

木村心一

Shinichi Kimura

これは
ゾンビ
ですか？

フはーい、眠れるチチです



ファンタジア文庫



**IS THIS A
Zombie?**

Haruna >

**IT'S A
SNEAK PEEK!
THAT'S
A LIE!**



Haruna: Rejoice! KoreZom had an anime!
You guys watched it, right?!

Ayumu: Uh-huh...

Haruna: Today I wanted to show you all
one scene from the anime!

Ayumu: Uh-huhh...

Haruna: Pay close attention! And then go
on all the message boards and
talk about how excited you are!

Ayumu: Uhh... okay?

Haruna: You look like you kinda want
to say something.

Ayumu: I'm saving it all for later.



Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo!

Yuu >



Ayumu: This was definitely not in the anime! When did this turn into one of the Four Great Tragedies?!

Haruna: Hm, we're not doing this? This is the "Is This a Zombie? Yes, I'm Stuck in Concrete" episode.

Ayumu: How is this scene going to turn into getting stuck in concrete?! Also, Juliet really doesn't seem into it, and what's with those outfits?!

Haruna: This is fan service! It's important! Look, all the people on this forum are all willing they're "really excited" by this!

Ayumu: Liar!



Yuu: Oh Romeo, why are you Romeo?



Sera: My love for you guided me, and without even knowing it I found myself here.

Yuu: So, why are you Romeo?

Sera: If I could only meet with you, then even death would leave me no regrets.

Yuu: Oh Romeo, but dying would be ever so depressing.

Sera: Then I shall live with you as a zombie.

Yuu: Please don't.



< Sera

Romeo & Juliette



Chris: Hey hey.

Haruna: Okay, onto the next scene.

Ayumu: We can't keep showing people scenes that don't actually exist.

Chris: Hey, listen to me! When is Chris going to show up?

Ayumu: Eh? Umm, huh? Did the anime actually get to your arc? I don't think you're in the anime.

Chris: No, that's so not faaaair--! Chris is gonna show up. If Chris doesn't show up, she'll have to destroy the world—

Ayumu: Calm down. Calm down, okay? Let's talk like civilized people.

Chris: Boooo. I even went through all the trouble to change into this swimsuit...

Ayumu: Okay, well... I'm pretty excited about that, honestly.

Chris: Okay! Post that on a message board!

Ayumu: "I'm excited."

Chris: Looks like I'll have to have a long chat with Onii-chan here. As his homeroom teacher, I mean.





プロローグ

人は誰も、二つの顔を持っている。
俺はごく一般的な高校生のようで、実はゾンビ。
車に乗ったら性格が変わるとか、酒が入ると性格が変わるとか。
大人しそうに見えて、キレたら怖いとか。

そんなことよりも大事なモノがある。

人は誰も、二つの顔を持っている。

それは、柔らかくてふかふかで、子供から大人までを幸せにする。



いけないいけない。
危うく寝るといふのだった。
おまけに寝る——
おまけに寝る

Prologue.

Part 1.

The most important thing to have in life is courage... is what I think at least. If you cower in the face of new experiences and can't take that first step, then you'll never get anything done.

You might fail. You might regret it. But that's fine. You might be terrified, but even so, you continue moving forwards. If you don't experience new things, you won't be able to feel anything about anything.

Chris, the strongest masou shoujo, had suddenly appeared during our October school festival.

And that title of "strongest" wasn't just window dressing – a mere zombie like myself couldn't even hope to touch her.

However, Chris had stolen something precious from me.

It had already been two months since I had decided to pay her back for everything she'd done.

Since then, I had gone through a mixer and a sexual harassment trial... it had been quite an eventful two months. Yes, quite eventful...

In the end, I got two pieces of information. For one, Chris often went to places you would normally find middle-aged men at: oden (1) restaurants, horseracing tracks, etc. Second, if you tickled Chris, she would not be able to move anymore.

But just knowing that didn't mean I was ready to face Chris.

Today was December 17th, a Sunday, and I was going to meet the “strongest person from the underworld” who might be able to face off with the “strongest masou shoujo.” (2) So, I had caught a train and went to a certain place in the Koto Ward in Tokyo. (3)

I was outside a shabby-looking wooden apartment building, which seemed decades old and looked like it would collapse under the smallest of earthquakes.

The entranceway was surrounded by a concrete block fence which was covered with ivy. I read the words “Sunflower Manor” on the fence in lettering that had been blurred by the rain. That name really felt out of place for this building...

I entered the building grounds, giving a sidelong glance to a rusty mailbox while going up some very creaky stairs. I soon found myself in front of my destination: room 203.

I took a deep breath, trying to calm my nerves, and pushed the doorbell.

I didn't hear anything. I tried pushing it hard, and then pushing it many times at once, but nothing happened. It looked like the doorbell was broken.

I lightly knocked. *Tap tap*. No response.

I tried knocking harder. *Knock knock*. Absolutely nothing.

I wrapped my hand around the doorknob, which had become chilled from the biting winter wind, and tested it. The door was unlocked.

I slowly, slowly opened the door, and saw...

Bomprof. Something flew out at me. A very soft something that filled my head with happy thoughts. Indeed, these were *breasts*.

If you left out the fact that I was dead, I was pretty much a very normal first year high school student, but I also wasn't the type who cared too much about how big breasts were.

I mean, if you want to call yourself a man, then of course you had to like breasts. I wasn't any exception to that rule.

However, when it came to how big or shapely they were, I didn't really care much.

Even small breasts were fine! Is what I thought at least. But my my, this feeling of happiness...

Exactly how long had I stood here thinking about breasts? It was only one moment in real, but it felt like hours had passed by in my head.

How had my brain been reduced to such a state...?

Well, it was because my face was now buried in a set of breasts.

A girl had suddenly come out when I opened the door, and I found myself being pushed back.

Clang! I collided with the rusty railing behind me. It was a flimsy-looking iron railing that looked like it would break under any significant weight, but I managed to wrap my arms around the girl and somehow escaped that fate.

She was probably around 1.6 meters tall (4)... she was a beautiful girl with a soft-looking, well-built feminine body. A tank top snugly clung to her body.

Her long hair hung down to her chest and also seemed to be knotted up in random places. Had she just woken up?

I was hugging her so it was hard to notice, but the only thing covering her underneath was one piece of black underwear... mmmmm...

Those bewitching thighs down there... that plump ass covered by that black underwear... those tight hips and those ripples coming from that snug tanktop... it all gave off quite a lewd impression.

And then there were those gigantic breasts sitting on top of it all. If she moved just a little, those breasts of hers jiggled like they were living creatures. Just beautiful.

Wait! What the hell am I thinking about right now?!

The girl was still in my arms, and all the strength had left her body.

“Are you okay?”

I tried calling out to her, but she didn't respond. What the hell? What was going on? My heart beat faster and faster.

For now, I carried her back into the room.

My strength as a zombie was the one thing I could depend on, so it was easy as pie to carry one girl.

I saw a kitchen and a bathroom out of the corner of my eyes, but proceeded further in.

It was a Japanese-style room, probably a bit bigger than 10 tatami in area. (5) A little shelf was crammed into the room and filled with manga and a figure collection. There were also manga and plastic bottles scattered all around.

I could tell from the state of this room that the owner wasn't very good at keeping things tidy. It was like I was staring at the room of my own house's resident irresponsible idiot, Haruna.

There was a television, but it was off right now. I sat the girl down on the low chair in the middle of the room and tried tapping her lightly on the cheek. At that point, the girl's eyes opened.

"Fuuaahh~~. Ah, good morninggg..."

"Eh? Ahh, good morning."

So she really was just sleeping? I watched her give a nice long stretch, her breasts drawing nicely tight... ah, no good no good. I hadn't come here for that. I wasn't here to sexually harass anybody!

"Are you Naegleria Nebiros-san?"

"Agh, no no no. Don't remind me of that name. Nene is fine."

"Okay. Nene-san, then."

..... And no response. Eh? What? Was she asleep again?

"Nene-san... Nene-san..."

“Fueh~?” She gave me a response like a flat can of cola and looked at me with sleepy eyes.

“Umm, I came here to see Nene-san about something...”

“Ah, okay...” *Clunk*. Her head flopped down under the influence of gravity.

She’s asleep again! She wasn’t even listening, was she?!

“Nene-san! Nene-san!”

“Ahh, sorry... umm, who are you again?”

“... Um, I think Shimomura told you about me before.”

“Ah, okay okay. Eucliwood’s friend, right...? Did you cut your hair?”

That wasn’t something you asked someone on your first meeting. Had we met somewhere before?

“I haven’t cut it in a while, but... umm, I’m here about Chris, the strongest masou shoujo.”

“Mhmm. Chris, yeah... that rings a bell...” *Zzzzzzz*.

She fell asleep again! “Umm, sorry, but I really want to talk...”

“Ah, right umm... okay, we can talk. You see, the difference between Blue Mountain Coffee and Rainbow Mountain Coffee is-”

“That’s not what we were talking about! Not even close! See, I want to ask you about beating Chris...”

“Okay okay. Chris, right? Umm, I guess if you want to beat her, you’d have to come to me.”

Ohh! That sounded really reassuring!

“Great! Then please help us with-”

Ugh, she’s asleep again! What the hell is up with this girl?! She’s been falling asleep every second!

But seriously, those are some pretty big breasts. I’ve met a lot of big-breasted people already, but hers just took the cake. You could even call her breasts “explosively big,” pardon my French.

“Whoops. Sorry sorry. I almost fell asleep there.”

Nene-san shook her head from side to side trying to wake herself up. Wait... what did she mean *almost*?

“So, about Chris...”

“Hm? Hm hm? You’re... who are you again?”

... Umm... were we starting over then? Nene-san stood up and walked over to a strange desk that was slightly tilted. She sat down on a swivel chair, the kind you would often find in offices.

“So, I think Anderson-kun told you about me...”

“Ah, right right. I remember. Aikawa Kinya-kun, right?” (6)

“It’s Ayumu. Aikawa Ayumu. Do I really look like Kinkin?”

“Ah. You’re here for help with Chris, right?”

“Yes!” Finally the conversation was getting somewhere.

“Ah, don’t worry about that. Everything’s gonna work out. Look forward to it~~.”

She chuckled.

“Everything’s gonna work out... so, you’re going to fight for us?”

“Hm? Me? No no, that would be really bad.”

“Why? You can win, right?”

“If I win, then Virie and the Underworld are going to go to war again. Are you okay with that?”

I see. If the supposedly strongest person from the Underworld fights with the supposedly strongest masou shoujo, then that would be interpreted as an act of war. And... that war would happen in this world.

“Uhh...”

Nene-san probably saw the frustrated look on my face and guessed what I wanted to say. She gave me a smile.

“Yup. But the solution to that problem will be coming soon enough, so could you just wait a bit longer?”

I see. Nene-san didn’t have to be the one to fight, but there was someone else. And she would introduce me to this other person who could beat Chris. To think things could be going this smoothly...

“Got it. I’ll wait here then until that person comes.”

“Okay~~. Umm, there’s also something else I want to ask you...”

“Hm?”

“Help me. With this draft.”

Nene-san handed me a bundle of draft papers as she said that.

I saw manga drawn on the pages. It looked like a fantasy manga with a girl clad in armor as the protagonist.

“Help...? Wait, are you telling me to draw manga...?”

“Zzzzzz...” Nene-san opened her mouth wide, using the back of her chair as a pillow as she began to tilt backwards...

“Wake up, dammit!”

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

(1) A Japanese stew using a soy-based broth.

(2) As usual, I'll footnote this once per volume. Masou shoujo is literally “magical clothing girl,” and is obviously a pun on the standard “mahou shoujo,” or “magical girl.”

(3) The Koto ward contains part of Odaiba, which is the island on which Comic Market takes place.

(4) That's around 5 feet 2 inches in stupid units.

(5) That's around 175 square feet in stupid units.

(6) A Japanese Actor. Nickname is “Kinkin.”

Part 2.

It was after school the next day, and I was sprawled out on my desk in an empty classroom.

After the exchange with Nene-san, I helped her with her manga manuscript for three more hours.

How many pages did I trace out with black ink? How many frames did I add shading too?

And yet, we weren't even close to done.

The deadline for the manga seemed to be the nineteenth. Today was the eighteenth... what a bad time to have met her.

The sun was going to set soon. I was dead... well, technically *undead*, so the one thing I was weak towards was sunlight.

... In the end, the person who was supposed to help us beat Chris never showed up.

So once the sun went down, I had to go to Nene-san's place again and continue with our work.

Nene-san had said the following:

“Oh, sorry... hmm, that's reaaally strange. I thought that person would come too... sorry, but could you come tomorrow again? I'm sure... tomorrow... zzzzzzzzzz.”

And I responded instantly with a “don't sleep, dammit!” of course.

I could've gone at a later date, but strangely I had an urge to finish the work which we had started yesterday. I guess otherwise it would be like getting on a ship and bailing midway.

“Hm, alone, are you? That's good.”

As I waited on tenterhooks for the sun to set, a dull man with a rough beard wearing a white lab coat came into the classroom.

“You're the last person I'd want to see when I'm waking up from a nap.”

“Hey hey, that’s a pretty awful thing to say to your homeroom teacher, isn’t it?”

This was the Year 1 Class C’s temporary homeroom teacher. His name was... well, umm, I just called him the Demon Baron. He looked annoyed no matter what he was doing, his hair was unkempt, and his lab coat dirty. It was hard to give him any respect based solely on his appearance, but he was quite an incredible person.

“It’s always a bother to talk to teachers, so I guess my manners are getting pretty sloppy in that department.”

“Aikawa Ayumu-kun. Things just got quite bad.”

It was like he was ignoring me. Well, whatever.

“You talking about Chris?”

“Yes, Chris. It’s been around two months since she’s gotten her power back, right?”

The Demon Baron shook his head sadly, scratching his cheek. When this guy showed up in front of me, it was almost always for the sake of beating Chris. We would often exchange information like this.

“Well, things should be better soon, so just be patient.”

I gave him a proud smile.

“Oh, well that’s nice then. What’s the solution you propose?”

“I asked Naegleria-san for help, and-”

“Wha-?! Naegleria... that S-Class... *cough cough!*”

The Demon Baron continued to look shocked even as he spat out blood like someone had twisted a faucet open.

“Ugh! My doctor was so explicit too in his orders to not get excited about breasts...”

The reason this person’s coat was stained red was from wiping his mouth, and because he was constantly coughing up blood and being carried to the nurse’s office. I was used to it though, so I just kept on talking.

“Actually, sensei, where do you come from? I guess you’re acquaintances with Yuu, so... I guess you’re from the Underworld?”

“I’m from Virie. I met Eucliwood in this world. Well, back then I was putting this army of vampire ninjas together, but that’s another story. More importantly...”

“You said things were getting bad. Did something happen?”

“Ahh, well... seems the queen is coming to this world.”

“Queen? You mean, the Queen of Virie?”

“I don’t know how she caught wind of it, but now she knows about Chris. So... we have this year to make sure we get rid of Chris and pretend she never existed.”

“Why?” I really couldn’t make sense of what he was saying.

“Do you really want this entire island nation to be blown up into outer space?”

“... What does that have to do with anything?”

“The queen is the kind of person who, if we put her together with Chris, she wouldn’t bat an eye before blowing up an entire country. Right now, Ariel is managing to restrain her by pretending that Chris doesn’t exist but... well, it’s just a matter of time. And the deadline for everything is...”

“The end of this year, huh...?”

“I tried to do something about it too, but...”

“Hm? What did you try?”

“Well, we had the conservative and reform factions of the vampire ninjas, right? And you saw how Sarasvati got them all to cooperate with each other. I gathered up around a hundred of those vampire ninjas and went to take care of Chris.”

“A-A hundred?! And you still couldn’t beat her?!”

“Yeah. As expected from the ‘strongest’ masou shoujo. I thought we’d be able to manage since she can’t transform right now... but I underestimated her. So, I thought you, me, and Eucliwood could figure out a plan together. But if Naegleria is handling things...”

“Yup. Nothing to worry about.”

The Demon Baron let out a small chuckle and spoke with a joking tone in his voice.

“You might be our last guardian here. Is there anything you want from me?”

So melodramatic. Well, if you’re going to joke like that, then I’ll joke right back.

“Okay then. Buy me a can of milk coffee?”

“Ahh, sure.” The Demon Baron smiled. But right then...

Cough hack! He spit out blood.

“Ugh. My doctor ordered me to never treat anybody to anything...”

“You know, now that I think about it, isn’t that disease of yours a bit too convenient?”

The chieftain of the vampire ninjas started wobbling from the blood loss and collapsed onto the floor as I stood above him and watched him with a strained smile.

Part 3.

As I sipped the milk coffee the Demon Baron had bought for me, I looked out the window at the sports clubs that were so diligently practicing even in the middle of this damn cold. Geez, the track team was even wearing shorts...

The Demon Baron had barely managed to buy me this drink, but he apparently had lost too much blood and was now resting in the nurse’s office.

There wasn’t really enough time to take a nap right now, and the usual girl who I would talk to at times like this was currently running to her heart’s content out on the track. So I just sat there, wondering how I was going to kill time in this empty classroom, when I saw one girl enter the room.

Her waist-length black hair fluttered in the wind as she walked over, a smirk appearing on her face.

“Oh look. You’re here alone... my darling.”

This girl, Sarasvati, looked around happily at the lonely, empty room as she came up right beside me. Her tall, slender body was clad in a sailor uniform.

“Hey Saras. That near-death homeroom teacher was here just a while ago, but he’s coughing up blood in the nurse’s office now. Did you need something?”

Schhp. I wrapped my lips around the straw for my milk coffee and sucked the drink up.

“Well, I wanted to make a report to the chief, but it seems we’ve passed each other... hm, what is that?”

Saras looked down at the milk coffee that I was drinking.

“Isn’t it obvious? It’s milk coffee. People my age really like tasty, caffeine-heavy things like this, you know.”

“I see. I shall take that, then.”

Saras gave me a nod and then snatched the milk coffee from my hands. Geez... this girl was always so forceful.

“If you really want one I can go get one for you. If you drink out of that one it’ll turn into an indirect kiss.”

I let out a single yawn, and I shook my head with exasperation. But Saras then brought her face right up to mine.

Her silky hair waved from side to side, and this beautiful girl gave me a bold smile at a distance close enough that our noses were almost touching.

“Perhaps that is precisely what I wanted to do... my darling.”

She challenged me with her grin, and I affixed my gaze on her lips that were right in front of me. I felt my heart skip a beat, but then I pushed her pretty face away.

“Don’t get so close.”

“... You certainly are colder today than usual, my useless darling. Did something happen?”

Saras seemed a bit worried. I was really used to her always talking down to me, but lately there’ve been times when I’ve seen a meeker, more feminine side of her personality.

“Ahh, I’m being forced to work as a manga assistant right now. It seems like the deadline is tomorrow, so everything’s in a huge hurry. I’m just tired from being made to do work that I’m not used to.”

“Tomorrow, hmm... oh hoh, it must be a doujinshi for comiket then.” (1)

“Well, I’m not sure about any of that-”

“Given the timing, that must be it. I see, perhaps I can meet with my scum darling at the convention center as well.”

She closed her eyes, seeming to let all those emotions sink in, and then...

“I am happy, you piece of shit!”

She spat abuse at me with a smile from ear to ear.

“But, I really don’t think we’re going to finish.”

“Hm? Did you not say that the deadline is tomorrow?”

“Yeah. But it’s probably not going to happen. Especially considering what that person is like...”

I let out another yawn. But before I could speak again...

“You imbecile!” Saras yelled loudly.

I couldn’t help but lean over in my chair at the sheer volume of her voice. But Saras continued with the fury of a demoness.

“I will never forgive you if you don’t make a Comiket deadline! Never!”

Saras was getting very angry, and at that moment I had no idea why.

TRANSLATOR’S NOTES

(1) Doujinshi are fan-made books, and the biggest marketplace they are sold is Comic Market, or comiket, a biannual convention held on Odaiba in Tokyo.

第一話

「もしもしい？
蝶のように舞い、
蜂のように天才ですが
何か？」

議題は「アユムがセクハラ大魔神に昇格した件について！」

あーもう！ 毎回毎回っ！
アユムはなんでこうも変態なんだっ！
あたしよりほんのちょこっとだけ胸が大きい
だけじゃん。
あたしの方が可愛いし、あたしの方が超可
愛いののに——
また、あんなことをしてるなんて……。
これは根暗マンサーと葉っぱの人と家族会
議が必要なレベルだ！



Chapter 1 – Hello? This is the Girl who Dances Like a Butterfly and Geniuses it Up Like a Bee. What do You Want?

Part 1.

Instead of going home, I had directly come to Nene-san's run-down apartment building, Sunflower Manor.

“Hm. This is certainly a nice place. Seems fitting for a manga artist.”

Standing next to me was a beautiful, cultivated girl. Her tall body was clad in a sailor uniform as she stood there dauntingly with her legs spread wide and her hands on her hips.

Yes, Saras had come to help with Nene-san's manga manuscript.

“Don't do anything weird, okay?”

I gave her a gentle reminder before heading towards room 203. Like yesterday, the doorbell didn't work, and even if I knocked there was no answer. So I just opened the door and boldly walked inside. If things ended up like yesterday and I ended up clinging to Nene-san again, I didn't know how many times Saras would kill me.

The inside of the room was more tidied up than the last time I had come. There hadn't been any room to work yesterday, so I had cleaned up all the manga that was piled up on the floor.

