still young'

'tru'

"Now can we eat?" Yuuto asked impatiently. "In case you forgot, *I* was the one running around all friggin' day, AND I still have to work later."

"Alright, alright," his mother replied, placing her hands together. The others followed her lead.

"Thanks for this meal!" the four said. They began to eat.

Yuuto stretched. He was lying on his bed, lounging around after finishing his homework. He felt his phone buzz in his hand. Looking at it, he saw a text.

'Darling, how r u?' it read.

Yuuto cracked a smile. 'doin fine, hbu Hanae?'

'I saw the meal u made, looked soooooooooo gud! I wanna have sum T-T'

'Then i'll make u sum next time u come over. Just tell me b4 u do so i can prepare the ingredients.'

'k <3 luv u' Hanae texted back.

Yuuto couldn't help but smile as he read the text. 'Ykno, i'm rly lucky 2 have u in my life.' he texted back. *And it's the damn truth*, he added to himself.

There was dead silence for a moment.

Shit, Yuuto thought, *did I do something wrong already?*

Suddenly, his phone buzzed again, snapping him back to attention.

'omigodrllyifeelthsameiluvusomuch' the text read.

"Dear lord," Yuuto chuckled, "did she forget to use the spacebar?" Before he could text her back, he heard the sound of thunder outside. "Oh shit," he said.

'Alright, i gtg. parents want me 2 get 2 bed. C u tmrw?' he texted.

'Yea, c u! Sleep well <3 <3 <3' Hanae texted back.

Putting down his phone, Yuuto got out of bed. "I gotta go shut the windows," he mumbled, "or rain's gonna fill the entire friggin' house." Walking out of his room, he looked around. His parents had already shut all the windows, and his father was on the phone. His mother, on the other hand, stood in the corner, glaring at him approvingly. Seeing her son, she walked over to him. "So dear, what did *you* do after dinner? Something productive, I hope, unlike your father."

"Uhhh...not exactly," Yuuto admitted. "I was lying around and texting Hanae for a bit."

At the mention of the girl's name, Aoi froze up. A smile found its way onto her face. "W-well, that's alright, no matter. No customers are gonna come in this weather, so I'll go close up shop for today. Go have a cookie or something, okay dear?" she said, walking out of the room with a hop in her step, humming a merry little tune.

"The hell is *her* problem?" Yuuto mumbled. "Well, guess I'll go have a cookie."

As Yuuto walked into the kitchen to get his cookie, Goro reached and arm out and grabbed him by the shoulder. "Son, you're sleeping on the couch tonight," he said.

"The hell?"

"The rain is really bad, so I called Hideki and asked if he wanted his daughter to just stay the night. He said yes, so she'll be resting in your room for the night. We don't have enough bedrooms, so you'll have to make do with the couch since it's the only thing that'll fit you."

"I...fine," Yuuto sighed. *It doesn't matter too much*, he thought, *it's not like I'm Nori and I have any porn magazines to hide from a girl. My room's actually completely clean and innocent, with not a single dirty book to be found.* Walking into the kitchen, he reached for a jar on the shelf and retrieved a cookie from it.

"Well, I should go move my pillow and blanket out here then," he mumbled to himself, walking out of the kitchen. "I'll go grab her a clear pillow and blanket from the closet. Just hope she doesn't mind staying in a *boy's* room."

Off to the side, Yuina nervously stared at him. *Oh, I hope I'm not causing Yuuto any trouble*, she thought.

Yuuto laid everything out on the couch. He sighed as his mother entered. "What's this?" she asked.

"Pops says Yuina's staying the night so I'll be offering my room as a place for her to stay," Yuuto explained in a quiet voice, conscious of the fact that she was at the other end of the room.

"So you intend to *share a bed* with that girl?" Aoi asked.

"N-no!" Yuuto replied in a rather loud whisper. "I'm sleeping on the couch!"

Aoi rolled her eyes. "Dammit, that father of yours...I can make *him* sleep on the couch if you like. I don't mind sharing a bed with you. After all, you used to share a bed with both your father and I when you were a kid."

"Yeah, I think I'll pass," Yuuto answered. "Thanks anyways, though, Mom. I've gotten Yuina a blanket and pillow from the closet, so I hope you don't mind."

"O-oh, not at all, dear," his mother answered. "But I think tonight I need to have a word with that husband of mine..."

Yuina walked over, looking over the couch. "W-wait, what's all this?"

"Don't worry," Yuuto smiled, turning to her, "we're not making you sleep here or anything. We've gotten a bed ready for you."

"O-oh..." Yuina answered. "Then who's..."

"D-don't worry about that," Yuuto chuckled. "You can go take a bath then get ready for bed, alright?"

"O-okay," Yuina answered timidly, walking off towards the bathroom.

Aoi sighed. *You're too nice sometimes, son, she thought. But then again, that's not always a bad trait per se.*