

XXVIII

"Wait, seriously?" Sayaka asked excitedly. "That's such a cool coincidence!" She laughed as she pondered what Yuuto had just said.

"Interesting indeed," Hanae mumbled, putting a finger to her chin. "Who would've thought *my* darling would have the same birthday as *you*?"

Yuuto sighed. *I should have been more careful about who was around when I told Hanae about my birthday*, he thought. *Or maybe I should have texted her when I got home instead of saying it out loud on the bus*. Ignoring Nori's chuckles from beside him, Yuuto desperately tried to defuse the situation that was quickly getting out of hand. "Now, now, it's not *that* big of a deal, is it?" he chuckled nervously.

"Of course it is!" Sayaka cried. "Say, how about this: let's have a joint party! It doesn't have to be big, it could just be the few of us. We could go to karaoke or something!"

"Huh. I suppose I must agree with you on that one," Hanae nodded. "Sounds fun, I'm in if you'll have me."

"Same," Nori laughed. "It's August 17, right? I'm free if you need me."

"I mean, of course we'd bring both of you," Yuuto smiled. "W-wait, HOLD ON! You're all okay with this?"

"What?" Nori laughed. "Were you just gonna stay home and make yourself lunch or something?"

"I...uhh..." Yuuto's voice trailed off. *Fuck, he got me*, he thought.

"Nori hasn't even gone to your family's restaurant before, has he?" Sayaka asked. "Great chance to get him addicted to those noodles, don't you think?"

"Exactly," Hanae agreed.

"Friggin'—oh well," Yuuto sighed, giving in. "I suppose you're right. Then it's settled? We'll all meet in front of the school, go to karaoke and then drop by the restaurant for lunch."

"Sounds good to me," Hanae nodded.

"It's a date!" Sayaka said excitedly.

"It's *not* a date for me," Nori laughed. "Or, well, I guess it technically *could* be..."

"Keep dreaming, buster," Sayaka retorted.

"Wow, this place is kinda fancy for a karaoke place, don't you think?" Nori asked, staring at the entrance.

"Well, y'see, my family kinda-sorta-maybe owns this place, so it's just free admission," Sayaka laughed. "It may or may not also be why I suggested it."

"Are you just flexing on us or is this shameless self-advertising?" Hanae asked jokingly.

"I'd say both, if we're talking about you," sayaka shot back with a smirk.

"Say, where's Yuuto?" Niro suddenly asked. At the mention of his name, Yuuto appeared, walking down the street and talking on the phone. He waved at his friends as he approached and hung up.

"Sorry for being late, everyone," he apologized. "Pops forced me to make a last-minute delivery since I was heading out in this direction anyways."

"Don't sweat it," Nori replied, "we all just got here too. And trust me, I'm not just trying to make you feel better."

"Huh," Yuuto chuckled. "Well then, let's go in—wait, why do I get the feeling that we're forgetting someone?"

"What're you blabbing about, man?" Nori asked.

"Y'know, I get the feeling we're being watched," Hanae mumbled.

"Err...that's odd. I think I just felt a chill up my spine. Oh well," Sayaka giggled, "now's not the time for that. Let's go in."

The four walked inside the karaoke building.

From afar, Yuina watched them enter with a pair of binoculars. "What is this?" she mumbled. "Hmm...well, Hanae's also with them," she added, "so I should watch her and Yuuto. After all, learning about a real wife is a taxing job..."

Packing up her belongings, she headed towards the building.

"What was with that voice crack, dude?" Yuuto laughed.

"Wait, you *noticed* that?" Nori cried in dismay.

"I think we *all* did," Sayaka giggled.

"Crap," he mumbled.

"Don't worry, I'll butcher it even more," Yuuto assured him, picking up a mic. "Now lemme find a song to sing real quick..."

As he continued searching for a song to sing, the group heard a commotion going on outside. Taking a peek out the door, Sayaka noticed a familiar girl talking with the person at the front desk. Sighing, she stood up. "One moment, everyone," she said with a smile.

"What do you mean I can't go watch?" Yuina complained. "I must! It's part of my research! Please!"

"I'm sorry, ma'am," the clerk responded, "but I simply cannot allow you to go and spy on any of our customers. Aside from being bad for business, I'm fairly certain that endorsing teenage stalking is quite illegal."

"What the hell are you doing out here?" Sayaka asked casually, strolling up to Yuina and giving her a tap on the shoulder. She turned to the clerk. "Don't worry, she's a friend of mine. Though her habits are a bit odd if I do say so myself." Taking Yuina's hand, she dragged her off towards the room where the others were. "I'll take care of her," Sayaka called, "don't you worry."

"Y-yes ma'am," the clerk nodded nervously. *I just hope poor lady Sayaka can HANDLE that girl*, he added to himself.