Well, to be fair, I had “cleaned up” by just shoving them all into a corner.

Nene-san was sitting in the fluffy swivel chair that was placed in front of the slanted desk.

She was leaning the weight of her entire body back into the chair, and her head was completely thrown back, making it seem like she was staring up at the ceiling.

It seemed that she was asleep. But even then, she seemed to be firmly gripping onto a pen in her right hand.

“Nene-san, Nene-san.”

“Hyah!! Oh, hi there, Aikawa-kun. School over then?”

Nene-san wiped a bit of drool from her mouth before standing up. She immediately began to hand me the manuscript she had probably just finished.

“Hm? Um umm, and you are...”

She pointed at Saras with the hand that was still holding the pen. *Boing*. Her big breasts jiggled.

“She’s here to help with the manuscript.”

I didn’t know if Nene-san heard me or not. She just looked at Saras with sleepy eyes and nodded, looking like she couldn’t care less.

“Ah, okay okay. Thanks much.”

From both my meeting with her yesterday and her behavior right now, I gathered that Nene-san was a flexible person who just accepted anybody and everybody. Many people might

even get angry at a stranger like Saras just randomly appearing like this, and even if she was here to help with the work, there weren't many who would just blindly accept a total stranger invading their personal space.

“Hey, trash darling. You never told me about this.”

Saras's eyes pierced through me like daggers. Hey, stop grabbing me by the collar... that's starting to hurt.

“About what?”

“You never told me the manga artist was a girl! Another girl! Once again, even though you have me...”

Her tightly gripped fists trembled. Exactly what was Saras scowling at here? I really had no idea.

“In any case, please beta and shade these. Thanks~.”

In the time it took me to go to school, Nene-san had managed to pile up a mountain of manuscript pages. Geez... Nene-san, exactly how much manga were you planning to draw?

The minute Saras had the manuscript in her hands, her eyes widened.

“T-This artwork... Nene-sensei's artwork?”

“Hm? Saras, you know her?”

“Yes... if this is related to Nene-sensei's work then I would consider it an honor.”

Her anger from just a minute ago seemed to dissipate into thin air. It was replaced by an expression of pure joy as she stared at the manuscript.

“Well, let’s get to work then.”

We heaped the manuscript onto the table. My job was being the manga artist’s assistant.

A manga assistant might be called on to do the following:

Erasing the pencil lines in the rough draft (eraser duty).

Completely painting in the areas which Nene-san indicated with black ink (beta painting).

Using a special paper called “screentone” to place various patterns on clothing and other things (shading).

Using correction fluid to deal with lines that jut out too far and to draw stars on black backgrounds (whiting).

Drawing lines that radiated outwards to indicate concentration or lines to indicate speed (effect lining).

There were probably other things too, but ultimately I ended up being entrusted with beta painting and shading.

So, let’s see what Saras can do to help.

“Do you have experience with this kind of stuff?”

“Yes. But this is just way too incomplete, is it not? Do you not have to submit this by tomorrow?”

“Hey... I can hear you, you know...”

Nene-san spoke but didn’t even look up as her pen ran across the paper.

“Well, I suppose it’s because I started drawing this a week ago...”

“... Why? With this many pages, this is not something you should try to finish in a week.”

Saras spoke a bit assertively, and Nene-san stopped drawing. She swiveled her chair towards us. Her bewitching, crossed legs were now right in front of my eyes... woah.

“I met an old friend... and then suddenly the inspiration went bzzzz!!”

Nene-san gestured with a smile, at which point Saras hit the table strongly.

“I understand what you mean all too well. But... what is the meaning of this?!”

“Of what~?”

In stark contrast to Saras, Nene-san responded without a care in the world.

“You’ve been taking shortcuts on all the backgrounds! I have never seen such things in the work of the Nene-sensei that I’m familiar with! Can you really call this level of work ‘finished’?!”

“Ehh, but I was rushing, and I really wanted to draw this... okay, can you fix the backgrounds then?”

Nene-san scratched her forehead with the back of her pen as she responded at a leisurely pace.

I thought Saras would heat up at Nene-san’s insolent tone, but...

“Me? It would be an absolute honor! My darling, did you hear that?!”

I had no idea why Saras was so happy. It seemed like she did heat up, but not in the way I had expected.

“That’s really great, Saras.”

For now though, I should focus on the beta painting and the shading.

Saras set off on her task, her pen flying to and fro in her delicate fingers in practice strokes.

Scratch scratch... scratch scratch...

It was way too quiet. I couldn’t take this anymore. Let’s make some small talk at least while we work.

“Nene-san, how’s this? Not bad, right?”

Oh, she was asleep. Well, whatever. I’ll try to talk with Saras instead then.

“I thought you were just saying things, but it really does look like you’re familiar with this kind of work. Do you draw these kinds of books too?”

It was pretty rare for me to be the one to strike up a conversation with Saras.

..... But she ignored me. Her too?! I’m so lonely! I’m so lonely here!

We worked in silence for probably an hour. By that time I was almost sobbing out of loneliness, Saras raised her head.

“Hey ling.”

She got rid of half of ‘my darling’ to save time!

But I don't care. Just pay attention to me! I tried not to seem too desperate here though, so I just lifted my head without answering.

Saras thrust out her work at me, clearly wanting me to take a look. It seems she had finished drawing the backgrounds on a number of pages, so she was probably taking a breather.

Umm, Saras was supposed to be good at drawing, right? Let's see...

"Pardon my arrogance, but I do believe it is quite good."

She nodded, and seemed to be waiting for me to praise her.

When I took a look, I saw a beautiful background drawn there. She didn't have any reference materials, but she still managed to get so many details in. It was great.

"Amazing. I never knew you had such a talent for this."

"Fallen in love with me, have you?"

"Not really."

"Hmmm? Lemme see~~." Nene-san stood up from her chair and came over. She was awake? If you're awake, talk to me dammit! Ugh!

Nene-san put a hand on the table and got down on her knees, picking up Saras's part of the manuscript.

Her bountiful breasts jiggled right in front of my eyes.

Gulp. I somehow kept my drool in my mouth and swallowed.

"Well well. Pretty good, pretty good."

Well well. Pretty bouncy, pretty bouncy. Ugh! It was like I was cursed! I couldn't take my eyes off those breasts!

"I am honored by your praise."

Saras looked very proud of herself. Meanwhile, I was just looking at the breasts.

"Hm? Ahaha, Aikawa-kun, giving me that dirty look. You're such a perv."

"Eh? No, uhh... this is... umm..."

"You damn pervling."

That sounded nothing like 'darling,' you know. You can't just slap 'ling' at the end of random words and call it a day, dammit.

I prepared myself for death. There was only one outcome I could expect from this. The only thing in my future was the fate of getting beaten to a pulp. Saras's murderous mood was already filling the room to the brim.

Nene-san was the strongest person from the Underworld. I had no idea whatsoever what kind of attack she was going to launch at me.

"Well, such is life, I suppose. Guys will be guys~~."

Eh? What was with that kind smile on her face?

"You're not angry?"

"Eh? Ahahaha, if I got angry at this kind of thing, there'd be no end to it. Anyways, I like my boys a bit on the pervy side~."

Nene-san laughed loudly and began smacking me on the back. If this were Sera or Saras, they'd probably be crushing my back with a foot instead...

In stark contrast to Nene-san, Saras sent me a fierce glare.

“This is clearly an act of ‘peeking.’ We may be fully clothed and in a bedroom, but if you look at the lewd expression in his eyes, then it is clear.”

If you put it like that, then I get the feeling that what I was doing was basically like peeking into a bathhouse...

“Well, I can't say I like what he's doing, but I don't think it's worth getting worked up over a small thing like this.”

Nene-san returned to her seat. Meanwhile, Saras still didn't look fully convinced.

“I see... that's why you're the ‘strongest’...”

Saras shut her eyes and shook her head back and forth as if trying to shake something off.

“Hm? What do you mean?” Saras's words struck me a bit, so I asked her about them.

“I believe that only the strong have the capacity for forgiveness. The weak do not have the same ability... before I met darling, I was an example of that.”

“Well, that's what they call ‘being broad-minded,’ I guess.”

“Indeed. Seeing her forgive you so easily makes my own anger seem quite petty.”

“So, that means you'll forgive me too, right?”

“I will not, darling. Stop ogling girls with those dirty eyes of yours. If you really want to look... maybe... if it’s just a bit... you can... just look at me...”

Saras flushed deep crimson from ear to ear as she said that and looked the other way. She was pretty cute when she did that, so I chuckled.

“Got it, got it. This was also why I was put through that sexual harassment trial anyways, so I’ll try to restrain myself.”

“Yes. My darling is the cutest when he is being sincere.”

Saras teased me with a grin. Seeing us smiling at each other, Nene-san covered her mouth with a hand as the corners of her mouth turned upwards.

“You call him darling, so... you two are lovers? Pretty hot, pretty hot~~.”

“Absolutely not.” I responded instantly. That was the one point I would not budge on.

“Ahh, don’t be shy~~.” But Nene-san didn’t seem to buy it.

As we talked, the front door suddenly flung open.

“Naegleriaaaa, you here?”

I heard a voice that could only belong to a very cute girl.

Someone came? Ah! Was this the person who was going to help us take care of our Chris problem?

I felt my heart speed up a bit as I waited, bending my body back in an attempt to catch a glimpse at what kind of person she was.

The girl took off her shoes and came inside the room... and my eyes narrowed to small points.

It was a young girl, wearing a white Gothic Lolita outfit.

Just from a glance, you could tell she was very pretty. She was holding onto a bottle of sake in her right hand and a pipe or something in her left? Those definitely weren't things you'd expect a normal girl to have.

There was only one person in the world that I knew who looked like this.

“Impossible... you're...”

It wasn't just me. Saras also couldn't hide her shock.

“Why is Chris here...?”

I looked over at Nene-san, hoping she could give me some answers.

“Ohh, there you are. I thought you were going to come yesterday.”

Nene-san beckoned Chris over.

Chris walked farther into the room while avoiding all the trash that was scattered out around the entranceway.

“Ahh, there was this show on TV yesterday and... hmm?”

Chris had been looking down the entire time so she didn't notice us until she had walked into the middle of the room.

Seeing me and Saras, Chris looked more excited than surprised.

“It’s been a while, oniichan. I thought you had died before, but it looks like you’re still alive.”

What a thing to hear from the person who had tried to kill me. But maybe I should count this as the meeting I had been long waiting for. I stood up and prepared to punch her, when Saras held me back.

I was already dead, so I would be fine, but Saras had almost been killed by Chris. So she probably had more reason than anybody here to be angry. But she held me back.

Maybe she wanted me to wait a bit before going for it. Either way, I put down my raised fist.

I saw Saras breath in deeply once, probably trying to contain her anger, before glaring at Nene-san.

“I would like an explanation as to why she is here.”

Her eyes were piercing. What a bold expression to have in the face of someone who had almost killed you.

“I thought you wanted to do something about Chris? So here! Talk it out and make all the problems go away~.”

“Talk it out...? This girl tried to kill us.”

“So what? You tried to kill Chris too! How is what you did different from what Chris did...?”

She tried to kill us, so we’ll try to kill her. I knew that getting trapped in this endless cycle wasn’t good. I knew that, but... I still wasn’t satisfied here.

“We’re like cats and dogs, I guess...?”

Chris said that and then plopped herself boldly down right next to me. She seemed completely defenseless there, full of openings.

“At least, we were a hundred years ago.”

They both laughed. The masou shoujo and people from the Underworld were supposed to be enemies. However, here the two “strongest” beings from each of those camps were sitting shoulder to shoulder.

“Exactly how did you two get so friendly with each other?”

“We met back when Chris had been chased into this world and was just wandering around.”

“I was pretty surprised, you know. She was a masou shoujo, but she had been turned into a pretty old guy.”

Pretty old guy... so this happened before Chris had stolen Haruna’s magical energy and was still my homeroom teacher. They had already met by then.

“Shouldn’t you two have been enemies?”

“Chris keeps her private life separate from her work! Plus, drinking sake here is just the best~~.”

Chris tipped her bottle back and took a drink straight from it.

“Well, because of my powers you can now shake off the queen’s curse when you drink, so of course you’d think that... also, did you bring the refreshments?”

“Yup yup, brought some beer. Do you two want any? Just kidding! This isn’t for kids.”

“I don’t need it!”

Nene-san took the beer from Chris and headed for the kitchen. She probably wanted to pop open a bottle immediately.

“So, oniichan. What did you want from Chris?”

She was sitting right there. This was my chance. My chance to take her down.

“Aikawa-kun. I just want to make sure you understand, but I’ve set this space up as a place for talking.”

Nene-san seemed to see right through my plan to launch an attack. But seriously, was this a person you could expect “talking” to work on?

Saras seemed to really be holding herself back, but she corrected her posture and turned towards Chris.

“If possible, we do not wish to fight. We would like to let the past be the past and come to a compromise, but what say you?”

“Compromise? What kind of compromise?”

“We want only one thing: for you to behave yourself and to stay out of the way.”

“Chris has been trying to behave...”

“If things continue like this, the Queen of Virie is going to come to this world. Do you really want that?”

Chris was drinking her sake, and Nene-san was in the kitchen chugging down a beer, but just for a moment I saw their bodies stiffen.

“Hmph. That may be a good chance for Chris.”

Chris had once challenged the Queen of Virie and lost. At that point, a curse was cast on her that robbed her of her personality and she was tossed into this world. So she probably had quite a few things she wanted to say to the queen as well.

By the way, the Demon Baron also had challenged the queen and lost, and that's why he was spitting blood all over the place now.

But now, by stealing Haruna's magical energy, Chris had been able to regain her original power and form.

"Also, give Haruna's magical energy back."

"Don't wannaaaa~~." She stuck her tongue out at me. Wow, it's been a while since I've seen somebody do that.

"That energy belongs to Haruna. If she continues like this, she might get killed by a Megalo someday. So please."

"Who cares? How does that benefit Chris at all? Nope nope, don't wanna~~. Who cares if Haruna dies? Kyahaha!"

I went to launch a punch at Chris, but Saras once again stopped me.

"If you attack, then we will no longer be able to negotiate. Please hold back... darling."

At that moment, Saras was not a high school girl, but rather, she was the leader of a group of vampire ninjas.

Yeah, I know. Even if I tried to attack her here, nothing good could come of it.

If I could beat her in the first place, I would've never gone to Nene-san.

But... what she had said now was utterly unacceptable.

“You know, during a negotiation you first listen to what the other person has to say before making your own proposal, right?”

“Yes, precisely. So, let us hear what you have to say.”

“Chris doesn't want to go back to being a man. Also, she wants to live like she wants. She doesn't want anybody to try and get in the way of that.”

Chris continued drinking her sake and sounded like she was having fun. I didn't know whether she was being serious or whether she just was enjoying completely shutting us down.

She didn't want to go back to being a man = she wouldn't return Haruna's magical energy.

She wanted to live like she wants = she wouldn't behave.

We weren't getting anywhere like this. Saras also had clammed up, not knowing what to say here.

“Oh oh. Also, Chris found something suuuuper interesting.”

She sure looked like she was having fun.

“What did you find?” I asked her, but...

“I won't teeeelll~~.” Chris stuck her cute tongue out at me.

“If it's something you found, I'm sure it's something pretty crazy.”

Nene-san chuckled from the kitchen.

“Yeah yeah. It goes *boom!* and all the things come sprinkling down~~. It’s a super super fun item.”

“Boom.” “Sprinkling.” From those words, the first thing that came to mind was fireworks, but she was a masou shoujo.

“... Are you planning to make something explode?”

I gave her a serious look. But, Chris didn’t seem fazed at all, and stuck out her tongue again.

“Not tellingggg~~.”

She was planning something. I had to defeat her soon.

“It really doesn’t seem like talking will do much good.”

“Ugh...”

Nene-san looked at me, seeming a bit troubled. I mean, you can give me that look, but what exactly do you expect me to do here?

At some point, I had fallen silent. After all, no matter what I said, she probably wasn’t going to take me seriously.

If only I had a way to beat her...

“Well, Chris is going back. There’s a TV drama Chris wants to watch.”

Chris had finished downing the entire bottle of sake, so she got up and started walking toward the door.

“Ahh, it’s already this late... well then, please excuse me for the night as well. I apologize for leaving in the middle, but I have some work to do.”

Saras also stood up.

“Don’t chase after her, okay?”

“Yes, I understand. I cannot hope to do anything about her with just my strength... dammit.”

This was Chris we were talking about. So even if Saras followed her, she would be found out pretty quickly. Not only that, there’s the possibility that she would be killed. Unlike zombies, vampire ninjas could actually still die.

Saras’s hair fluttered as she walked briskly for the door.

I watched her go while Nene-san came over to me and placed a cup of hot coffee down in front of me.

“Hey hey, Aikawa-kun. Do you have to beat Chris no matter what?”

I took the coffee and gave a little bow in thanks before blowing on the hot liquid.

“I don’t really know. That’s how we’ve thought about things until now. It was like that with the King of the Night too...”

I sipped my hot coffee. Ugh, bitter. It was bitter enough to make my forehead scrunch up.

“Eh? Hm? What’s that King of the Night thing you’re talking about...?”

Nene-san sat down with her knees up in her chair while still holding onto her cup of beer. She seemed really interested in this topic.

“Eh? He was a zombie like me, and he knew Yuu too. Does Nene-san also know him?”

“A zombie like you... I see. He became a king.”

Nene-san traced the rim of her cup with a finger and muttered, a solemn expression on her face.

“Well, I think that’s a title he made up for himself.”

“Ahaha... that guy always did want to become a king.”

“So, Nene-san does know him...”

“Well, we were on a team together called the Seventh Abyss. It was me, Eucliwood, the idiot who’s the current King of the Underworld, the two people who created the Megalo System, and... the King of the Night.”

Seventh? So, that means there were seven people on the team?

“Aren’t you missing one person there?”

Nene-san had been pretty cheerful up until now, but her demeanor suddenly changed. She looked lonely, and her voice held quite a lot of pain.

“He died,” she muttered.

“Eh?” I was less surprised by her words than by the emotions in Nene-san’s voice when she said them.

Impatience. Anger. Irritation. Frustration. Unease. All those negative emotions seem to be packed into her expression. But she only looked like that for a moment.

Soon, her face brightened up again, and she took a drink from her beer.

“Buhaah!! Good beer. Well, the last person... he was killed. Killed by the King of the Night. I was pretty surprised, to tell

you the truth. I didn't expect that the King of the Night would be stronger than him."

"What happened?"

"Zzzzz..."

Nene-san's head just slumped right down! Hey! Don't fall asleep while holding a cup! It's gonna spill! Hey, it's gonna spill!

I sprung up and went over to grab her cup before it fell. A second later and the carpet would've been bubbling with beer foam.

"We were in the middle of a conversation. Nene-san... Nene-san!"

"Hah?! I wasn't sleeping, I wasn't sleeping. Umm, so the difference between a strong and a weak acid is--"

"No no no, we were talking about the person in the Seventh Abyss who was killed by the King of the Night. Who cares about strong acids and weak acids?! Also, put your cup down first."

Nene-san seemed to come back to her senses and placed her cup on the table in front of me. Her work desk was slanted, so she probably couldn't put a cup on there.

"Well, to make a long story short, a team member became the King of the Underworld and the King of the Night began to sulk. Things got worse and worse... and then at a point he wanted to die. I actually heard that right from him over a drink."

Bereft of dreams and hopes, the King of the Night tried to die.
But...

“But, he was a zombie so he couldn’t.”

“Exactly! So, he just sulked more and more and things got really bad.”

“And then he decided to kill another member of the Seventh Abyss so Yuu would kill him.”

The King of the Night had always wanted Yuu to kill him ever since his time in the Underworld.

Nene-san slowly nodded, as if realizing something.

“Ah. To be honest, I never knew why that guy had decided to do what he did. I see... he wanted to provoke Eucliwood. I can believe that. Aikawa-kun, you sure have a good head on those shoulders.”

“Nah, he actually told me as much when I met him...”

“Eucliwood had a lot of respect for the member who died. He was something like a team leader. And after he died, the Seventh Abyss disbanded. Both me and Eucliwood ended up leaving the Underworld.”

A person Yuu respected was killed by the King of the Night... that’s why Yuu had taken out her scythe when she saw the King of the Night. That was also the reason why she had not wanted to kill him.

Dying is painful. She had said that while tears flowed down her cheeks.

Everything was connected to that one incident, wasn't it?

“Well, shall we get back to work? We might not make it at this rate.”

Nene-san said that and turned back to her desk before promptly falling asleep again.

Part 2.

I busied myself with my beta painting and shading, but there was still plenty of manuscript to do. Nene-san had said the deadline was tomorrow... but ugh, this was looking like it would turn into a marathon. Maybe Saras would come back and help us again?

“Ahh, looks like we'll need some more time. Hey hey. You wanna stay over?”

“Eh?” Being able to stay over with a girl who was living alone was like a dream come true... and it was a dream I didn't even ask for. Actually, this might've been the first time I stayed over at a girl's place. So I ended up getting more excited than even I could have predicted and responded in a booming voice as if I was an overly friendly bartender.

“Sure, with pleasure!”

Okay, I have to get a few provisions for staying over now. I took out my cell phone and dialed home.

Ringgggg... Ringgggg... Click.

“Hello? This is the girl who dances like a butterfly and geniuses it up like a bee. What do you want?”

