

## Prologue

“Please give me a bit of money. I want to get married.”

A girl stuck her hands out pitifully toward me.

I responded coldly: “Tell your husband to earn some himself!”

“We’ve been earning money as if our lives depended on it, but there’s not enough time. We want to participate in the joint wedding this time.” Her words carried a touch of grievance.

I knew about the joint wedding that was taking place during the next worship service. It was titled “I Will Love You Forever,” and the total cost was 5201314. It sounded all very lovely, yet it mercilessly scraped people’s pockets empty.

I remained indifferent and turned around to walk away.

“How much more do you need?” As expected, the dear friend behind me quickly came forward after I left.

“About one million and two hundred thousand.”

“This is for you. You should hurry and register.”

“Wow, thank you, gege!”

The girl joyously ran off into the distance.

“Fuck, what wedding did she think she’d be having with no money like that?” I glared at the back of her bouncing figure, venting out a stomach full of dissatisfaction toward that overly benevolent person.

“Acting like this again! I told you long ago that you have to follow the rules of the game! You think you’re a god?”

He smiled and said: “What’s wrong with helping someone in need? Charging over five million for a wedding is ridiculous. Don’t you yourself go around making others medicine for free when you’re in a good mood? Besides, I barely did anything. That money was all earned by me.”

“You barely did anything? The swindler from last time — didn’t you end up turning him into a penniless wretch? How do you know that girl wasn’t deceiving you?”

“Last time, the punishment fit the crime. How could a person like that be let off the hook? Besides, who could deceive me?” His face was persuasively righteous.

I was just about to retort back when a male and female pair ran over, panting heavily. The two of them whipped out pathetic appearances for the person beside me: “We also want to get married next week...”

I indulged in schadenfreude as I rapidly made my getaway.

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He returned to the hilltop just in time for the sunset. We never made a formal agreement, but we both came back exactly at this time every day.

I asked unhappily: “How much did you give this time?”

“Nothing. This time, there really was no money.”

“Shouldn’t getting a bit of money be extremely easy for you?”

He replied earnestly: “Can’t break the rules of the game.”

I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

Afterward, we sat side-by-side on the cliff and stared at the setting sun on the horizon, the same as every day.

“If you could start over again, what would you do?”

He contemplated for a while: “I would live more responsibly. I would finish my studies, make arrangements for my parents’ later years, and then...”

“And then turn back to find me?”

“I suppose so. But what’s the point in saying this now?”

“No way. What would you even come to find me for by that day?”

He remained silent.

Because what I said was the truth. *By that day, you would only think of me as a passerby from your young and frivolous years, and you would have no choice but to face your former self with a self-deprecating smile. And I would be scraping by in my own corner, running around every day to make a living, being corroded by the passage of time into bits and pieces.*

I didn’t know which was more frightening: the cruelty of the online world in its nothingness or the cruelty of real life in its actuality.