A cute girl's voice answered the phone.

I really was curious exactly how a bee had anything to do with genius, but I should probably just ignore her.

“Ah, Haruna? So... I'm staying over at Nene-san's place tonight. Could you bring me a change of clothes? Also, I'll be going to school straight from here, so it'd be great if you brought my uniform too.”

“Hm? Sounds like a bulldog eating wild grass... oh, it's Ayumu.”

“What kind of sound is that supposed to be?! Wouldn't that be pretty silent?!”

“So, Ayumu, watcha need?”

Didn't I already tell you? Ugh, fine. I tiredly began my explanation again.

“I'm staying over somewhere to do some work so please bring me a change of clothes thanks.”

“Huh? Why does the beautiful genius Demon Baroness masou shoujo Haruna-chan have to lower herself to do something for the likes of you? Stop bothering me!”

That's exactly what I expected to hear.

“Okay okay. Put Sera on then.”

I tried to quickly deal with Haruna, but I swear I could almost hear her frowning from the other end of the line.

“W-Well... maybe if Ayumu asked nicely. I'm not completely against helping out.”

Hm? It was rare to hear Haruna making concessions like this.

“Umm... oh great genius girl Haruna-sama. Please take pity on this worm.”

“Say it in a more grating way.”

“Haruna-shama~~.”

“Gross! Shut up!”

Eh? Wasn't this just not fair? I had no idea what she wanted me to say...

“Well, I guess it's fine.”

“Hm?”

“It's fine, I'll bring your clothes. You better be super thankful to me the rest of the year!”

“Yeah yeah. As you command.”

“Okay! What's the address?”

“There should be a memo stuck around my desk or somewhere that has the address written on it.”

“Okay okay. Leave it to me!”

“I'm counting on you.”

“Aye aye~~.”

Click. Beep, beep, beep. Well, it was pretty obvious she didn't care much about my clothes, but she'd probably bring them now.

“What a strange phone call.”

Nene-san's face was right next to mine and she was giving me a wide smile. I backed up in surprise.

"Well, it was only because I was talking to a strange person."

"Mhmm." Nene-san looked at me with suspicion in her eyes.

I get the feeling that she was misunderstanding something.

Around three more hours passed. I could start to see the light at the end of the tunnel, but midnight was already rolling around.

Haruna sure was late. Ah! Don't tell me she was planning to walk here. My house was in the west part of Tokyo. It was quite far from Koto Ward, which was on the East side of the city.

She should've been able to take a train by herself...

"Want a bath? I can lend you some clothes."

"Nah, I'll wait until my own clothes come. Also looks like there's a long night in front of us."

"Kaay~. Maybe I'll take a bath..."

Nene-san gave a stretch in her chair before standing up. And now she was giving me a teasing look. Why was that?

"Got it. Go ahead."

I replied casually while continuing my beta painting. Nene-san's lips curve upwards.

"... Gonna peek?"

"I won't!"

Ugh, this girl... she just won't let up with the teasing. Or maybe she wanted me to peek...? Mmmmm... no no no. I won't be tricked! I won't let you trick me!

Nene-san went towards the bathroom that was right next to the entrance.

I could hear the sounds of running water coming from the bathroom. She was probably showering about now.

Hmm... this was strange. What was this fluttering feeling in my chest?

I saw an image of Nene-san from just a moment ago running through my head.

"... **Gonna peak?**" I saw her standing there in a tank top, smiling teasingly at me.

I saw her thighs, which had a decent bit of meat on them. And her calves. And her butt. And... those S-class breasts of hers.

That amazing body was in that room right now, wet with droplets of water.

..... I couldn't ignore it. Why couldn't I help but think about this?

I had to keep going with the manuscript. But my pen was not in the mood to move.

I could hear humming. It was a popular anime opening from long ago.

Dammit, why was I getting so excited? Just because a girl was humming an anime song I knew? Dammit, I couldn't stop thinking about her! Couldn't stop at all!

Concentrate, Ayumu! Concentrate on your work!

Scratch scratch... scratch scratch...

Schh~::~

Dammit! I'm being drowned out! It was like the sounds of the shower were overwhelmingly louder than the sounds of my pen!

And then, the shower fell silent.

It didn't feel like she had used the water to fill a bathtub or something, so I guessed that she was the type that was happy with just a shower. Which means she would come out soon. Hooray, I conquered my libido! Point to Ayumu!

Knock knock. Someone was knocking at the door. It was probably Haruna, so I stood up. It wasn't like I was doing something dirty or suspicious, but for some reason I ended up tiptoeing silently to the entrance.

"Is someone here?"

I had been looking down, so when Nene-san peeked her head out the bathroom I collided into her with full force.

"Uwah! Hah?! Hyah?!"

Nene-san, who was only wearing a single towel right now, lost her balance and grabbed onto my clothes to try and stay upright.



However, I had also run into Nene-san, so my feet ended up slipping on the floor.

... After that, before I knew it, I had collapsed onto the floor, with Nene-san on top.

S-Something nice and soft was pushing into my back!

“Nene-san, hey...”

“Zzzzzz...”

“She’s sleeping! Hey! You’ll catch a cold! Come on, get off...”

For now, I at least turned my body around so I was facing up.

“U-Ummm...” Nene-san sleepily raised the top half of her body up.

Like she was practicing a martial arts move or something, Nene-san had taken a mounting position right above me.

Her single towel slipped and fell a bit.

O-Ohh, that was marvelous... wait, no! Stop!

“Hey, Nene-san! You can’t be doing that!”

This sight was blindingly perverted. It hit me with the force of a thousand suns.

It was too bright for a high school student and for a zombie, so I covered my face with my hands.

Nene-san’s eyes opened lazily and she put a hand on my chest before glancing down at me.

At that point, she finally realized the position we were in.

“Ahahaha~. Sorry about this. Aikawa-kun sure seems to have the power to draw himself into these kinds of situations, doesn't he? Lucky lucky~.”

Nene-san gave me a bright laugh before hiding her beautiful body with her towel and standing up, walking back into the room.

Geez. I also stood up and escaped to the front door. Opening the door, I saw... nobody at all. Maybe it took too much time for me to answer the door and they had assumed there was nobody home?

I shut the door and went back into the room.

Nene-san was asleep in the middle of the room, still wearing that one towel, so I couldn't help but let out a sigh.

“Please at least change before going to sleep.”

I poked her a few times on her soft skin, a look of complete calm on my face.

The dirty thoughts that any healthy high school boy would be thinking in this situation threatened to break out, but I kept them in.

Part 3.

She wasn't coming. Haruna just wasn't coming.

It was already midnight. I really wanted to go take a bath, but what was I supposed to do?

Maybe I really shouldn't have entrusted Haruna with this.

Well, I did come straight from school like this, so there shouldn't be any problem with going to school like this in the morning. Maybe I should just give up.

Just as I was thinking that, I heard knocking at the door.

“Coming~~.” Nene-san began to stand up, but I held her back.

Normal people would never come knocking at this time of night. This was Haruna. Yeah, there was no mistaking it.

“This one's probably for me.”

I forced my body up to its feet and walked towards the door.

“You're so late.” I opened the crumbling door and saw a girl standing there.

Well... three girls, to be precise.

I scowled. I hadn't expected all three of them to come.

“Umm... did you bring clothes?”

I spoke to the shortest girl out of the three, but the one who answered me was the tallest one.

“Yes, enough for all of us.”

As I thought, all three of them were planning to stay over.

The shortest girl, Haruna, looked up at me with proud eyes and pointed a finger at me.

“We came today to kill Ayumu!”

What the hell? Seriously, what the hell? At no point in my life have I ever thought “what the hell?” more strongly than at this moment.

This young girl named Haruna had shoulder-length chestnut hair, and the ahoge poking out from the top of her head was her trademark. She was the masou shoujo who had had her magical energy stolen by Chris.

If Nene-san's breasts were a full moon, then Haruna's would be more like an LCD screen. And yet, she thrust out her little chest proudly and gave me a cocky look. Well, her face was pretty cute at least.

If I had to describe her in one word, it would be... 'annoyacute.'

"I'm not even going to ask... but anyway, I didn't expect even Yuu to come."

A silver-haired girl wearing a set of plate armor and gauntlets showed me a memo.

It was a good chance. = "Ehehe~. Yuu also came~! Kyaha~."

She didn't show any emotion and just thrust that memo at me. Like Nene-san, this mysterious girl was also from the Underworld, or maybe it's better to say that she was also a member of the Seventh Abyss. Her name was Eucliwood Hellscythe. I just called her Yuu.

She had powers that even she couldn't control, and because of that she couldn't talk or show any emotion. That's why she had to use writing to communicate. The line that came after her memo was my own rehashing of her words in my head.

Yuu was the necromancer who had turned me into a zombie.

If I had to describe her in one word, it would be... 'deluxacute.'

"We're comin' right in, so get ready!"

Haruna's ahoge bounced from side to side as she kicked off her shoes and rudely intruded into the room.

Please excuse us.

Next, Yuu the armored girl also entered.

"This room seems to be larger than expected. That's a relief."

The last girl, sporting a ponytail, entered only after tidying up Haruna's shoes which had been tossed on the floor.

She gave me a sharp, terrifying look.

This girl's name was Sera. Her full name, Seraphim, might make you think that she was an angel, but she was actually a demon.

Ah, wait, that's not it. She wasn't a demon. She was a vampire ninja. I mean, when you got glared at with such unsheathed hostility like that, you were liable to make mistakes like that.

She could've been a model with her hourglass figure. Her breasts weren't as big as Nene-san's breasts though... well, you could say that having breasts that weren't *too* big was precisely why her body lines were so exquisite.

If I had to describe her in one word, it would be... 'sexyscary.'

The three of them entered the room in succession, and sat around the table where I had been working.

"So, what should we do?"

Haruna put her chin in her hands and looked at me with grumpy eyes.

"Are you going to help?"

“Exactly why did you think we came?”

Sera sat in perfect form in the Japanese formal style and glared at me.

But seriously, why exactly did you all come?

“I thought you were all here for a sleepover party or something.”

“A party, hmm...?”

Sera’s eyes narrowed, and a crazy amount of hostility filled the air. Why was she so angry? Also, the prim and proper Sera took one look at Nene-san with her disheveled clothes and seemed to get even grumpier.

Nene-san sleepily moved her head from side to side before opening her eyes.

“Hm? When did all these people... ah.”

Long time no see.

Yuu and Nene-san gave each other a long hard look. I saw many complicated emotions go back and forth between both of them.

“Did you cut your hair?”

Not really.

“I see I see. Well, Eucliwood, you sure haven’t changed.”

Neither have you. You are just like you were back then.

Yuu remained emotionless, while Nene-san gave her a smile. These two were old friends here, so that’s all they really needed.

“So, do you all want to help out?”

Nene-san seemed pretty happy as she handed me the manuscript.

“With this many people we can get things done pretty quickly. Could you start by erasing lines here?”

Nene-san continued to smile, but Haruna did not seem happy at all.

“Shut up! Don’t order me around! You damn melon farmer!”

“Why in the world do you have to act so grumpy when meeting her for the first time? Ugh...”

I held my head in my hands. When Sera turned toward Nene-san, her commanding eyes filled with determination.

“I suppose we should clear the air sooner rather than later, so I will ask. This here dirty rag – ah, I mean Aikawa Ayumu... did you do anything shameless with him?”

Wait, who was a dirty rag? Also, what kind of question was that?! I don’t think I was the only one who was shocked either.

“Wha-?! Leaf woman! What are you-”

Haruna seemed to be flustered for some reason. Her ahoge was waving back and forth like a metronome.

“Shameless, hmm? That’s... hmm... ah.”

Nene-san clapped her hands and then... fell asleep.

The room fell back into silence.

“That settles it. There must’ve been. Must’ve been something she cannot talk about.”

Sera glared at me again.

“There was nothing, I swear. I learned my lesson back at the sexual harassment trial.”

“Hmph. As if anything that ever comes out of a man’s mouth is ever worth anything.”

Yeah, she’s got me there... but at this rate I’d have to go through another sexual harassment trial.

“Nene-san! Please wake up! Things are getting bad out here!”

It was no use. She wasn’t waking up at all. At times like these...

“Stop sleeping!” I shook her strongly by the shoulders, which seemed to be the method that was proven to be the quickest way to wake her.

Nene-san finally opened her eyes and waved her hands back and forth.

“I wasn’t sleeping. Really really. Okay, so in regards to Dream Notes and Death Notes...”

“Okay, that is something I might want to hear, but first you really need to help me out here. Please tell these people that I didn’t do anything sketchy to you.”

“Hm, let’s see... well, I don’t remember you doing anything sketchy I guess.”

Bang. Haruna slammed her fists on the table.

“Stop playing dumb! I-I saw it too!”

“Saw what?”

“You two... you were naked... and...”

Haruna's energy seemed to wilt away, and her voice dropped to a whisper.

“Ah. You mean that thing before?”

As I thought, Haruna had been the one who had knocked earlier.

“So there was something. Something sketchy.”

“There wasn't! It was more like a lucky coincidence! (1) A complete accident!”

So, did something like that happen?

There was a fierce light residing in Yuu's eyes.

“Nah. Nothing sketchy.”

Nene-san waved her hands back and forth and denied that anything had happened. Thank God.

“Well, even if something *did* happen, he's a guy after all. Can't really help it.”

“Wha-?! Can't really... what does that mean?!”

Haruna seemed to be undergoing extreme culture shock at Nene-san's words.

“Yeah! Unlike you guys, Nene-san here doesn't immediately resort to violence. You should take a page out of her book.”

“Hnggg...” Haruna's ahoge jumped from side to side as she crossed her arms and groaned. Yuu passed her a memo.

As I thought.

“It's a lie! I saw it! I swear!”

What the hell was she going on and on about? I ignored Haruna's screams and turned to Sera.

"What is she talking about?"

"Earlier, Haruna came home in tears, crying about how Ayumu had become the 'Evil Overlord of all Perverts.'"

"I-I wasn't crying! Stop lying about me!"

Haruna's face lit up bright red as she continued to shout. She was getting pretty annoying, so I whacked her head a few times as if I was pacifying a small animal.

"Yeah yeah, okay. Anyway, Sera, please continue."

"But Hellsythe-dono believed it was a misunderstanding and trusted Ayumu. So, we came to find out the truth."

"That's why you're all here? So, what did Sera think?"

Sera gave me a scornful chuckle.

"I believed that you didn't do anything."

"I wouldn't have expected that."

"I did not think you had the courage to try and do something shameless with a girl you had just met. However, you are still a piece of shit who would start doing those things the minute a girl becomes a bit more familiar."

"How admirable of you to say that. Anyway, exactly what were you planning to do if Haruna was right?"

Sera gave me an ear-to-ear smile. With that smile, she could've been the cute poster girl for an idol group. She seriously was cute.

“Perverts deserve to die.”

Everyone, please be careful when you see an unnaturally cute smile.

That smile might mean that someone’s desire to slice you to ribbons had just crossed the line.

Anyway, it seemed that we had resolved the misunderstanding somehow, so Nene-san began to assign us our work roles.

She began to hand everyone a piece of the manuscript.

“Okay, Eucliwood, please pen in all these places I’ve marked with an ‘X’.”

Understood. = “Leave it to me! Yuu’s gonna try her best!”

Yuu was always carrying around a ballpoint pen and a memo pad, so it seemed right to leave the beta painting to her.

“Aikawa-kun, please continue with your shading.”

“Got it.”

I was finally starting to get used to this doujinshi making process, so I would continue with shading.

“For you... could you build a biiiiiiiiig castle here and here, and also here and here? You can base it off these materials here.”

“Only if you call me ‘Haruna-sama!’”

Haruna, who had shown some terrifying talent for this kind of stuff, was tasked with the background.

“And then-” But before Nene-san could give Sera anything, I held up a hand and stopped her.

“You should do the cleaning.”

I tried to keep my eyes off Sera’s face as I said that.

“I do not mind, but that disgusting expression on your face is a bit annoying. Do you really want to have your chest gouged out that badly?”

It’s precisely because I thought she’d say something like that that I didn’t look at her face. But the psychological damage was still immense...

Sera could pull off almost everything flawlessly, but her skills in art and cooking were pretty much none existent.

When they say you should find the right person for each job, I took that to also mean that you should make sure the right person isn’t do something strange in the wrong job. The right person needed to be always doing the right job. I really had to somehow convince her to do the cleaning...

“You said this place is pretty big, but there’s nowhere for people to sleep. You tend to be the most efficient at cleaning out of all of us, so please, just do it this time.”

“There is still something highly irritating about your request, but fine. I will clean.”

Sera still seemed unsatisfied, but she stood up and opened the closet door. There was a huge number of pillows in there. Dozens, maybe hundreds of pillows were forcibly stuffed in there.

It was a huge nest of pillows, and I couldn’t help but letting out a small “uwaah” in amazement.

“Ahh, I always ruin pillows so quickly.”

“How can it be that easy to ruin a pillow...?”

“Maybe soft things just don’t mesh well with me. I buy them when they’re fluffy fluffy, but just a bit later the cotton gets all hard and the pillow gets all lumpy...”

Sera picked out a few of the pillows and tested them out in her hands.

“Hm. What if you try buying hard pillows? When I was young, I liked soft pillows the best, but I was always able to sleep better with hard pillows.”

“Hmmmmmm. I’ve only ever used cotton pillows, so maybe I’ll give those a shot next time. Thanks a bunch~.”

Nene-san gave Sera a smile. She was seriously cute.

Now then... a bit after we had begun to work, Yuu’s pen stopped moving.

Yuu’s writing speed was lightning fast.

She could write any sentence down in the blink of an eye, like she was typing it on the computer. She just needed to put her pen down on the manuscript for a brief moment, and all the designated areas would be filled out. She would get a page of the manuscript from her right, paint it in completely, and then send it to the left. It was like some kind of factory assembly line. To her, this kind of work must have been fairly simple.

“What’s wrong, Yuu?”

This story. I recognize it. Yuu stopped her beta painting and showed that memo to Nene-san.

I could swear I saw a bit of surprise in Yuu's expression. It was still hard to tell though.

“Yup, you got it. This manga is Eucliwood's story.”

Nene-san smiled.

“Yuu's...?” Even hearing that, it was hard to believe. The protagonist in this story was a bright, cheerful girl, which was the complete opposite of Yuu.

It was set in a fantasy world you might find in an RPG, and it was a story about the young protagonist and her six friends living strong lives towards the future.

“Don't tell me... these main characters are the Seventh Abyss?”

“Bingo. If the King of the Night hadn't done what he did back then and if Eucliwood got her voice back, I'm sure things would've work out like this.”

Why did you write this story?

Nene-san sat cross-legged on the chair and scratched her forehead with the back of her pen.

“... I just really wanted to put a happy ending to this story.”

Nene-san gave us a shy chuckle. I saw Yuu's eyes moisten up a bit.

It's not your fault.

“I know, it’s not anybody’s fault. It’s not like I think that it’s my fault because I didn’t stop the King of the Night and that tragedy happened. I don’t think that at all. And it’s not like it’s Eucliwood’s fault either for turning him into a zombie.”

“Are you talking about the time when one of the Seventh Abyss was killed?”

Yuu gave me a small nod.

I want to see it.

“Hm?”

This happy end.

“Yeah, let’s all make sure we finish it.”

Yuu gave us a strong nod. When Yuu got like this, I felt like I could pull a million all-nighters for her sake.

“Agreed. No matter what, I definitely want to write this story.”

I saw a strong sense of determination in Nene-san’s eyes as she smiled at us.

I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes, and we all continued our work.

Yuu didn’t seem to be sleepy at all. She just continued to repeat the same motions over and over again, with the same expression.

Haruna didn’t seem to be able to work while sitting or something, so she was sprawled out in the corner. Her ahoge occasionally waved sleepily from side to side, but she was also

swinging her legs back and forth, almost as if she wanted to convince us that she was still awake.

Nene-san was... well she was completely asleep. As usual, she was using her chair as both bed and pillow. I didn't really feel right trying to force her awake right now.

Hm? Where was Sera? Did she go off somewhere?

Well, as long as she wasn't doing anything weird, it was-... wait. This situation smelled kind of familiar to me. The sleep deprivation was making it hard for me to think, but this was definitely... it was...!

I stood up and took a very very timid peek at the kitchen.

I saw a girl wearing an apron in there. Am I the only one who thinks that wearing an apron over jeans was even more sexy than wearing an apron over nothing?

Wait, no, now's not the time to be thinking about that.

"Yuu." But even though I called out to her, I got no response.

"Yuu?" I tried again, and Yuu slowly lifted her head to look at me.

I was asleep. = "Fueh~? Sorry, oniichan. Yuu was just so sleepy... *yawwwnnn.*"

So she was sleeping. I didn't notice at all. Yuu was pretty cute when she was blinking like that... ah, no, once again now's not the time.

I pointed my thumb at the kitchen, silently asking Yuu to take a look.

Seeing Sera there, Yuu stayed emotionless but handed me a memo. **This can only lead to a bad end**, the memo lamented.

“What do you want? Stop looking at me. That’s disgusting. If I had to describe you with an idiom, it would be ‘trash falling from the sky.’”

“Nah, I just wasn’t expecting you to be cooking something this late.”

I had to stop her... had to stop her right now... I began to panic as I searched for the right words to say.

“Ayumu, did you hear that we mobilized a hundred vampire ninjas in order to defeat our enemy?”

“Yeah, I did. I also heard you still couldn’t do it.”

“Yes. And do you remember what my own mission was?”

“To protect Yuu, and... ah! Right, you were supposed to defeat Chris.”

In the past, Sera had broken the laws of the vampire ninjas, and in order to obtain forgiveness, she had to defeat Chris as a trial. However, to defeat Chris by herself...

I glanced at Nene-san. Could Nene-san actually beat Chris? Was there anybody on this planet who could defeat Chris? She was just so powerful that I had to doubt that.

“Because of that, I... I would like to support you.”

She was standing over a pot. The pot was on a gas burner and I could hear a bubbling sound coming from it. Sera was stirring the pot with a ladle.

Yes, something was starting to boil alright... and it was my temper. My temper was starting to really boil over. I couldn't take this anymore. I had to say something. Something like 'My God you just suck way too much at cooking!'

But...

"Eh? Support me?"

"I firmly believe that you will be able to do something about this. So I will support you. Then, even though it may be indirect, I will be able to fulfill my mission. And so... I would not be averse to placing myself at your service."

When she put it like that...

"Ah, the food is almost done. Please wait for just a moment longer."

"Cool. I was getting a bit hungry too."

I couldn't bring myself to say it. When Sera cooked and perhaps only when she was cooking, she became a very cute, normal girl.

What are you making? = "What kinda food is it? Sera-oneechan!"

Yuu seemed to want to hear what the dish was before passing final judgment.

For now, I pushed the manuscript and pens on the table out of the way.

"It's ghostly cream stew."

"Why is it ghostly?!"

“Because I felt possessed when making it.”

Sera gave us a shy chuckle. Seriously, these were the only times I would be able to see her like this. Ugh, she’s so cute...

As for the ingredients of this “ghostly” stew... did she throw in a demon? Maybe a spirit that had been haunting this area?

“I made plentiful use of mackerel and vengeful spirit.”

Sera placed the pot onto the table while happily describing her dish.

Ah, a vengeful spirit. If that was all, then it’s-

Wait, what?! As if I could let that one slide! What the hell, vengeful spirit?! And I don’t think anybody ever puts mackerel into a cream stew. Also, she was handing us chopsticks now, not spoons...

“There’s a lot of things I could say right now, but I just want to ask one thing... did you actually fillet the mackerel?”

The minute I poked my chopsticks into the pot, I found it.

An entire mackerel just sitting there. I was definitely expecting that the fish would be sliced so I was taken by surprise.

There was a little “X” scored into the belly of the fish.

But there were also bandages around the “X,” almost as if Sera was trying to hide it from view.

Oh hoh. So she felt pity for the fish or something and tried to hide that...

As if it really needed the pity! Seriously, the mackerel is crying too! All that wet stuff in the pot wasn't stew, it was the mackerel's tears!

"Well then, please eat."

Even if you tell me to do that... this soup thing that Sera made was more like a slime monster that was melting everything in its path. This really wasn't the time to be eating this and then dying, but if I didn't eat, she would get pretty pissed. Hm, what should I do...?

As I pondered my next move...

"Okay! I'm done!"

Haruna, who had been sprawled out in the corner working, suddenly leapt up.

Oh, and I thought she had been sleeping, but it looks like she was actually diligently working on her task.

Haruna was quite a genius when it came to work like this, so I wasn't worried.

She was supposed to be drawing castles, right? I wasn't very good at things like that, but as expected from Haruna. There was quite a magnificent castle right there.

A castle... castle... castle?! What the hell was up with that castle?!

"Haruna! What the hell are you doing?!"

There was a huge castle towering over the room past Haruna.

"She told me to build a castle."

Haruna had used a lot of the manuscript stationary and, like she was making origami cranes, had “built a castle.” Who in the world would have thought that she would build a 3-D castle with that paper...?

Don’t tell me, did she actually use the manuscript to make that?

“Ugh! You damn brat...”

I went over to break down the castle, but my foot kicked something.

It was a bottle of ink that I had taken off the table to make room for the pot.

Glrrb. The ink began to spill.

“Get paper towels, paper towels! What do you think you’re doing?!”

Haruna yelled at me and kicked me from behind.

“There’s some newspaper over there. Get that.”

Hearing that from Sera, I went and got the newspaper.

However, the spill was worse than I thought, and I ended up using sheets upon sheets upon sheets of newspaper to clean up the spilled ink and-

Agh!

“Isn’t this the manuscript?”

I felt the blood draining from my face.

Now I’ve done it. I was so tired that I had mistaken the manuscript for old newspaper.

That meant... the castle that Haruna had built wasn't built using the finished manuscript. I should've heard her out and taken a closer look before jumping to conclusions.

This was completely my bad.

Tap tap. Yuu tapped the table twice.

The stew.

Eh? I glanced at the table, and saw the stew beginning to leak from the melted pot.

Right next to it was the manuscript, which had been moved there out of the way of danger.

“Agh! Sera, do something about that! Please!”

“It seems that it may have been an unwise decision to add sulfuric acid as a secret ingredient.”

What kind of “secret” ingredient is that?! It's pretty obvious! Hell, I get the feeling that this acid's now even more acidic than it used to be!

“Ugh, dammit! Fix this, Bayumu!”

Every once in a while, Haruna mixed a “baka” in with my name.

“Sera, clean up the stew! Fast!”

Sera and I ran around the room in a fluster.

While we were doing all this, the sun began to rise.

The manuscript was now quite torn up, and the tatami mat under us was melted.

The situation was just horrid, and I felt all my motivation draining away. I could do nothing but just stand stock still there with the ruined manuscript clutched in my hand.

“Ah! I wasn’t sleeping, wasn’t sleeping. That was close. I seriously almost fell asleep right there.”

Nene-san shook her head back and forth, shaking off her drowsiness.

She had totally fallen asleep though. For around an hour.

I didn’t even try to hide it. I held out the manuscript that had been torn up by the cream stew, as well as the manuscript that was now black with the ink I had tried to clean up.

“Sorry, Nene-san.”

My hands were shaking. Uncomfortable feelings of regret filled my heart.

We had lost over half of the manuscript. Forty pages of it.

Nene-san took a good look around the room and seemed to arrive at an understanding of what had happened.

She really could say anything to me right now, and I wouldn’t be able to say anything back.

I was even prepared to be beaten to a pulp by this strongest denizen of the Underworld.

But Nene-san just burst into loud laughter.

“You lot were pretty busy, weren’t you? Don’t worry, don’t worry. Manga can be drawn anytime.”

She was smiling at us, but I caught a hint of sadness in her eyes.

“What happened was-”

“Ah, I think I pretty much know what happened. It’s fine, it’s fine.”

Was she not going to get angry? She was just going to forgive me, to forgive Sera, without even asking us for the specifics of what had happened? This girl was just so...

“Well, it was a rush job to begin with, so there’s not much helping it.”

She said that, but I still felt a slight sense of remorse coming from her.

Also, Saras had said it, right? She wouldn’t forgive Nene-san for missing a Comiket deadline.

So, Nene-san was probably just trying to be considerate towards us.

I just couldn’t bear it anymore.

“I don’t have a spare blank draft either. So maybe this time we should just give-”

I stopped Nene-san from finishing her thought.

“Definitely not. We can’t do that. We have to finish this manuscript!”

I almost cringed when hearing what I had just said since I honestly sounded like a disobedient child.

“Aikawa-kun. Even if you say that, we have no time.”

“I’ll go around to the printers to ask for an extension. Nene-san, I know it’s a lot of work for you... but please let us try one more time. Please!”

I put my forehead to the ground.

“I humbly apologize. I am partially responsible for this situation as well. I will do anything within my power to fix things.”

Sera’s ponytail swayed as she also put her forehead to the ground.

Nene-san never dropped her smile as she put a hand on my shoulder.

“Roger~~. Let’s start from scratch then. Everyone together, okaaay? So come on, lift your heads up.”

Nene-san was probably saying that so we would feel better and not completely useless, regardless of whether or not she thought we could make the deadline.

“Anyway, let’s go to the printers.”

“Allow me to come with you.”

Sera and I looked at each other from our positions on the floor.

“Good attitude, the two of you. If you decide to do something, then you better never give up.”

For some reason, Haruna was now looking down at us with crossed arms and a proud look on her face.

In any case, if we couldn’t get an extension on the printing deadline, then there was nothing we could do.

After that, Sera and I went around to the printer that Nene-san used, but no matter how much we explained our situation they wouldn't give us an extension.

I was expecting something like that. They were already being pretty lenient with us by giving us until the 19th.

We then tried going around to a few other printers, but no matter where we went, we couldn't find any shop that would listen to our selfish demands.

That was also natural. If they actually agreed to our request, then everybody would start knocking down their doors asking for the same treatment.

As a business, you never wanted to set any weird precedents.

So, we were out of luck.

On our way back to Nene-san's place, completely empty-handed, Sera spoke up with a quiet look on her face.

"... It seems I have no other choice. Let me try one final thing. If possible, I wanted to avoid trying this, but..."

She sounded quite frustrated, but then held her hand out toward me.

"Could you let me use your cell phone?"

I gave her a suspicious look, but I did as I was told and handed her my cell phone.

Sera didn't seem to want to be overheard, so she went off a bit to the side and began to talk with someone.

Maybe she had some connections within her vampire ninja group? Saras seemed pretty knowledgeable about stuff like this. Now that I think about it, I also know somebody who was frighteningly strong when it came to things like this.

His name was Orito. He was usually annoying as hell, but he also had quite a knack for solving this kind of problem.

As a last resort, it might not be a bad idea to ask him for help.

“Yes. Is it alright if it’s something like a photograph? Okay. Understood.”

I had no idea who Sera was talking to, but she seemed to be negotiating terms.

After just three minutes of negotiations, Sera looked back towards me.

“Here is your cell phone back.”

“How’d it go?”

“It seems we can obtain an extension until the twenty-fourth. I am quite relieved.”

It was just that easy?

After all the trouble we had gone through running around the city with zero results, Sera had gotten us an extension with no trouble at all. It was like somebody was laughing at us, but even as I was a bit suspicious of what had just happened, I stroked down my chest in relief.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

(1) Ayumu uses the word “lucky pervert,” which refers to guys who randomly find themselves in pervy situations.

第二話

「疲れてるのよ
モルダウ」

……私も、あの技を少々試してみたいとは思いますが。



これは全て私の責任です。

ですから、あの男に頼るのは、私でなくてはいけません。

私にとっては屈辱でしかありませんが、忍者として気持ちより任務を優先する必要があったのです。

それにしても、また歩が気持ち悪い技を会得しようとしていますね。

彼の技は、気持ち悪いモノしかないのでしょうか？

Chapter 2 – You Look Tired, Moldau.

Part 1.

Because I had been running around to all the printers in the morning, I found myself late for school. It was the first time in my life I had been late for school.

Perhaps because I had had such a busy morning, I also really couldn't get into my lectures today.

Well, I always slept through class anyway, so this wasn't much of a problem.

Sera's quick-wittedness had gotten us a deadline extension until the twenty-fourth, but today was already the nineteenth. I didn't know if we really could make it.

Those three girls were probably now all busily helping Nene-san. I had come to school today with a store-bought lunch rather than the usual handmade lunch made by Haruna.

It's been a while since I've had convenience store food for lunch even though a year ago this had been the norm.

As I ate my lunch, I felt... well, I really reaffirmed that Haruna's cooking was much better.

This convenience store lunch had just been heated up, and I certainly thought it was tasty, but even when cold Haruna's cooking was supremely delicious.

The minute you tasted the best, that would become your new standard and anything less would cease to satisfy you.

As I poured copious amounts of sauce onto my fried chicken, I saw an annoying bespectacled idiot walk over.

“Hmmm? Hm hm hmmm?”

He smiled at me, repeating “hm?” over and over again to the point where I felt that God would probably forgive me if I punched him in the face right here.

“What do you want?” I spoke with every ounce of calm that I could muster.

“Aikawa-sensei~~, what’s that supposed to be? Hmmm? Hm hm hm hm hm~~?”

The spiky-haired guy walked closer, still half laughing at me. He was being so damn annoying that it was almost refreshing.

“Don’t come any closer. You’re damn annoying.”

“Aikawa-san, are you serious?! Are you seriously eating a convenience store lunch?! That’s soooo strange.”

He looks really really happy.

“You sure look insanely pleased about this.”

“Eh? You think so~~?”

“If you don’t stop talking like that I’m going to tackle you and then flip your lunch upside down.”

“Ahh, but see actually, something interesting happened.”

My spiky-haired classmate Orito began to happily speak as he dug into a lunch that looked to have been crafted with love by his mother.

“I got a phone call yesterday, and I thought it was from Aikawa, but it was actually Sera-san.”

“Mhmm.” I gave him a noncommittal response, but then took a second look up at him.

“It was Sera? What?”

“She asked me whether there were any print shops in the Tokyo area that were open until the end of the year.”

Don’t tell me... that the person Sera had called was this annoying person, this person whose only worthwhile feature was his annoyingness, this person whose real name was rumored to be “89% Annoying, 11% Human.”

“And?”

“I went searching for one immediately, and then I found one that was open for business until the twenty-fourth.”

“Good job there. I looked all over for one too.”

“Ahh, but I got lucky. See, I knew this guy in Sera-san’s fan club-”

“Hey, wait just a second. What’s this fan club thing?”

Orito gave me a look of disbelief as if he was surprised I didn’t know what he was talking about.

“It’s a club where we can pay our respects to Sera-san’s beauty. Don’t you remember back at the school festival when she had that idol battle with Hoshigawa Kirara?”

Certainly, there was a time when Sera had an idol battle with Hoshigawa Kirara aka Saras.

“That’s when this fan club was made. There’s an old guy who works at a print shop, and he’s member number 25. There’re more than 300,000 members, you know, so having a member number in the double digits is something to be proud of.”

“Does Sera know about this fan club?”

“Who knows. She’s not really an actress or anything but she has such a huge fan club so there’re definitely people talking about it, but this is only in a small corner of the internet. So, you’ll just have to ask Sera-san herself that question.”

If I told Sera, then she’d probably say something about it being “disgusting” and then would probably head off to destroy her fan club.

At that point, a girl with short hair came over carrying her lunch and a bag filled with lots of types of dressing.

“Hm? What’s up over here? Aikawa’s reaaaaally paying attention to Orito, so you two must be talking about something pervy, right? Geez, after all that sexual harassment trial stuff, you sure didn’t learn.”

Her name was Yoshida Yuki, and she was an energetic vampire ninja who was on the track team and happened to be in the class next door. Her vampire ninja name was Mael Strom.

By the way, her name might be pronounced “Yoshida Yuki,” but because she acted like a stupid guy in elementary school we mixed up the pronunciations of the kanji in her name and called her “Tomonori.”

Tomonori had brought two lunchboxes today.

“Hey hey, what’s wrong Aikawa? Why’d you go and buy lunch from the convenience store?”

“You too. Why do you have two lunches?”

“Eh? Well, Master called me... and she told me to make lunch for Aikawa. I tried really hard!”

By “Master,” she meant Haruna. Tomonori was training to be a good wife, and one part of that training was learning how to cook from Haruna.

That Haruna... was she actually being considerate toward me?

“Hm, lessee~~. Tomonori made this lunch with lots of love and care. Let’s give it a taste, then.”

Orito rubbed his hands together happily.

“Eh?! What’d you say? Yuki-chan made Aikawa lunch with love and care?!”

The person who had spoken was a go-go girl (dead slang) who was chatting near the teacher’s podium. I’m a zombie who already died once, so I knew a lot about dead slang. Ah hah hah... never mind.

This girl with the long (probably fake) eyelashes walked toward us. Her name was Mihara Kanami.

She ran over while still holding her chopsticks. She was in the class next door, so what the hell was she doing here?

“Hey... that’s... bad mannered...”

Sitting right in front of the teacher’s podium was the girl who boasted the top marks in my grade, Hiramatsu Taeko. She had

twin pigtails and was a meek, well-mannered person. She was also probably why Mihara was over in this room.

Don't come over here, dammit. Before those words could leave my mouth, Mihara had already run up next to Tomonori and wrapped her arms around Tomonori's neck in a hug.

Seeing that, I let out an exasperated sigh and made eye contact with Hiramatsu.

Life sure was a lot of work when you had weird friends. That's the message I was trying to give Hiramatsu while we looked at each other.

Ah, Hiramatsu chuckled. She was probably thinking the same thing.

"If you can't make a tasty lunch, you'll never be a good wife, you know?"

Mihara said that and lifted the lid of Tomonori's lunch. In there was laid out a normal but cute meal.

There were octopus wieners, pieces of fried chicken, and an egg omelet. A lot of popular items were crammed into that lunch box.

"Hurry!" Orito widened his eyes. Mihara and I immediately understood what he meant, and quickly grabbed and ate a piece of whatever we wanted.

"Hey! The food is not finished yet!"

Tomonori puffed her cheeks out and sulked. She had a bottle of dressing in her hand.

No matter what food she made, Tomonori wouldn't be happy unless she added dressing to the meal. It really was a rather annoying personality trait. So if we didn't quickly finish off what we wanted to eat, we'd end up seeing everything just soaked in dressing.

"H-Hey, Aikawa..."

Orito had eaten some of the omelet, and his chopsticks were now trembling.

"Yeah... t-this..."

Mihara's eyes were widened.

I probably was doing both.

"Yeah, there's still quite a while to go, but... this tastes a bit like Haruna's cooking."

If you ate Haruna's egg omelet, it was so mind-blowingly delicious that you could feel the flavors of the entire Milky Way just spreading through your palette. Tomonori's egg omelet might be around the level of the sun only, but it still had magnificent flavors and textures that just filled your mouth.

"Yeah, I know right? I tried really really hard on it!"

Tomonori gave us a pearly-white smile. I guess even an idiot could learn things if she tried hard enough.

At some point, Hiramatsu had appeared right next to Mihara, and she gave us an apologetic look.

"Can I... also try...?"

“Yeah, sure. Just taste some.”

I put a piece of fried chicken on the lunchbox lid and passed it to Hiramatsu.

“Hey hey hey, at least let me finish seasoning the food...”

Almost as if she was trying to save the fried chicken from Tomonori’s dressing, Hiramatsu grabbed the piece with her chopsticks and quickly popped it into her mouth.

And then, her cute eyes blinked a few times.

“Amazing... to think it would be this delicious... the meat is so soft... it’s been long enough for the chicken to get cold, but the skin is still crispy... and it’s not oily at all... what magic did you use to make it like this...?”

Well, she was just about to make it super oily though.

“Hey, all of you! Why are you eating the food before it’s ready?! Fried chicken goes perfectly with Japanese-style dressing, dontcha know?!”

“That probably wouldn’t be too bad, but you always pour way too much on. It’s seriously fine the way it is.”

“O-Okay. So... in other words, dressing is still delicious, right?”

She was an idiot. No matter what I said it would be pointless.

“So, why is Aikawa eating a convenience store lunch today?”

Mihara pushed a nearby desk up to mine and then brought her lunch over from Hiramatsu’s desk. It seemed like both Hiramatsu and Mihara were planning on eating lunch with me now.

“Hm? Oh, Haruna and the others were pretty busy. I was sleeping all the way through class, but those three might still have not gotten any sleep.”

“Haruna-sensei... if she has so much to do... maybe... I should also help?”

I was truly grateful for this kind girl’s words.

“What what? You guys doing something fun again? I’m getting pretty excited.”

Mihara seemed to be plotting something. What was the sweet smell in the air? Was it perfume?

“I wanna go and help too! That’s okay right, Aikawa?!”

Tomonori uttered those reassuring words. She was sitting in her chair but was still bouncing up and down like an idiot. Your breasts are really jiggling, you know.

Everyone was so nice that I couldn’t help but feel happy. This was why it was so important to have friends.

“Well, if Sera-san is there, then I’ll go to help too.”

“Nah, you don’t have to come. Seriously.”

Orito looked up at me with hope in his eyes, but I held him back.

“Why not, Aikawaaaaaa...”

Because I would never let you meet Nene-san. With those huge breasts of hers, I’m sure that he would just do something annoying and disgusting.

I didn't even want to answer his annoying question, so I stood up.

"I'm going to the bathroom."

"Take too long and all the food will be gone by the time you get back~~."

"Yeah yeah." I casually brushed Mihara off as she happily stuffed her cheeks with fried chicken and left the classroom.

When I got out into the hallway, I saw a long-haired, beautiful girl who was already walking away. I called out to her.

"Hey, Saras. What are you doing here? Looking for someone?"

The black-haired beauty turned around, a slight look of sadness in her eyes.

"No, I was not looking for anybody in particular..."

I noticed that Saras had both her hands behind her back. Why?

"What do you have behind your back there?"

"Did you sniff it out my little gluttonous darling?"

Wait... how could you be "little" and "gluttonous" at the same time?

Saras revealed the huge bag she was holding. That was...

"Did you make lunch for me?"

"Yes. I was concerned that you may not have eaten enough after yesterday."

Saras's steely eyes turned away from me. I saw a slight hint of red in her cheeks.

“I see. Thanks. You should come in and eat with us.”

Her black hair swayed as she shook her head.

“I will respectfully refuse. If it was only Yoshida, then I would have no objection as she is also a vampire ninja, but...”

Saras glanced inside the classroom. A throng of lively people had gathered around my desk.

“Hey Tomonori! Stop putting dressing all over *my* lunch too!”

“Ahahaha! But it’ll make you really handsome! Isn’t that great, Orito?”

“It’s super delicious! Trust me! Just pretend that I tricked you and eat it. Come onnnn~~.”

“If possible... it would be nice to eat without getting tricked...”

Everyone seemed to be having a fun time. Orito sent a karate chop down on Tomonori’s head, which made Mihara erupt into laughter. Hiramatsu just smiled kindly.

“I would never fit into that scene. I am an entity that only exists in the shadows... and it is far too bright for me over there.”

Saras let out a short chuckle. I spied some sadness in her expression.

“I see. Well, I’ll just take that then.”

“Hm? But you already have the lunchbox Yoshida made for you, and I may have gone a bit overboard with this one...”

I took a peek inside the big bag I took from Saras. Hmm... one, two, three... damn, there were fifteen layers in this lunchbox.

My face stiffened. “You... sure worked hard on this,” I told Saras.

“As I was cooking, I suddenly thought of something else I wanted to feed my darling. Then more and more things I wanted to feed my darling kept entering my head, and I couldn’t help myself.”

“Hmmm. Well, that sounds like fun then. I’m looking forward to eating it. Thanks.”

“Wait! Are you saying you will eat all of it?”

“Yup. Didn’t you know?”

“Hm?”

“Zombies are huge on eating. They eat around the clock!”

Part 2.

So, that’s how we ended up writing all our feelings down on tanzaku. (1)

Haruna’s version of Santa, for not one good reason whatsoever, seemed to limit his attention to people with ponytails, so everyone had tied up their hair.

Of course, Sera had a ponytail to begin with, so she didn’t have to change a thing.

Yuu, who had her waist-length hair done into a ponytail, did seem a bit more relaxed than usual.

Or rather, seeing her like that definitely made me more relaxed, so having the impression that she was as well was probably just an illusion.

Haruna had forced her shoulder-length chestnut hair into a small ponytail, and I'll hand it to her that she was pretty cute too.

Even for Haruna, who was usually lacking in sex appeal, seeing the back of her neck exposed like that was quite charming.

As for me...

"Ayumu, that look really works for you."

Why did she say that without even looking at me?

Sera looked a few times in my direction and snorted with laughter. Well, it's not like I can do anything about it. I don't have as much hair as you people.

Sera placed a felt-tipped pen on her elegant lips, and seemed to be thinking about what to write. Ugh, she laughed again.

"Ayumu, that look really works for you."

"Ahh, thanks."

It was a smile dripping with sarcasm.

"Alright, something like this!"

Haruna held up her tanzaku. However, she frowned and glared at it, and seeming not happy with it, soon crumpled it up and threw it into the trashcan. Over the past few minutes, she had already done that a few times.

I picked up one of her rejections and uncrumpled it. The wish that was written on it was...

A heart that loves peace... I guess?

That was pointlessly cool-sounding... why did she ask it like a question? Wishes were a more one-sided thing, weren't they? Wasn't she really good when it came to things like that? Did she not already have a heart that loved peace?!

As I was thinking that, I opened up another rejection. Yuu seemed to show some interest as well, and leaned both her body and her silver-haired ponytail over as she peeked at what was written.

The Monster Killer of Koshien (Long sword) (2)

What the hell was that? Something like the Dragon Killer? (3)
Did Santa inherit that or something?

Yuu seemed to regret ever looking over, and returned both her body and her eyes to the television.

“Hey! What are you doing?! Don't look! The wishes won't come true if other people read them!”

There was a rule like that? Alright, if Haruna decided that, then let's look through them all right away.

“Don't wish for weird things. At least ask for something that exists in this-“

Two taps on the table interrupted my words, so while I still hadn't finished my sentence with the word “world,” I took a look at Yuu's memo.

Why does she want to kill the monster of Koshien?

I guess Yuu just couldn't help having that on her mind.

“The gloomy necromancer doesn’t know? If you beat the monster that lives at Koshien, kouka (4) flows out, you know?”

Oh hoh, so instead of blood, a school song flows out... no, or was I getting the words for “school song” and “coin currency” mixed up? Ugh, this is getting complicated and I can’t keep things straight anymore. Who was it? Who the hell told you that?

Sera covered her mouth and seemed to be enjoying herself, letting out a single chuckle. Surely, the source of all this evil couldn’t be this vampire ninja, could it?

“Ugh, whatever! Enough about me! Hey, Ayumu, go faster! Everyone’s waiting for you right now!”

I see... waiting for me, huh... well then, I’ll just go with something half-assed, like “I wish that my nail-clippers will always stay sharp.”

Actually, wait. It’s not like that wish would come true. And then, I’m sure Haruna would make a fuss about it and go “That’s definitely not coming true! Are you screwing with me?!” or something.

Alright, then let’s make my wish this:

I wish that none of the wishes will come true.

Like this, even if Haruna made a fuss and yelled “It’s not coming true!” I can just respond sarcastically with “Well, mine would come true first.” Ahh, just thinking about how flustered Haruna is going to get is enough to make me smile.

“Ayumu, what’s wrong? That look really works for you, you know?”

What look?! The ponytail? Or rather, the fact that I’m smiling right now?

What is Ayumu wishing for? = “Hey hey, what did oniichan write? Show Yuu, show Yuu!”

Unlike her usual hairstyle, Yuu had done her silky silver hair up into a ponytail, but her expression was as emotionless as ever. But I could have sworn that I saw the depths of her eyes overflowing with curiosity. To understand what Yuu was thinking on the inside, it was enough to gaze into her eyes.

“It’s a secret. Well, I’m sure you’ll find out about it soon.”

I gave her a smile and tried to sound deep. It was already pretty set in stone that Haruna was going to complain about this.

I had finished writing what I wanted to write, and it seemed that I was being an eyesore to Sera, so I started to untie my ponytail.

“Hey Ayumu! The ceremony hasn’t even started yet!”

Wait... since when did Tanabata have a ceremony?

Sera also seemed to have finished writing, and was busy trying to watch the television with Yuu, but Haruna just kept on crying out things like uwah!, nyah!, gunyah!... almost as if she were having a nightmare.

“Just hurry up. I want to take a bath.”

“Just go when we finish the ceremony! You can’t even sit still for a second?! This is why the digital age is so...!”

“Yeah, yeah. So, what kind of ceremony is it?”

“Umm...”

Haruna glanced at Sera. You were just making up random things to say, weren’t you?

... And Sera was definitely the one who blew these crazy ideas about Santa and Tanabata into her head, wasn’t she? Well, Yuu didn’t seem very interested in events like this, so by process of elimination the only person who could have taught Haruna about Japanese customs was Sera.

“Sera, stop teaching Haruna weird things.”

“I didn’t teach her anything weird. Haruna just took what I said and altered them and confused them herself.”

Sera spoke in an indifferent tone with a stern expression. She probably didn’t want me to involve her.

“Then tell her she’s wrong when she starts doing that, dammit.”

“Isn’t it better this way? Changing things up a bit, rather than doing the same thing over and over again.”

“No, I think it’s best if we don’t touch things that have already been perfected. Wouldn’t you hate it if they used watermelon instead in strawberry shortcake? Or if the savory pancake you ordered only had mandarin oranges in it.”

“... And you’re comparing what Haruna is doing to something like that, which could start an outright war? How terrifying.”

“No, what’s actually terrifying is that you’d start a war over something like that.”

“Alright, I’m done! Let’s start the ceremony!”

Haruna collected all the tanzaku back-side up, but I saw her trying to peek at just mine, so I pulled on her ahoge.

“Ugyaahh!!” she squealed, and her eyes filled with tears.

I didn’t pull on it that hard, but that squeal was incredibly cute.

Maybe her ahoge was her real body.

“D-Don’t pull on that...”

“I got it, just hurry up and start.”

Haruna held a candle in between her fingers, and for some reason crossed her arms in front of her chest like Wolverine, and started to chant.

“Kaizard, Alzard, Ki, Sku, Hanz, Graz, Silc. Turn everything to ash, and-”

Halloween... hey... (5)

“Wait just a second! Are you just ripping that off?! Shouldn’t you be waiting until Halloween to make that reference? Or rather, do you seriously think that’s a real chant?!”

“Hueh? It is. It’s magic. I did my best to practice it before too.”

“No no, that’s seriously baffling to me. Just stop it. Is that seriously something you can just practice and be able to do?”

“Ayumu, what exactly are you so afraid of?”

It seems that Ms. Vampire Ninja didn't appreciate the terror that was Halloween. I should explain to her just how terrifying the magic that appears in manga can be.

Do not worry. Haruna has no magical power.

Well, that was certainly true. She still couldn't transform into a masou shoujo, after all. Well, that's a relief.

“I-I do have magical power! I'm pretty sure it's returned! So if I don't try, we won't know, right?!”

“That's why I'm telling you to stop it, isn't it?”

By the way, what kind of ceremony is this?

Ah, I'm pretty grateful that Yuu is backing me up here.

I followed her up with a “Yeah, that's right.” And I wanted to continue “Exactly what kind of ceremony are you doing here?” but I didn't have the chance to get the words out.

“Doing an event like this together makes us seem like a family, doesn't it?”

Sera gave a little chuckle.

Ah, indeed. I understood what she meant. I was thinking the same thing, in fact. I smiled just like Sera.

Yuu also seemed to agree. She gave a single nod.

But, as for Haruna...

“W-hat is this... these feelings... oogh...”

Haruna just glared at me with a frowning expression. She didn't seem happy about something.

"Haruna?"

When I called out to her, Haruna's face flushed red, almost as if it were being boiled.

"W-What do you want?! Don't look at me!"

Hey, you were the one looking at me. What just happened? Did my smile annoy you that much? Well, alright, if she wanted to be like that, then I'll tease her a bit.

"Haruna, you know..."

"Come on! Don't look at-"

"That hairstyle looks really cute on you."

"Nyahfth!!"

Haruna made a sound you might expect when you explode an egg in a microwave.

She stood up.

"Ayumu's hairstyle doesn't look good at all! Why do you have your hair like that?! You dumb idiot!"

Huh? The only reason I did my hair like this is because you wouldn't shut up and told me to... but before I could retort with that, Haruna had already begun to come at me with a very clean spinning back kick.

"Yuu, help me."

I reached out a hand towards the goddess that was sitting next to me. Yuu put on a somewhat lonely expression and just looked up at Haruna.

“Ah, Ayumu. Didn’t you want to ask me something?”

“No... nothing in particular comes to mind.”

“Well, then I don’t mind. Haruna, please continue.”

No, come on, please stop her.

TRANSLATOR’S NOTES

(1) The strips of paper you write wishes on for Tanabata.

(2) Koshien is a baseball tournament. No, it’s really not supposed to make sense.

(3) Not sure if this is a specific reference to a video game sword or not.

(4) Have to leave this in Japanese in order for the next string of puns to work. What follows is a bunch of words that all are pronounced as “kouka” in Japanese.

(5) Reference to the Halloween chant from Bastard. Sappari.

Part 3.

The group of freeloaders left and was replaced by the group of three girls who had just shown up. We began to focus on our work.

Huddling up all at the same desk and running our pens across the manuscript pages... it felt almost like a study group.

Mihara took off her jacket and sat down at the table.

“Hey hey, Aikawa Aikawa.”

Poke poke poke poke. She pushed her finger into my shoulder.

“What is it?”

“That girl over there is reaaaaaally pretty. How do you know her?”

Mihara gave me a smile.

“She’s friends with Anderson-kun.”

Mihara didn’t stop smiling and started whispering to Tomonori, who was sitting right next to her.

“Yuki-chan, Yuki-chan. Sounds like Aikawa’s about to be stolen away from you.”

“Huh? Why?”

Tomonori cocked her head to the side, clearly not understanding what Mihara meant.

“Just look. Her breasts are so much bigger, and breast size is your only weapon.”

Mihara reached around and firmly began fondling Tomonori’s breasts from behind.

“Uwaah! H-Hey! Stop it!”

Tomonori twisted her body all around as I looked with cold eyes at Mihara, who seemed like she was having loads of fun. Exactly why did you come here, you idiot?

“Hey... we have work to do...”

Hiramatsu almost seemed a bit bored as she twirled one of her pigtails around her finger.

“Yeah! We came here to help, right?”

Tomonori managed to shake off Mihara’s hand and wrapped her own arms around herself, defending herself from further attack.

Tap tap. Someone tapped the table twice.

We should begin with the work.

“Yeah. Yuu’s right. We really should get going and-”

Wait, hm? Is it just me or did the number of people around the table increase?

Me, Tomonori, Mihara, Hiramatsu... and Yuu. There was a silver-haired girl with plate armor and gauntlets sitting there, not a single emotion on her face.

Nobody had noticed. Mihara and Hiramatsu looked at Yuu with surprise in their eyes.

“Hm? Yuu, didn’t you already go back?”

Haruna and Sera are out shopping for dinner.

“Ahh, right. You three haven’t eaten yet, have you?”

I muttered that, when Tomonori’s eyes suddenly lit up.

“Should we cook something?”

I ignored Tomonori and turned to face Yuu.

“So, Yuu never went back?”

I wanted to help as much as I could. So only I came back.

“I see. Thanks, Yuu.”

“... So... what should we do...?”

I handed the manuscript out and began explaining the work schedule.

The backgrounds and special effect lines weren't done at all, so I got Hiramatsu to help with those, giving her a few pages of finished manuscript as a reference.

As for Tomonori and Mihara... they were in front of the television.

“What are you two doing?”

Maybe it's my fault for not paying them enough attention, but the two of them seemed insanely interested in the video game console in front of the TV.

“Look Aikwaa! She has a Saturn, a Saturn! Let's play Guardian Heroes!”

“Let's play it together, Yuki-chan!”

Seriously, what the hell had those two come here for? Well, granted, I guess it was pretty like Tomonori to act this way.

“Hmm, I kinda want to join in too...”

Nene-san had been sleeping a minute ago, but now she smiled and raised her hand.

“... Sorry... did we... wake you...?”

Hiramatsu looked apologetic and bowed her head. Honestly though, the two people who really should've been bowing

their heads were currently trying to power on the video game console. Ugh... what a hopeless pair.

“You’re quite a nice girl, aren’t you? The kind that easily gets misunderstood by boys.”

Nene-san chuckled as she looked at Hiramatsu.

“Mis... understanding...?”

“If you’re too nice to people, then weird boys might latch onto you.”

Nene-san paid me a sidelong glance.

What the hell? Why are you looking at me?

“Okay okay, let’s get back to work.”

I continued to paste the screentone onto the manuscript. Yuu helped with beta painting and whiting.

Nene-san was directly teaching Hiramatsu how to add effect lines.

It was steady work where you spun the manuscript and a ruler around as you drew line after line. Hiramatsu was also provided with tissues to wipe off the ruler when it got too dirty with ink.

Watching Hiramatsu silently begin to work filled me with a strong sense of relief.

She was so careful that she wasn’t really moving very quickly, but I was grateful to get any help at all with this.

Yuu and Hiramatsu. With these two on our team, we could probably make some good progress.

“Uwah! Kanami shoot your laser! Your laser!”

“Okay. Yuki-chan’s in the way though.”

Not to say that *everyone* here was being useful though.

I considered going over and lecturing Tomonori and Mihara, but I decided that we’d probably make more progress here if I just left them alone.

Around thirty minutes passed like that, and I decided to take a short break.

I suddenly noticed that water was drip dropping onto the table.

“... U... Uuuu...”

They were Hiramatsu’s tears.

“A-Are you alright? What’s wrong?”

I was at a bit of a loss seeing Hiramatsu suddenly start crying like this.



“... Sorry... this manga... it’s very sad.”

“Sad?”

I was so focused on completing my task that I wasn’t really paying attention to what the manga actually was about, but hearing that from Hiramatsu and giving the manuscript a quick read... yeah, it certainly was sad.

A girl in a village becomes wrapped up in a war, and takes up arms herself to help fight.

During the war, unique powers are awakened within her and she loses her ability to speak.

This was the story about how she tried to get her voice back with six companions.

Nene-san had mentioned that this girl was none other than Yuu, who was sitting right in front of me beta painting right now. So, this story was basically nonfiction.

Just by speaking, she was feared and persecuted by her allies. Even then, this young girl desperately fought for the sake of others. She was also once captured by the King of the Underworld, who wanted her power.

That was around the point of the manuscript that Hiramatsu was working on right now.

But, the girl’s friends came to rescue her. Everyone worked together to conquer their problems. The Yuu in the story never lost her smile, not even once.

There were painful events, sad events, but she finally discovered a way to seal her powers and returned to the village

where she was born, living peacefully with her six companions.

This was the happy ending for Yuu that Nene-san had crafted. She had returned to a normal, casual life. There was no happiness greater than that.

If that was the case, if someone were to also write my story... what would a happy end for me look like?

“The main character... and all the companions who surround her... they all feel so real... this is a fantasy manga but... everyone feels so life-like... I’m really moved by this.”

Nene-san blushed a bit when she saw Hiramatsu’s cute, quivering eyes directed at her.

“It’s not really that big a deal.”

It seemed Hiramatsu’s honest eyes were making Nene-san feel a bit ticklish, so she... fell asleep.

“There’s a happy ending waiting at the finish line. Let’s get this girl there as quickly as possible.”

“... Yeah... let’s do that.” Hiramatsu smiled and pumped her arms.

Yuu had been watching Hiramatsu the entire time this scene had been unfolding. Her expression didn’t change, but she set a memo in front of Hiramatsu with the words **Thank you.** written on it.

“... Kanami. Let’s help too.”

“Yeah. We’ve had enough fun.”

Maybe they had felt the pressure of this mood Hiramatsu had created, but Tomonori and Mihara turned the game console off and came over.

They divided Hiramatsu's work amongst the three of them and silently set out on their tasks.

What was this fluttering I felt in my chest?

I felt a fuzzy feeling welling up inside me, even more than it usually did when I worked with Haruna and Sera.

I looked around me.

Underneath Yuu's plate armor was a pair of small breasts.

Mihara had normal breasts. Maybe it was because she played basketball, but they seemed a bit tight.

Hiramatsu's breasts were larger than Mihara's. I guess you could call them "pretty great for normal breasts."

Tomonori's breasts were huge. Exactly how could she run track with breasts like that?

And then, Nene-san's breasts were just gigantic.

Breasts... there were breasts all around me! Feeling dirty thoughts fill my head, I held my head in my hands and squirmed in agony.

"Hey, Aikawa."

Not good. This wasn't good. I already learned my lesson back at the sexual harassment trial. Get rid of all these strange thoughts, Ayumu!

But why...? Why... weren't there any other guys here?!
Surrounded by all these high school girls, surrounded by all these girls from the Underworld... the room smelled so damn good!

"Aikawa?"

"He's been wriggling around all grossly for a while already."

"... Is... something wrong...?"

Calm down, Ayumu. It's not like you want to touch those breasts or sexually harass these girls. It's not like you're even hoping for an opportunity to do any of that stuff.

But... hm? Why is everyone looking at me?

"Umm... what's up?"

"I was just thinking that even though Aikawa is good friends with Orito, he won't do anything strange here... right?"

"Yuki-chan. It's because he does strange things so often that he had to go through a sexual harassment trial just the other day."

"Yeah. That's why I've decided to never sexually harass anybody ever again."

"Hmm, pretty admirable from a pervert lolicon rabid homo like Aikawa..."

"... I wish... Orito-kun... would also learn from him."

Tap tap.

But right now, Aikawa was just comparing our breasts.

Wha-?! How did she know?!

“Aikawa... that expression of yours makes it look like you’re thinking ‘How did she know?!’ right now or something.”

Tomonori looked at me with dead eyes. It was an expression of resigned shock, something I saw from Sera and Saras twenty times a day.

You look tired, Moldau. (1)

Am I a river in the Czech Republic or something? Ok sure, maybe I was too tired and my mind was starting to think about strange things. I put a hand on my forehead and sighed.

“As if I’d ever think dirty thoughts about you all.”

“Are you sure~~?”

“Yeah. We’re *friends*, after all.”

..... Hm? Why isn’t anybody saying anything anymore? Somebody say something, dammit.

Hiramatsu just sat there motionless, a bit of loneliness in her eyes.

Tomonori gave me a childlike pout, and Mihara put a hand on her forehead, looking nonplussed.

Tap tap. Yuu tapped the table.

By the way, I’m out of bounds.

Yuu’s expression didn’t change but she continued to tap on the table. Yeah yeah, I got it. I’m looking at your memo right now. You don’t have to keep tapping.

“Y-Yeah! He’s just talking to Hiramatsu and Kanami, right?! Yeah, okay!”

What the hell are you getting so flustered over?

“I think Aikawa’s lack of delicacy here can be considered sexual harassment.”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“I... I’m happy... to be Aikawa-kun’s friend... but Yuki-chan...”

“Seriously, I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“You obviously do know but you’re still feeding us that barefaced lie. Seriously, that’s cold.”

Wait wait wait wait. Honestly, the stuff coming out of *your* mouth is the stuff I *least* understand.

Anyway, what the hell did “out of bounds” mean?! Was she talking about the manuscript? No, wait, it’d be super weird for her to just suddenly start talking about the manuscript.

Dammit! What did I say right before Yuu passed me that memo? The answer was probably there, but my mind was drawing a blank.

Yeah, I guess this was just one of those times...

I wanted to keep pushing this matter, but...

I suddenly heard a sound that couldn’t have come from anything other than the front door being thrown wide open.

“Ayumu! It’s a Megalo! Let’s go!”

A short chestnut-haired girl came bounding into the room. Haruna was here, holding onto a chainsaw with one hand.

“You couldn’t just ask Sera?”

“If we don’t use Mystletainn we won’t be able to defeat it!
Understand?!”

So not even Sera would be a match for this particular monster.
Geez...

“... Okay, I got it.”

“Eh? You have to go?”

Mihara’s long-eyelashes moved up and down as she blinked.
She seemed to be super interested in this new development.

“Ahh, just for a bit. Don’t worry, I’ll be back real quick.”

“Aikawa... could it be...”

It seemed that Tomonori had realized that “It’s a Megalo”
meant that I was about to go monster hunting. She looked at
me with a slightly serious expression.

I wanted to tell her not to worry, but the minute I did that, the
others would realize I was going to go do something that
might be cause for worry. I really didn’t want to give everyone
a reason to get anxious for my sake.

“What, you want to go too? Not happening. Haruna and I are
going to take all the fun for ourselves this time.”

“Ehh, Aikawa’s going to go have fun somewhere? And you’re
just leaving us here to do work? Isn’t that pretty awful?”

Mihara scowled. Good. I’m happy that my strategy worked.

“Ayumu! We’re. Going. Nowwww~.”

Haruna pulled me by the arm, so I hurriedly replied to Mihara.

“S-Sorry Mihara. I’ll buy you a meal or something next time.”

“Really? Hear that Yuki-chan?! Aikawa is taking us out for sushi!”

This bastard... well, I guess it wasn't too crazy, so I'd think about it.

Be careful. = “Do your best, oniichan!”

Yuu just looked straight up at me.

“Yeah, I'll be back soon.”

Ahh, getting sent off by Yuu like this just filled me with a sense of calm for some reason. I dunno, it felt like she just had full, unconditional faith in me... or maybe I was being a bit too conceited.

“... Aikawa-kun... don't... over do it, okay...?”

My eyes widened.

Because Hiramatsu's words, the last words I heard before I left, filled me with just as much calm as Yuu's words had.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

(1) Probably a play on “Mulder,” from the X-Files.

Part 4.

I searched for the Megalo with Haruna, who was full of energy and still holding the chainsaw in one hand.

Megalo were monsters that came to this world from the Underworld in order to defeat the masou shoujo.

They were creatures that were created for the sole purpose of killing masou shoujo, so the masou shoujo were intent on destroying them all.

Haruna had come to this world in order to hunt the Megalo, but now that Chris has stolen her magical energy away from her, she was currently nothing more than a girl with an ahoge.

Megalo were terrifyingly strong. If Haruna as she was right now tried to fight one, then I don't think anything would prevent her from getting killed.

That's why I had to get her magical energy back from Chris. The fact that just defeating her wasn't enough was honestly a huge headache for me.

Well, granted, defeating her in and of itself was a huge problem.

“Ayumu, over there!”

Haruna was pointing at the park. It was a small park surrounded by lots of private homes.

“So it's him?”

There weren't any slides or jungle gyms in this park.

Instead, there were a set of swings and a horizontal bar and some benches. There was also a single rodeo bull kind of toy that was built to resemble a panda. It really was a small park.

“Hyahho~~! Fuwaaah aahhh~~.”

Boing boing boing boing. An animal in a school boy's uniform was playing on that panda. A... deer?

“It doesn’t feel like he’s trying to hunt any masou shoujo, so I thought it might be better to leave him alone, but...”

Haruna began to explain her state of mind.

“Yeah, it doesn’t really feel like he’s trying to find the masou shoujo... doesn’t feel like he wants to fight at all, honestly.”

“Hyahho~~.” *Boing boing boing boing.*

This must be the first time in my life I’ve seen someone having so much fun on one of those rodeo toys.

It was interesting to find such a hot-headed simpleton out in the middle of such a cold winter night.

“He doesn’t seem very strong, so let’s get this over with quick.”

“... Ayumu, wait just a sec.”

“What’s wrong?”

“... I want to talk a bit.”

“Huh?”

“What if... what if he’s not a bad guy? Like that other one...”

That other one. Haruna was probably referring to the owl.

Haruna had become friends with an owl Megalo that she had met at a mixer just last week.

And she realized that there could even be good Megalo.

Up until now, Haruna had crushed every Megalo in her path as if they were bugs.

Megalo had been created purely for the purpose of killing masou shoujo, so this was a natural course of events.

I had also helped her with that, but coming here and choosing to talk instead of fight... it wasn't something I could've ever expected from Haruna six months ago.

Back then, all Haruna could think about was beating every Megalo... wait. Wait just a minute. What about me?

All I could think about was defeating Chris.

Even Haruna... Haruna, the idiotic, selfish, violent, bratty girl who thought she was the center of the universe, had come to consider options other than just beating everything to a pulp. So, what did that say about me?

All I could think about was taking Chris out... Nene-san had gone through all that trouble to set up a negotiation table for us, but I had let that all go to waste.

"I got it, Haruna. Let's talk to him first. But... what if he doesn't turn out to be a good guy?"

"If we find that out... we'll beat him to a pulp! That's why I called Ayumu over here!"

I smiled at Haruna, who had clearly cheered back up. We both entered the park.

"Agh! This magic... it has to be a masou shoujo!"

Great. There were Megalo who could talk and Megalo who couldn't, but this fellow was definitely in the former category.

"Ayumu. If it gets down to a battle, be careful. This is a double-A class Megalo... they call him the Wild Goat of the Underworld, the goat deer!"

What kind of crappy confusing name was that?! So he was actually a wild goat? Or was he a deer? Or maybe he was a deer that went “moo” and had a bit of cow in him? Certainly, wild goats were more closely related to cows than to deer...

“What’s the meaning of thissy? The one with the magical energy is the guy!”

The wild goat said that and dismounted from the panda rodeo toy.

“You. Have you killed any masou shoujo before?”

“Maybe I done have and maybe I have haven’t done that.”

I couldn’t understand this thing! He was insanely hard to understand!

“Haruna, do you think he has?”

I whispered that into Haruna’s ear, being careful that the goat didn’t hear me.

“Class AA means that a masou shoujo has been defeated by this Megalo. So, if he has that designation, then that means he’s at least strong enough to beat a masou shoujo. Probably... no, I definitely think there are masou shoujo who have been killed by this Megalo. Look at him, he’s not nervous at all.”

Haruna thinks that this Megalo has killed her companions, but she still wants to talk? Wow, the surprises just keep on coming.

Haruna put her hands on her hips and took a step forward.

“Hey, deer, do you like fighting?”

“Deer? You said ‘deer’ right? I guess I do look like a deer?
Mmmmm.”

The goat seemed a bit embarrassed and a bit happy as he said that.

“If you promise to never ever attack masou shoujo again, then I’ll-”

“Can’t do that~~.”

The goat quickly cut down Haruna’s suggestion.

“Why?”

“It’s fun to torment masou shoujo, yup!”

I could’ve sworn I saw a touch of announce seep into the motions of Haruna’s ahoge.

“Torment? What do you mean?”

“All those girls who want so bad to kill Megalo, it’s so fun when they’re begging for their lives! Yup yup!”

Haruna looked like she was really trying to hold in her anger.

“... Well, if the masou shoujo don’t try to attack you either, then will you stop fighting?”

“Probably not. If the masou shoujo want to not fight, then I get to torment them more and more! Sounds super great to me.”

I could’ve sworn I heard something snap inside of Haruna right then. Or no, maybe that sound was coming from inside my own head.

“I see. Okay, Ayumu.”

“Yeah, I think with this one, we’ll have to...”

“Beat him to a pulp!”

The goat began to make a dash for me and Haruna, as if lured by our collective shout.

“Ayumu! Transform!”

Haruna tried to pass me the chainsaw, but I didn’t take it and just met the goat head on.

I had to fight Chris. If I couldn’t beat this goat without the masou renki (1), then I wouldn’t be a match for Chris at all!

Also, I really didn’t want to transform!

I planted my foot firmly in the sandy ground and sent my fist toward the goat’s face...

Zombies were strong. Normal people wouldn’t be able to maintain their bodies while making such fierce attacks, so their brains held them back, but I was a zombie. It was fine if I destroyed my body.

For example, I could gain more and more strength and push my limits as far as I wanted, even if I had to tear my muscle fibers to shreds in the process. That was the part of me that was no longer human.

360%! My punch had far more power in it than a human could ever hope to muster, and it slammed right into the goat’s face... or it should’ve but I felt my legs being swept up from under me.

The goat was attacking me while squatting.

Whaa~~? This was strange. I splendidly fell to the ground and cocked my neck to the side while lying on my side.

As I lie sprawled there, I saw a shadow loom over me. When I looked up, I saw the goat's leg.

His heel came slamming down!

I managed to roll out of the way... but the goat kicked my body up as if he was playing with a soccer ball.

Ohh, he was really strong. My body flew up into the air as if I was suspended by the wire, and then the goat attacked again.

Whaaa~~? This seriously was strange. I managed to cross my arms and repel the goat's legs.

I wanted to put some distance between us, but the goat was already moving into his next attack.

He sent a high kick at my forehead. I guarded with one of my hands. Ah, yup, I definitely broke a bone there.

“What's wrong? What's wronggg~~?”

He probably felt the break and showed me a look of superiority. Ugh, everything this guy did was so annoying.

The goat sent his leg at my flank, and I stopped him using both palms.

I heard something like a ringing sound before my hands went numb. The muscles in my arms ripped apart from the impact.

However, I was a zombie, so I felt no pain and my arms would regenerate quickly.

Still, I was now sure of one thing. This goat... he was stronger than I was.

If I thought about it, this much should've been obvious. Either way, I would never be absolutely confident that I could beat a masou shoujo, but this goat had enough strength to have that confidence.

So it was natural he would be stronger than I was.

But... he wasn't overwhelmingly more powerful.

I grabbed onto the goat's school uniform and judo threw him to the floor.

A cloud of dust rose up and the earth shook. I could hear Haruna's voice.

"Ayumu! Hurry up and transform!"

I caught the chainsaw she threw to me with one hand and let out a single sigh.

Dammit. It seems like I really couldn't escape from this particular fate.

"Nomobuyo, woshi, hashitawa, dokeda, gunmiicha, dei, ribura!"

I chanted that strangely long spell, and then oh my oh my.

A cute pink outfit appeared around my body. This fluffy skirt was so lovely that it seriously moved me to tears.

"Gross gross~~."

I couldn't let this happen! I hurriedly gripped onto the chainsaw again and concentrated.

Masou shoujo had the ability to restore things that were once broken.

I used that power to recreate my original clothing.

Sparkling particles surrounded me, and around the time the pink outfit had completely disappeared, I found that only my jeans had appeared around me.

... Cold. I put a hand in my pocket and checked that my wallet and cell phone were indeed there. My pockets were almost bursting, but I was relieved that I had put those things in there.

After all, your wallet and your cell phone were essential for basic living.

“Gyaaahhh!! P-Pervert! It's a pervert!”

Haruna's ahoge bounced from side to side as she sent punch after punch at me.

“Haruna. Why is this happening? Why did my magical energy go away?”

“As if I know! Just get out of here already!”

What was the meaning of this? Wait, actually... how had I been able to transform in the first place?

Wasn't all of Haruna's magical energy in the hands of Chris?

Now that I thought about it, the one who had taken Haruna's magical energy in the first place had been Yuu.

Then, because Yuu had shared magical energy with me, I gained the ability to transform into a masou shoujo.

Chris had snatched away the magical energy that was flowing between Yuu and Haruna. Could it be that that was a different pool of magical energy than the magical energy Yuu had shared with me?

But, now all of Haruna's magical energy was over with Chris. So the pool of magical energy Yuu had been supplying me with had run dry.

To put it simply, I was out of fuel. Ugh, this was a problem... I held my head in my hands.

If possible, I would've preferred to notice this before that fuel had run out. Now I couldn't even transform when I battled Chris. Becoming a masou shoujo was one of the minimum requirements for being able to defeat Chris. Hell, even then I might not be able to do it. I guess my only remaining option was to try and negotiate...

Also, I really hope nobody was going to see me and report me to the police like this. God, it was cold.

Well, Nene-san's apartment was close by, so I guess it was fine. I also had left a change of clothes there.

"Okay, I'm going to head back to Nene-san's apartment then."

"Eh? Why?" Haruna's eyes widened into saucers.

"Why? I mean, there's still a lot of manuscript to work on."

"... Do you really like being at her place that much?"

“Huh? What’s this all of a sudden? I mean, Nene-san is a really nice person, and I guess it’s pretty comfortable being around her...”

Haruna looked down and muttered without making eye contact with me.

“The deadline is the 24th, right?”

“Yeah. Don’t you forget it either, okay?”

Haruna’s face sprung up and she pointed right at me. She had gone back to her usual self.

“You better be back that night!”

Ahh, now that she mentioned it, it was Christmas Eve, wasn’t it? I’ve never really cared too much about Christmas Eve, so I had completely forgotten. It’s not like I have a girlfriend, and as for family... well, they weren’t around either.

“Santa comes on the twenty fourth! He’s gonna come give me a present!”

So Haruna still believed in Santa Claus.

It was the pure, childlike parts of her that made her seem cute sometimes.

I couldn’t help but chuckle at seeing Haruna standing there, her ahoge bouncing from side to side.

“Did you wish for something? If you don’t do that fast he won’t come.”

I teased Haruna a bit, causing her to blink a few times.

“Hueh? I already made my wish back in July.”

“... July?” Oh, at Tanabata! Yeah, I guess back then, Haruna had said something about Santa.

“Santa goes around granting all the wishes in the world! He’s a huge masochist!”

Don’t call him a masochist... he was a really good person.

“So I guess you want Santa to grant the wish you made at Tanabata?”

“Yeah! If you don’t give him half a year, he can’t get everything ready!”

W-Whoa... that was actually pretty convincing.

Come on, Ayumu, remember. What did Haruna wish for at Tanabata...?

She didn’t ask for anything weird, right? I mean, if it was something reasonable I could probably play Santa and grant her wish, but... umm... what was it...

Give us snow. Snow big enough that everyone here can see it. If it’s too small I’ll kill you.

Yeah, it was something like that, right? Haruna wanted snow.

Maybe there wasn’t any snow in the magical world Virie? But damn, that’s hard. That’s not something I could just make happen.

“By the way, Haruna. Did you have a second wish?”

“Hueh? Why?”

“Sometimes Santa can’t grant every wish either. So the more choices you give him the better it is.”

“Hm, I guess that makes sense, but... it feels a bit too late to make a new wish.”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. I know Santa, actually.”

“Eh? Even though you’re a smelly gross pervert?”

“Don’t you know? Santa is immortal, kind of like a zombie.”

“That’s so sketchy! ... Well, fine. I want a stuffed animal. Of a horned owl.”

A stuffed animal of a horned owl... I felt my cheek muscles relax a bit at her words.

“I got it. I’ll ask him for you.”

“You better!”

Bounce bounce bounce bounce. Haruna’s ahoge wagged back and forth like a puppy’s tail. She was adorable, and I couldn’t help but put my hand on top of her head.

But I was still half naked, so of course she just called me gross and kicked me as hard as she could.

TRANSLATOR’S NOTES

(1) The technical term for his magical weapon. I guess I haven’t footnoted this yet in this volume so I’ll do it this once.

三
八
番
テ
ー
ブル
の
方
に
マ
テ
ィ
ー
ニ
を
*

第三話

気になって寿司も喉を通らないぜ!



オレって勉強とか全然しないし、遊ぶときっていつも外なんだけどみんなで机囲ってると、結構楽しいもんだな!

こいつらとだったら、オレ——勉強も出来るような気がするぜ!

やっぱりアレだ! モツ煮込むべきものは友達って奴だぜ!
そういえば、相川と織戸っていつから仲が良いんだろう。

Chapter 3 – A Martini for Table Eight.

Part 1.

It was Sunday, the twenty-fourth of December. The manuscript still wasn't done, and I was wracking my brain for ideas.

The deadline was today, but... dammit. We had tried so hard, but I guess it was just way too much work for beginners like us.

A girl with two ponytails was sitting in front of me. It was already winter break, but Hiramatsu had been coming to help every day, not even talking very much as she set off on her tasks.

“So, it's Christmas Eve. Is Hiramatsu going to be spending the evening with someone?”

I heard no response. This was the intense power of concentration that Hiramatsu occasionally put on display. She was so immersed in her work that she couldn't even hear anything around her. You could say this was proof that she was a truly excellent student.

“You're pretty amazing, seriously...” I mumbled that, at which Hiramatsu finally realized I was talking and began flap her hands from side to side.

“... Eh? ... What? ... Sorry... I wasn't listening...”

“Ah, I was just saying that it's Christmas Eve, so I was wondering if you were spending the evening with someone. I

mean, Hiramatsu is pretty cute, so I'm sure she would have someone to-"

Hiramatsu's face flushed deep red and she waved her hands vigorously to interrupt me.

"No way! I'm... not... I guess I just have a Christmas party with my family... u-umm... are you doing anything, Aikawa-kun?"

"Hm? I guess we can probably have a Christmas party back home too. Haruna looked like she wanted to have a party."

"... I see... that... seems fun."

"Well, assuming nothing strange happens."

Hiramatsu and I shared a smile.

"Yo, Aikawa! I'm here to hang out!"

"Hullooo~~. Hm? Tae-chan's here too!"

Tomonori and Mihara had come over. Mihara was, as always, wearing the latest trendiest fashions, while Tomonori was in shorts. I couldn't help but stare a bit at her thighs which were wrapped in black stockings.

If it was only those two, I wouldn't really have much to complain about. But...

"I'm here! Hurray!" There was another guy behind them.

A guy with glasses and spiky hair. Orito.

"Why the hell is Orito here?!"

"Eh? Ah, so he is. When the hell did he show up?!"

Tomonori looked behind her with surprise in her eyes.

To think he would be able to trail them like a ninja without getting discovered... he certainly was a terrifying pervert.

“Uwah. Please don’t tell me you were tailing us.”

Mihara seemed repulsed, and she smacked Orito upside his spiky head.

“Hey, when you say ‘tailing,’ it makes me sound like the bad guy. Can’t you just say something like ‘Oh, you came with us?’ Anyway, where’s Sera-san?”

“She’s not here. So go home.”

“That’s so unfair, Aikawa! It’s Christmas Eve! And here you are with all these girls! I want to spend Christmas Eve with girls too! I won’t allow this injustice!”

This annoying guy walked further and further into the room.

Crap. If he saw Nene-san, then things would get even more annoying...

“Seriously, just go home.”

Orito’s eyes widened. If Sera was here, she probably would call him “disgusting.”

“A-Aikawa...”

“What is it?”

“W-Who is that over there with that dynamite... no, that atomic bomb body?”

What the hell is an atomic bomb body? I saw that Orito was pointing at Nene-san, who was still asleep. More specifically, it seemed like he was pointing at her breasts.

I guess I was too late... Orito was seriously a huge perv. If my perv level was at 50 perv points and normal high schoolers were at 10 perv points, then Orito would be at 130,000,000 perv points. If I had one of those scouters from Dragonball Z here with me, it would just completely explode in Orito's presence.

I knew that if a huge pervert like that caught sight of those humongous breasts, then he was going to make the most disgusting face in the world. I honestly didn't want to see that face, which is why I didn't want to invite him in the first place.

Here, just look at him. Look at that disgusting face. Look at the corners of his eyes droop downwards and the rest of his eye take on that boomerang shape. Look at that upper lip of his jut out like that. Look at those disgusting lips of his, wet with drool.

"It's been quite a while since I've seen that disgusting expression on his face."

Mihara continued to look completely repulsed and sent Orito a glare.

"Orito-kun... you're... you're drooling a bit."

Hiramatsu had a strained smile on her face.

"Fuaah... oh? More people? Come in, come in."

The now awake Nene-san ran a hand roughly through her hair and waved at Orito.

"D-Did you hear that, Aikawa?! That beautiful woman over there just said she liked me-"

“She didn’t say anything!”

Mihara, Tomonori, and I all shouted at the same time. It might’ve been the first time in history when we three were in such good sync.

“Is he going to help out too?”

Boing boing. Every time Nene-san moved just a bit, those soft lobes of hers went *boing boing*.

“Eheh~~.” Orito still had that disgusting look on his face. But he finally shook his head back and forth, as if trying to shake that expression off, and then gave Nene-san a suave look.

“I will do whatever you need, milady! Would you like a massage?”

Orito gave her a salute.

Then he plopped himself down right next to Mihara, looking ready to work.

“Ugh, he’s so disgusting.”

Yeah. Exactly. When it came to Orito, Mihara and I were in complete agreement.

“Seriously, Aikawa is making such a disgusting face.”

“Wait, me?! You were talking about Orito, weren’t you?!”

“... Aikawa-kun... and Orito-kun... have the same look on their faces...”

H-Hiramatsu too?! Stop it! Stop looking at me with such pity in your eyes!

Well, okay, admittedly I was also staring pretty intently at Nene-san's breasts... get a grip, Ayumu. If you keep on doing this people are going to accuse you of being a pervert again.

And all this after my name had just been cleared of those charges.

I also gave everyone a suave look before turning back to the manuscript.

“Well then, let's do this, Aikawa-kun.”

“Indeed, Orito-kun.”

Orito looked at the manuscript on the table, figuring out an instant what we had been doing up until now.

And then... at that moment, I bore witness to Orito performing what could be called a divine miracle.

Orito's hands spread out look those of the thousand-armed Goddess of Mercy. He only had two arms, but it almost looked like he was using every drawing tool at the same time.

“Haaaaaaaaaaaah!! Nuuryaaaaahh!! Nuuaaahhh!! Nuouuuu!! Nuhyaaahhh!!”

Orito went to work, and he kept on adding “nu”s to his shouts to the point where he sounded like the Supreme Ruler of the Century's End from Fist of the North Star.

His hands moved with the skill of a ramen master stretching his noodles. Pages upon pages of the manuscript flew up into the air, completely finished with shocking quality.

T-This was the Mighty Hundred-fold Screentone Binding technique! No, it wasn't just the tone! He was doing everything in the entire process all by himself.

Whether it was how dynamic the effect lines looked, or how detailed the small things were drawn, he was doing a wonderful job.

Yes, this was what you could call the Advanced Mighty Hundred-fold Screentone Binding technique!

To think that a normal person like Orito would possess such a skill as this... I was shocked.

“That’s amazing, but also disgusting.”

Yes. I agree completely, Mihara.

We spent around an hour happily working like that, but then another visitor showed up.

There were two knocks on the door before a pretty voice spoke from outside the room. “I’m coming in.”

I already knew exactly who it was just from the voice, so I immediately headed for the front door to greet her. That’s where I saw the black-haired beauty Saras.

“What’s up? Did you come to help?”

“Yes. I received these here from Seraphim.”

She was holding onto a big envelope. When I took a peek inside, I saw...

“It’s the manuscript! Did Haruna and the others already finish their part?”

“Yes, that’s what they told me. Also, I heard that today was the last day before the deadline, so I thought I might be of some help...”

I see. As expected from Haruna, she didn’t just call herself a genius masou shoujo for nothing. Sera and Yuu probably also exhausted all their strength making this happen. We shouldn’t make their efforts go to waste and really make double time over here too.

Hm? Saras looked a bit stiffer than usual.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing... are there already other people here?”

Saras looked a bit at a loss after hearing the sound of happy voices coming from inside the room.

I do remember Saras had once told me that even though she was comfortable being with other vampire ninjas like Tomonori, she wasn’t very good when it came to being with normal people.

Saras looked like she wanted to leave, so I grabbed her by her delicate hand.

“D-Darling!”

“Just help us. If you’re here, we’ll work a hundred times faster.”

I gave her a smile and led her into the room, her hand still in mine.

“H-Hey, you! Don’t pull that hard... well, I am not averse to a bit of roughness, but... no, that’s beside the point! S-Stop getting carried away, oi!”

Saras flushed red right to the tips of her ears and kicked my behind with all her might. I ended up sliding on the tatami like a huge tuna being sent out of the Tokyo fish market.

Hiramatsu stood up at the sight of me in surprise.

“A-Aikawa..... kun...? Are you..... alright?”

“Hm? Hoshigawa-senpai?”

Mihara looked at Saras in surprise.

“She’s going to help us out too.”

“Darling, you...”

“Unfortunately, there’s not much more work that can be split up...”

Nene-san looked rather apologetic.

“Umm... in that case... maybe we can let Aikawa-kun rest...?”

Nene-san seemed quite happy with Hiramatsu’s suggestion.

“Now that you mention it, Aikawa-kun has been helping us the entire time, hasn’t he? Okay, let’s let him sleep.”

Nene-san opened her closet door, and a few of the tightly packed pillows in there tumbled out. Oh right, I forgot that her closet was just pillows...

Nene-san fished a futon out from the inside of the closet and laid it out in the corner of the room.

Everyone's eyes were on me right now. It made me feel a bit tickled.

"But, uhh..."

"Come on, Aikawa! Just take a break!"

Tomonori grabbed me by the shoulders and forced me to lay down on the futon.

She also piled up a bunch of pillows, many of which had cotton that had gone a bit hard and lumpy, and pushed my head right into the pile.

Well, I honestly was fine with continuing to work, but if this would give Saras something to do it'd be like killing two birds with one stone. So I guess I'll accept their offer.

"Okay. I'll leave the rest to you, Hoshigawa Kirara-san."

I rolled over to face the wall, closed my eyes, and felt the strength leave my body.

"My darling just does what he wants, doesn't he? Fine, I suppose I will help."

Saras sat where I had sat a few minutes ago and began to work.

However, they didn't have much to talk about, and honestly the lively atmosphere that had filled the room a minute before had evaporated.

I wonder how much time passed like that.

I had been working excitedly for a while, so it was hard for me to go to sleep. Instead, I just lay there resting my eyes.

"Hey hey, do you think Aikawa-kun's asleep?"

I heard Nene-san's voice. It seemed like she couldn't really stand this heavy atmosphere anymore.

This is probably where I should be tactful and at least pretend I was asleep.

"Maybe we should whack him one and check?"

That was Mihara sounding so amused, wasn't it? That damn girl and her damn unnecessary ideas...

But I'm a zombie, so I wouldn't feel any pain. So go ahead and hit me with all you've got. I'll just keep on sleeping.

"Hm. Then please allow me."

I could tell Saras had stood up by the sound of rustling clothes.

Bam! She kicked me as hard as she could on the back of my head. The kick made such an amazing sound that it was pretty clearly not your average kick. If I hadn't been a zombie, I would've probably died right there.

Saras knew I couldn't die, so she probably didn't care about holding back.

"He... didn't move..."

Hiramatsu sounded worried. I didn't want them to think I was dead, so I began breathing heavily to signal that I was asleep.

"Okay, he's probably sleeping then. No problem."

I heard a guy's voice spit out those irresponsible words. Once the New Year was here, I was going to punch that bastard Orito a hundred and eight times. (1)

"Well, the problem is that he might not wake up from that..."

Mihara was the type to always tack on unnecessary commentary at the end. Just like me.

“So, what exactly is everyone’s relation with Aikawa-kun? From what I can tell, you’re not just normal classmates.”

Tomonori was the first to respond to Nene-san’s question.

“I’m... Aikawa’s...”

Was she going to say it? Or wasn’t she? But while Tomonori fumbled with her words...

“You’re his bride, right?”

Mihara butt in again.

“I am my darling’s fiancée.”

Exactly when the hell had I proposed?! I didn’t remember that at alllllll!!! Why the hell was she spitting out such bold-faced lies just because she thought I wasn’t awake?!

“Fee on... fee on what?”

Tomonori the idiot didn’t seem to understand what Saras was talking about.

“..... Fiancée, not fee on anything. Are you an idiot?”

Tomonori could possibly be the biggest idiot of this generation, but it seems Saras didn’t find this very funny.

“Tae-chan is also a prospective bride, isn’t she?”

“I’m... no... I’m just... his classmate.....”

I'm sure Hiramatsu was blushing right now at Mihara's teasing. I wanted to take a look, but I was a bit afraid to flip around in bed.

"Meanwhile, Aikawa is in love with me. It's quite annoying."

Orito you bastard, soon I'll teach you what it feels like to be in hell.

"Hmmm. Seems he's surrounded by beautiful girls on all sides then."

Nene-san tried to sum it up. Well, that wasn't entirely accurate though...

"... Hm. Yes, also, his relationship with those freeloaders at his house is quite suspect."

Is that what Saras thought about my relationship with Sera?

"But, how do I put it... I don't think Aikwaa is looking for a lover, or a bride, or a fee on whatever."

"I told you it's a fiancée, not a fee on whatever!"

Kch. Saras probably just karate chopped Tomonori. At least, that's what it sounded like.

"I think Aikawa just wants to find more of a family."

Orito said that, his tone a bit strange and lacking all its usual obnoxiousness.

"Now that I think about it, someone told me this before... they told me that Aikawa's parents are dead."

No they aren't! Mihara had said that in such a somber tone too that Hiramatsu responded sadly with a "..... I see....."

“I actually heard they were just overseas.”

Nice one, Saras. Thanks for getting things back on track.

“That’s good to hear...” Hiramatsu also sounded relieved.

“Ahh, this is why Aikawa sometimes speaks in a Kansai dialect.”

Tomonori sounded quite happy, as if she had just solved one of the great mysteries of the universe.

Wait, did she think that the Kansai region was overseas? My God, somebody please teach this girl elementary school geography please.

“Ah, but... I heard somewhere that Aikawa’s dad said that he was going somewhere to meet his strongest opponent and he never came back.”

Was my dad making a living as a street fighter or something?! I’m pretty sure I’ve explained all this to Tomonori after school before too...

“They just left him alone and went overseas? He didn’t go with them?”

Nene-san asked that question and Orito responded.

“Aikawa stayed back in Japan for my sake.”

Stop spreading these awful lies! I have half a mind to get up and beat you half to death right now!

“Why the hell would he have to separate from his family just for Orito’s sake?”

Good good. Mihara was echoing my feelings perfectly.

“... You have to know something about Aikawa. He might look indifferent all the time, but he has this strange sense of justice and can't ignore anybody who seems to be in trouble.”

For some reason, Orito was speaking in an overly manly tone right now. He continued speaking in earnest with that same gross tone.

“And then there was me. Before I met Aikawa, I was a shy person who never had any friends.”

“You don't have many friends now either.”

Orito ignored Mihara's retort and continued speaking, his vocal tone not changing one bit.

“During elementary school, I had the impulse to steal a recorder.”

“Don't just talk about doing awful things like it's nothing at all. Well, I guess I'd expect that coming from you though.”

I could imagine Mihara's cold eyes right now even if I couldn't see them.

“At the end of the day, the recorder's owner realized this and raised a huge fuss about it. I was too shy and frightened to say anything, but Aikawa took the blame for it. He said he had lost it after playing with it for a bit, but also mentioned that his recorder was new and so handed it over. He covered for my crime.”

Did something like that really happen? I couldn't remember at all.

“Aikawa-kun... does have that side to him...”

Hiramatsu seemed fairly sure of herself.

“He’s pretty unreliable, but he does pull through at the last second, so I guess in some sense he’s kinda reliable too.”

I can’t believe such an admirable thought had come from Tomonori’s mouth. Good, good. Keep on talking me up!

“He’s a huge masochist, I suppose.”

Saras sounded rather impressed. Hey hey hey! Now all the good stuff that people said about Aikawa-kun has gone to nothing!

“Well, anyway, I happily took that recorder home with me.”

“You didn’t even return it? You’re the worst!”

“Orito-kun... would do something like that... I suppose...”

“Come on, let’s just chalk this up to my own youthful indiscretion. Just give me a break on this one.”

“So, why would Aikawa-kun stay in Japan for someone like *that?*”

“Because Aikawa’s been in love with me since elementary school.”

Someone punch him in the face! Punch him in the face for me!

Laughter rang through the room. In the midst of that laughter...

“Orito-kun, are you sure that you’re not the one who fell in love with Aikawa-kun?”

Nene-san spoke with a hint of teasing in her voice, and Orito responded bluntly.

–

“Yeah, maybe. I probably fell in love with Aikawa before anybody else.”

–

Orito’s voice was as annoying and disgusting as always.

I felt so disgusted hearing him talk that I... decided to *really* fall asleep.

TRANSLATOR’S NOTES

(1) During the new year in Japan, Buddhist temples ring their bells 108 times to symbolize the 108 human sins.

Part 2.

Two hours passed before I woke up.

I saw Orito and the others silently doing their work and wanted to get back into it as quickly as possible too. I saw Nene-san sitting on her chair drinking coffee, so I asked her.

“Nene-san, where’s the next part of the manuscript?”

Nene-san smiled.

“That’s the last of it.”

Ohh! Everyone’s eyes widened. We were done. We made it.

An indescribable feeling of accomplishment filled the room.

“It’s all because everyone helped. Thanks.”

Nene-san gave us all a gentle smile.

Yeah, if everyone hadn’t pitched in, I would’ve never been able to finish all this work by myself.

“When we’re in trouble, we have to help each other, after all.”

Mihara winked. She was kinda cute right now.

Nene-san seemed to be done with her part as well. She lounged back in her chair and crossed her legs while giving the manuscript a final check through.

I saw her face stiffen a bit.

“Is something... the matter?”

Hiramatsu seemed worried.

“N-Nah... well...”

I took a glance at the manuscript Nene-san was holding... and I immediately could spot some things that seemed out of place.

The female protagonist was holding a cat. It was a super serious scene too, but for some reason she was suddenly holding a cat. Was this... Saras’s doing? She had wanted to draw something like this, after all.

There were also points where the castle in the background suddenly became a huge humanoid fighting robot.

... That was Haruna, wasn’t it? She probably got bored of just drawing castles.

There was also a peaceful scene where the main character was eating dinner in her room... and Steven Seagal was also there brandishing a pistol. This must’ve been Yuu. She probably saw Haruna’s drawing and decided to have a bit of fun with the art herself by drawing in her beloved Seagal.

And then... there was also a horrifying monster gracing some of the pages.

I mean, I had no idea where the face of this monster began and where it ended..it was seriously eerie to look at. It took less than a second for me to realize that Sera had drawn this.

It was a monster that looked like it could've come straight from the Cthulhu Mythos, and there was a speech bubble above its head which said "I-It's not like I'm doing this for you, okay?!"

"Those girls... Nene-san, I'm sorry! I'll go start fixing all this right away-"

Nene-san's shoulders began to shake, unable to keep herself calm anymore.

"Ahahahaha!It's fine, it's fine. Let's just leave it like this. This is just way too surreal."

"But it makes zero sense."

"It's a doujinshi after all, so having a bit of fun with it is par for the course."

Was she saying that for real, or was she just trying to be considerate?

"Hm. I do believe this is a wonderful piece of work."

Saras spoke proudly with her arms crossed. Well, I was glad she was satisfied with this. After all, she had been able to do something she wanted to do.

"Yes, it's fine, it's fine." Nene-san tried to quell my anger.

“So, I really want to compensate everyone for their efforts...”

“Eh? It’s fine... we don’t need that...”

Hiramatsu waved her hand back and forth.

“Hmmm... okay, I’ll just buy a Christmas present for everyone then.”

“I-It’s really fine... you don’t have to...”

Hiramatsu’s hand-waving became all the more vigorous.

“Yeah, she’s right. We really didn’t help that much.”

Mihara mixed in a yawn as she said that, massaging her tired hand.

“I think Aikawa should get one though!”

Tomonori pointed at me. I mean, getting a bit of help with beating Chris was ample compensation. I didn’t need a Christmas present.

But there was one of us who had no shame.

“What about me?” The spiky-haired guy in the group stuck out his tongue teasingly.

“You only came today, didn’t you...”

Mihara smacked Orito on the back with all her might.

But, to be honest, Orito being here had really helped us lighten the workload by a lot.

“Do you have anything you want?”

Nene-san gave a stretch. Her explosively large boobs waved from side to side. I heard Orito gulp and push his glasses up his nose.

“... Okay, well, maybe if I could grope Nene-san’s huge explosive boobs just once... guhehehe.”

“Hmm, what should I do... well, maybe if just for a bit...”

Nene-san teasingly crossed her arms, her huge breasts resting on top of them.

“Eh? Huh? You’re okay with that idea? I can do it? Really?”

“Nah, that was a joke. Ahahaha! You sure looked cute right then.”

Nene-san burst out laughing, while the corner of Mihara’s mouth twitched in irritation.

“C-Cute? ... This woman is seriously strange in the head.”

“..... Y-Yeah... maybe... a bit...”

Hiramatsu and Mihara looked at each other and nodded.

“Well, anyway... I do want to thank you all though.”

Nene-san crossed her legs atop her chair and looked at us for help.

“Well, okay. I’ll take the pay then, and I can use that to buy a Christmas present for Haruna and Sera and the others, since they all worked so hard. Also, we can all go out for sushi.”

This way, Nene-san wouldn’t lose any face either.

“Sushi?” Nene-san’s eyes widened, puzzled by my words.

“Ah, so you remembered.” Mihara mumbled that, almost acting as if she had forgotten herself.

“Yeah. Mihara told me I had to treat her to sushi.”

“I see. Okay, sure. Go and eat your fill.”

Nene-san took out her bulging wallet as she spoke. She began to count out ten-thousand-yen bills.

“So... is something like this enough?”

Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, a hundred... two hundred thousand yen. Even if you weren't a student, that was a huge amount of money.

“Wow! Hey, let's go to Harajuku (1) with this! There's a sushi place there I've always wanted to try.”

Mihara's eyes sparkled. Harajuku, huh... I could probably pick up the Christmas presents over there too.

“Honestly, for all of your help, that's the least I could do. Go ahead and go shopping.”

Still smiling, Nene-san fell asleep.

Now that I think about it, she's been awake for a while now, hasn't she?

Thanks for your hard work today, Nene-san.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

(1) A fairly stylish district of Tokyo for the younger crowd, and also fairly expensive.

Part 3.

Now that we've gotten our hands on all this money, we decided to go shopping right away.

I really didn't know what kind of present would make Yuu and Sera the happiest. Haruna had mentioned she wanted a horned owl plushie, but neither Sera nor Yuu owned a single stuffed animal.

Well, no harm in just trying a bunch of things and seeing what stuck.

Mihara and Saras seemed to be into the same type of thing as Sera.

Hiramatsu would probably match well with Yuu.

Tomonori and Haruna often agreed on things.

And Orito was just completely useless in this scenario.

We were in the Koto Ward of Tokyo right now, which was on the East side of Tokyo. Meanwhile, Harajuku was basically in the city center.

We were also in the height of Christmas season, so Harajuku was overflowing with couples.

Blinding light displays filled the streets around us as handsome guys and pretty girls walked to and fro. The street in front of the station was so crowded you'd think we just had a fireworks festival or something.

We walked along Meijidoori and Omotesandou, two popular shopping spots, as Orito glared at all the happy couples around us.

The first shop we headed for was... a sports equipment shop!

“Why the hell are we starting here?”

I couldn't help but voice my concerns.

Tomonori was next to me, her eyes glittering. To think she would be completely useless here too...

“If you want to buy Master a present, you gotta get her a soccer ball!”

Tomonori grabbed me by the arm and seemed eager to get into the shop.

“Only boys would be happy with that present!”

“Ehh, but Master seems to like sports and stuff too...”

Ugh. Well, whatever. Feeling resigned, we all shuffled into the sports equipment shop in succession.

First were me and Tomonori. We were followed by Hiramatsu and Mihara. Saras and Orito brought up the rear.

“Ah, this one looks good.”

Mihara spoke up as soon as we got into the store. I saw that there were some shoes on sale near the store entrance. Had she found some fashionable sneakers or something?

“... Which one?” Hiramatsu asked.

“These basketball shoes.”

Basketball shoes?! Oh, right, I guess she was on the basketball team.

“These were the ones that Anderson-kun wanted.”

Mihara picked up some really large basketball shoes and held them out to me, but I didn’t take them from her.

“Doesn’t he already have a lot of these things?”

“He’s like a collector, honestly. He has a huge mountain of them.”

Well, then he probably doesn’t need another one-

“So that means these are probably pretty great quality. Maybe Sera or somebody would like them.”

“Aikawa, a soccer ball is the best idea! Seriously, just trust me.”

“Okay, okay, fine. I’ll trust you.”

I took the basketball shoes and... holy crap these were expensive. I really couldn’t get these. Well, it’s not like anybody actually wanted them, so whatever.

Actually, wait. They could be a decent gag gift. I’ll just give some basketball shoes to Tomonori later. She’ll probably get a kick out of them since she’s actually on the track team.

Okay, I’ll buy a cheap pair and make it a Christmas present.

And so, I ended up purchasing a pair of basketball shoes and a soccer ball. It was probably safe to say that both these things would end up going to Tomonori.

Next, we headed for the part of a big department store where they sold small articles. This would probably be where the real

shopping began. Sera really liked small accessories, and getting her a gift that would last was probably the best idea.

Orito and I watched from a distance as the girls excitedly window shopped.

“Ah, this one looks good.”

“... This... does look good...”

Mihara and Hiramatsu both had grabbed a heart-shaped anklet.

“You two aren’t just picking out things *you* would like, right?”

I half-jokingly admonished them as they continued to happily fish for accessories.

“Ehh, of couuuurse nooooooot~~~...”

Why the hell was she saying it like that? Mihara’s excitement levels were definitely maxed right now.

And I was sure now that these girls were just looking for things they personally liked.

Well, Sera and Haruna were both girls though. So maybe the things these girls here picked out would be good. At the very least, the things they picked out would make better gifts than a soccer ball...

More importantly, we had to find that stuffed horned owl. We began to wander around and around and around the shop in search of it.

Shops that specialized in stuffed animals were pretty rare, and we definitely checked out a lot of the department stores and

accessory stores and arcades (which could offer stuffed animals as prizes)...

“... Ah... this owl... doesn’t have horns... either...”

“Horned owls are rather special, I guess. I’ve never seen many around here.”

Saras crossed her arms, looking a bit resigned.

Horned owls were rather rare creatures to begin with.

No matter where I went, all I saw were bears or cats, and all of them were rather familiar looking.

Indeed, the only stuffed animals being sold around here seemed to be stuffed animals of characters who already had names.

Even when we finally thought we found an owl, it was a normal owl and not a horned one. This was hard. If this continued, Haruna would end up with a soccer ball for Christmas. If that happened, I was in for a rough morning.

Mihara and Tomonori had dumped all their bags onto Orito, and right now they were probably going on a huge impulsive shopping spree in the accessories corner. Meanwhile, Saras and Hiramatsu wanted to help me find that stuffed animal, so we wandered around the department store. Hiramatsu paused when we got to the bedding section.

“Ah... this pillow... I wonder if it’d be good...”

“As a present for Haruna?”

“No... for Nene-san...”

Pat pat. She pat the pillow a bit, checking its firmness. Ah, right, Sera had said something about Nene-san liking firm pillows.

“Yeah, you’re right. She’s been a big help, after all. We should get her a Christmas present.”

Hiramatsu roamed around the bedding section and then stopped again in a particular place.

The cushion corner?

She stared at a hug pillow style of cushion which was around a meter in length. It had what looked like a rather ugly dog’s head attached, and the entire pillow seemed to be made to resemble a dachshund.

“Do you want that?”

“... Eh? ... Umm... not really... I...”

Hiramatsu looked away in slight panic. Saras saw her and gave her a small smile.

“It’s clear on your face. You want that cushion.”

The price was 4000 yen. Wow, for such an ugly dog...

“So Hiramatsu likes stuff like this...”

By “this,” I meant stuff that was both cute and easygoing. Man, that dog just looked like such an idiot. And that face of his was so ugly...

“It... kind of looks like... Aikawa-kun.”

Eh? Looks like me? But before I could object, Saras cut in.

“Hm. I was about to say the same thing.”

After hearing that, I could do nothing but give out a strained smile.

“This... might be nice... to give to Nene-san too...”

“Yeah. She sleeps on her chair a lot, so a cushion like this might be nice.”

So, I ended up buying a firm pillow and this dog cushion with the moronic-looking head.

That settles Nene-san’s gifts then.

But we still needed to buy a present for Haruna. I glanced over at Saras and Hiramatsu.

“If you two want anything feel free to buy it too. This compensation I got from Nene-san belongs to all of us.”

“That’s... I don’t... need anything.”

As expected from Hiramatsu.

“If I said I wanted my darling for Christmas, would you oblige me?”

As expected from Saras.

“If I ever see them selling a figure of me I’ll get it for you.”

I jokingly responded and chuckled.

In any case, we had to look for Haruna’s present.

“..... A stuffed horned owl... where could we find something like that...?”

Hiramatsu let out a sigh at the thought of what could be an impossible search.

I saw Saras also with a hand held up to her mouth. She had this rather annoyed look on her face, like she wanted to say something but couldn't.

“What's wrong?”

“Hm? Ah... it's just that... hmm...”

It was rare to see Saras at a loss for words like this.

“You have something on your mind, don't you?”

“As expected from my darling. Mi amore, in Italian. We understand each other.”

Saras nodded, looking thoughtful.

“Just quit it and tell me what's wrong.”

“Hm. I do believe I have an idea where we could find a stuffed horned owl.”

Was it a shop run by a vampire ninja? Saras was living as a normal high school student, so I wouldn't be surprised if there was a vampire ninja somewhere who ran a shop.

“For now, let's regroup with Tomonori and the others.”

“Yeah... let's meet back up with everyone...”

I called Tomonori on my cell phone and waited for her at the department store entrance.

“Hey! Aikawaaa!”

Stop waving so frantically at me. God, that was embarrassing.

Tomonori dashed over to us looking like she had had the time of her life shopping.

Meanwhile, Orito also hobbled over, carrying a huge number of shopping bags and not looking all too happy.

“I want to go home.”

He mumbled a complaint, but nobody paid him any mind.

In any case, it seemed they had bought a whole lot of things.

With this much stuff, I should be able to avoid Sera’s wrath.

“We’re headed for a shop that specializes in stuffed animals.”

“Ah! That one! I know it.”

Mihara’s face brightened up and she nodded, seeming to remember something.

“You know it? That’s impressive.”

“Eh? Ahh, I mean... yeah, sure.”

“Kanami-chan is... like a Shopping Queen...”

Hiramatsu let out a small, shy chuckle. Mihara seemed like such a stylish, modern girl, but she still liked stuffed animals? Or maybe she just knew a lot about shops in this area.

“Well then. Let us depart, darling.”

Saras knew the way, so she took the lead. We proceeded away from the main road that was filled with the noisy jingles of Christmas music; the crowds were getting thinner and thinner around us. We walked quite a distance like that, and around the time when Orito had finally fallen into silence, I caught sight of a shop with a load of stuffed animals on display.

“If you want something weird like a horned owl, it’s best to search here. They don’t sell stuffed animals of famous animal characters at all. It’s more like a stuffed animal zoo.”

Certainly, I could see a number of different types of stuffed animals in the shop window.

Feeling more hopeful, I quickly walked towards the shop.

“Aikawa~~. Can you just take half?”

Orito was holding so many bags that he looked like a waiter at a bar who was trying to bring a dozen beer mugs to a table. But I rejected his request.

“I have my hands full too.”

This hug pillow was really bulky, after all.

The one who finally offered help to the downtrodden Orito was Hiramatsu.

“I... can carry some?”

“Thanks so much. It seems like there’s only one Goddess here today.”

Orito’s glasses clouded over, his face filling with emotion.

“I suppose I will carry some as well.”

Next, Saras offered her help. She glanced at me, as if she wanted to emphasize to me how kind of a person she was.

Honestly, she didn’t have to go out of her way to emphasize that. I already knew.

“So, what did you end up buying anyways?”

I was curious what kind of gifts Mihara had chosen. Mihara answered back happily.

“Got a bag and a heart-shaped necklace. They’re really cute, so I’m sure I made the right choice~~.”

I hadn’t even thought of a bag as a potential option. Guys always just carried the same bag around, but girls just piled bags on top of bags like a Russian nesting doll, and used a different bag every day.

Impressed, I gave Mihara a nod. Meanwhile, Tomonori’s girlish eyes were sparkling.

“There’re so many stuffed animals! I kinda want one now too!”

Tomonori had both her hands on the display window, her eyes shining.

... I lied. Those were definitely boyish eyes.

I felt I was looking at a small boy who wanted a clarinet for Christmas or something. If I were a generous father, I would be turning to Tomonori right now and going “sonny, do you want that?”

“There are a few stuffed animal specialty shops in Harajuku, but if you want to find something rather rare then this is where you have to go.”

Ah, I see. In that case, we could’ve probably just chosen to meet up here.

Perhaps he was tired, but Orito plopped himself down on the entranceway stairs.

Well, it's not like it was a lingerie shop or anything, and I doubt there was much for him in a stuffed animal store, so once he saw exactly where we were headed he just gave up.

If he waited inside it would be a bother to the other customers anyways. It was pretty cold, but he and his grossness would figure out a way to deal with it. So, we ended up handing off all our baggage to him and going into the shop.

Unsurprisingly, a Christmas song was playing inside.

There were even more couples and girls inside than there were around the entrance. We all split up and began to search.

Searching might not be very easy, considering there were so many things being sold here.

I took a quick look around, and saw that Saras had stopped in her tracks and was staring at a stuffed animal.

She took it from the shelf, tested out how it felt to the touch, hugged it tight and tested out how it felt there too, and then put it back on the shelf. She crossed her arms and nodded twice.

“You found it?”

“Hm? N-No... the horned owl is not here, but...”



Saras looked a bit flustered, perhaps because I had so suddenly called out to her. She turned around, looking like she was trying to hide the shelf behind her.

When I tried to get a peek at what she had been looking at, she brought her face close to mine, blocking my view. I got really really curious what she was trying so hard to hide, and finally managed to grab a look. It was a stuffed animal of a chicken.

“... You like this kind of stuff?”

“Do not be ridiculous. Why would I like anything like this?”

Well, certainly, Saras didn't seem to be the type to like stuffed animals.

“Well, sorry. So, why were you looking at that then?”

“... Um, t-that's... well... mmm... perhaps this would also make a suitable present?”

“That stuffed chicken? It's not very cute, is it?”

“Not very cute... I see. Do you not find me cute either...?”

“Rather than cute, I'd say you're more beautiful. So I won't deny that.”

“Hm? What's going on over here?”

Mihara walked over. Mihara was a high school girl, so she probably had a pretty good sense of what was cute and what wasn't. I showed her the stuffed chicken and asked her about it.

“Hm, looks pretty cute to me.”

She agreed with Saras. Well, okay, maybe it was possible then...

“But we’re here to find a stuffed owl.”

“Yes. That is true.” Saras looked a bit reluctant as she left that shelf behind.

Now that I was alone with Mihara, I tried to strike up a conversation.

“Mihara, you seem to know a lot about this kind of stuff.”

“Hmm, well, I don’t think you could say I know *a lot*...”

Conversation over. Now that I thought about it, there weren’t many things I could talk about with Mihara. I was almost never alone with her anyway since Tomonori or Orito were usually there. Even if I was alone with her, it’s not like there was much to talk about between someone on the basketball team and someone who wasn’t a part of any team at all.

“Ah, I’ll just go ask an employee.”

Dammit, while I was thinking about all this, Mihara just up and left.

I don’t think she hated me or anything... but I guess I got the feeling that we weren’t very close.

Well, I also guess that a zombie like me would never be able to just so casually go up to a shop employee and talk with them.

Mihara sprinted back toward me with a smile on her face.

“They don’t have horned owls, he said!”

Why the hell were you smiling then?! I wanted to retort with that, but Mihara kept on smiling and continued.

“But he also told me about a place that might have them.”

Nice one, milady! I quickly went around the shop, gathering everyone up again.

As I was doing that, I noticed Saras once again standing in front of the stuffed chicken.

She looked really interested in it, so I just grabbed the chicken off the shelf.

“I’ll buy it for you.”

“Hm? You make it sound like I want you to buy it for me.”

“Don’t you? You want this stuffed animal, don’t you?”

“No... I don’t mind either way. Just give it to one of the freeloaders in your house. This is... a nice piece of work.”

“But I haven’t bought a Christmas present for you yet.”

“Just being together like this is enough to make me supremely happy.”

I was sincerely happy to hear that, but I definitely also wanted to get her something.

Well, if Haruna didn’t like it I could always give it to Yuu, I guess. I brought the stuffed chicken to the register.

Part 4.

After that, we had to go through three stores before finally finding the stuffed horned owl. I really didn’t expect it to take

this long; by that time it was already 9 in the evening. Feeling like we should also make it up to the exhausted Orito somehow, we ended up going to a rotary sushi restaurant.

“I knew we were visiting a sushi restaurant, but what is this? Is this one of those ‘rotary sushi’ restaurants?”

Saras was so high society that she probably always ate at famous sushi restaurants, so it seemed like this was her first trip to a rotary sushi. How bourgeois of her.

We were led inside and the six of us sat at a long bench.

Hiramatsu and I were seated furthest in, which means that we were probably the ones responsible for grabbing the plate off the conveyor belt.

“Hoshigawa-san, is this your first time at a rotary sushi? Wow, I wouldn’t have guessed at all~~.”

Mihara, was sitting next to me, teased Saras a bit.

“I don’t think it’s that surprising.”

Next to Saras, Orito sat down adjacent to the aisle and put all the bags he was carrying onto the floor with a sigh. He really looked tired.

“She does look like she would be eating at all the expensive restaurants...”

There was a hint of jealousy in Mihara’s voice. Saras let out a small chuckle.

“I will not deny that, but I can eat anything. Even the wild grass that grows next to the road.”

“Ah, we did do some training like that, didn’t we. Getting shoved off into the wilderness and told to survive with just a knife.”

Tomonori had her usual happy expression on as she thought back.

Wait, was that really okay? Talking about their ninja training out in the open like that.

“Liar. There’s no high schooler in the world who goes off and does weird war training stuff like that.”

Mihara and Orito both laughed.

“I’m being serious! I’m really good at survival games like that. Right, Saras-... erm, I mean Hoshigawa.”

“Who knows. Don’t look at me.”

Saras probably didn’t want any normal people knowing that she was a ninja, so she swiftly swept Tomonori’s statement under the rug.

“So, what are we eating?”

Saras tried to change the subject.

“Well, first, pass me the murasaki.”

“Murasaki?”

Orito looked really alarmed. I also had no idea what they were talking about.

“... She is talking about the soy sauce.”

Hiramatsu seemed to understand. Ah, so we were using specialized sushi lingo then. Ugh, so difficult to understand...

“Oh. I thought you had seen a demon slayer or something. You scared me there.”

I decided not to ask what he was confusing things with and passed the soy sauce to Saras. (1)

“So, if we’re at a rotary sushi, what exactly rotates?”

“Ah, you see, there’s this conveyer belt here which goes around the entire restaurant, and the plates circle around on it.”

“Plates?” Saras cocked her head to the side, looking a bit dubious.

“Ah, right. At normal sushi restaurants the food comes on wooden planks, doesn’t it.”

Tomonori fidgeted her hands back and forth, trying to imitate the *geta* wooden planks you would find in Edo-style sushi restaurants.

“Anyway, just wait. The sushi will come rolling around...”

Hm?

“Rolling around...”

“It’s not coming.”

The conveyer belt just sadly rotated without any sushi on it. What was the meaning of this? Maybe I should call over a waiter.

“Ah, Aikawa. Over there.”

Tomonori tapped me on the shoulder. It seemed like she had realized something.

I followed her lead and raised myself up, taking a good look towards the other side of the conveyer belt.

And then, I quickly pulled myself back down. On the other side was...

“Come on, come on, more more more! Don’t think you can fill my genius belly with just that!”

A girl with an ahoge was bouncing in her seat on the other side. She needed a lesson in manners...

“Haruna, please sit still.”

A ponytailed girl admonished her, almost like a mother. Next to her sat a silver-haired girl wearing a suit of plate armor.

Indeed, my own home’s freeloaders were right there. They had finished working on the manuscript, so they had probably decided to go shopping in Harajuku, where the youth of Tokyo gathered, and now they were here enjoying a sophisticated meal.

This was bad. Haruna still believed in Santa Claus, so I couldn’t let her see the Christmas presents we had bought.

“Let’s make an order!”

Tomonori leaned forward and pushed the call button on the intercom. A lot of recent rotary sushi restaurants let you order using a touch panel, but it seems that here you ordered directly using the intercom.

“What would you like to order?” A voice came from the intercom.

“Chawan mushi please!” (2)

Tomonori shouted loudly. Hey, don't make so much noise. They're going to realize we're here.

Everyone ordered what they wanted, and after a few minutes what we ordered began to roll towards us on the conveyer belt. The message “your order is in the yellow plate” soon displayed on our intercom screen.

The yellow plate on the conveyer belt also had a “customer order” sign stuck to it.

I see. So that plate contained the food we had asked for.

“Hm, this reminds me quite a lot of nagare soumen.” (3)

Saras mumbled that. It was her first time seeing a rotary sushi at work. And yeah, now that I think about it, I'll admit that maybe this kind of system was based on nagare soumen.

Haruna didn't end up snatching up our order, possibly because Sera was there to stop her.

Not good. I couldn't stop thinking about what was happening on the other side of the conveyer belt.

Oh, Haruna seemed to have just pushed the call button.

“What would you like to order?”

“A martini for table eight.”

Martini?! What the hell? What kind of bar were we supposed to be in?!

A waiter came over to our table, holding onto something.

“This is from the customers over there.”

We were table eight?! Crap, it looks like we were completely found out.

But, we were also all high school students, so I refused the martini.

“Orito. Just try to keep the horned owl stuffed animal hidden. I’m going to give that to Haruna as Santa later.”

But it didn’t seem like Orito was listening to me.

I slipped under the table and reached into one of the paper bags at Orito’s feet. I found the plastic bag with the owl in it and stuffed it as deep into the bag as it would go.

The paper bag swelled up. But at least like this, nobody should be able to figure out what was inside. Ugh, the things I have to do...

When I lifted my head, I saw thighs, thighs, thighs in front of me.

I gulped, and stared at the beautiful thighs in front of me that were peeking out from the girls’ skirts.

Saras uncrossed and recrossed her legs in the opposite order. I could swear I just caught a glimpse of her panties there.

To think there was such a paradise waiting for me right here...

“Mmm, so Haruna-sensei still believes in Santa Claus.”

“Fufu... she has... her cute side too..”

Their kneecaps squirmed around. This was bad. Bad bad bad. I’m going to turn into a complete pervert down here.

Putting an innocent expression on my face, I retreated from the heaven that existed under the table.

Mihara, who was a lover of cute things, looked lovingly over at Haruna on the other side of the conveyer belt.

“I see. That’s why Aikawa was so desperately looking for a stuffed animal.”

Stop smiling at me like that.

“Don’t you dare let Master find out that you’re Santa! You better make her happy!”

Stop talking like you’re some overly considerate middle-aged fishmonger. Haruna’s going to hear you!

“The sushi... seems to be coming.”

“Ohh! Aikawa! Hurry hurry!”

Yeah yeah. Urged on by Tomonori, both Hiramatsu and I started to grab sushi from the conveyer belt and arranged it on the table.

“This is *that* place, right?! The sushi place where you can order anything?!”

Tomonori quickly began to eat her tuna which she had doused with the dressing she had brought along.

“Yup, it is. We’re at the Funny Weird Rotary Sushi. No returns accepted.”

Funny weird rotary sushi? What the hell was that? Ah, I guess like the martini we had gotten a bit ago, you could order really weird things here?

“... I... wanted to come here once... maybe... we should order something weird?”

“Let’s test them to see if they really have everything.”

Mihara and Hiramatsu gave each other a smile. Meanwhile, Orito just sat there, still exhausted and stuffing his cheeks with sushi.

We might’ve been surrounded by pretty girls here, but they were the usual suspects so it wasn’t all too exciting for Orito probably. Definitely not anything to get worked up over.

He also didn’t seem to realize that Haruna and the others were here. Well, if I mentioned to him that Sera was here he’d probably go back to his old self, but there was nothing in the world more annoying than his old self so I’ll restrain myself.

“Ohh, the ootoro is so good...” Mihara let out a shiver.

“Yes... it’s... delicious...”

Hiramatsu smiled, her smile partially covered by a hand she was using to politely cover her lips as she chewed. When I saw that smile though, I knew it had been worth it to come.

I poured myself some tea as I glanced over the menu. I really was impressed at how many sushi toppings they had on offer here.

The one topping that most caught my eye though was “wasabi eggplant.”

I assumed that would be sushi topped with pickled eggplant... but there was a little smiley face printed next to the menu

item. That mark meant that the item was child-friendly and had no wasabi.

Wasabi eggplant without any wasabi... what the hell was that supposed to be?! Well, no, I got what they meant. There was probably some wasabi flavoring on the pickled eggplant, but there wasn't any actual wasabi spread on the sushi rice.

... But was it really necessary for them to keep that wasabi off the rice? I mean, the damn eggplant was already wasabi flavored...

“Let's order more! More more!”

Tomonori leaned forwards and pushed the intercom button. Tomonori had the largest breasts out of anybody at our table, and they jiggled as she moved. I saw Orito cheer up a bit at the sight of them.

“What would you like to order?”

“A melon,” said Tomonori.

“Paella.” Mihara made a completely unreasonable request.

“Sorry, but I have to ask. Is the wasabi eggplant without eggplant actually any good at all?”

I asked that to the intercom, a bit of a smile on my face.

“.....” No response.

“Well, nevermind. Umm... a cream croquette, please.”

I was hoping for some kind of reaction, but I guess I shouldn't have expected it. The people who set the menu were most likely different from the people working the intercom.

But I'm pretty sure a sushi place wouldn't have any paella. I thought that, but...

Some paella came casually rolling down the conveyer belt.

So I guess they could really put anything we wanted on sushi.
(4)

"Ahahaha, the paella really came."

Mihara really did look happy. There wasn't much paella coming towards us, but it was definitely recognizably paella.

And of course, the melon also came down the belt. Tomonori wasted no time in dousing it with dressing.

But, my cream croquette never came... instead, I got an order of wasabi eggplant.

"Aikawa tried to be fresh back there, so of course this would happen."

Mihara chuckled and pointed at the wasabi eggplant.

I regretted having said anything strange into the intercom and grabbed the plate of wasabi eggplant, putting it on the table.

On the other side of the belt, Haruna's table pushed the intercom.

"What would you like to order?"

"Whale, Shanghai crab, and foie gras."

Haruna was being pretty unreasonable too, but everything she asked for came down on the conveyer belt. It just made me all the sadder about my plate of wasabi eggplant.

"Let's order more stuff! More stuff!"

Tomonori looked like she was having a hell of a lot of fun as she leaned forward and pushed the intercom button.

“Shall we ask for an order of yellowtail engawa?”

Mihara seemed puzzled at Saras’s request.

“Engawa? Isn’t that flounder?”

“Engawa refers to the head of a fish. It is not limited to flounder.”

“Ohhh.” The idiot Tomonori seemed impressed by that piece of knowledge.

“Will that be all?”

Without a moment’s delay, I also made an order.

“I’ll have a tuna roll please.”

I ordered something normal. I really didn’t want to get full off just wasabi eggplant.

“Curry! I want some curry!”

Well, if they had paella they probably had curry too.

Soon, a roll of curry wrapped in seaweed and a strange-looking plate of engawa came rolling down the belt.

And then, there was another plate of wasabi eggplant... dammit, I think I really pissed off the chef.

“An Indian elephant for table eight!”

Haruna’s voice echoed through the restaurant. Maybe she was ordering stuff for me out of pity... but, an Indian elephant...

“So, how’s your first rotary sushi experience? Pretty good, right?”

Mihara put her elbows on the table and looked at Saras.

“It was certainly not unsatisfactory.”

It was a typical response from Saras, but Mihara didn’t seem happy with it.

“When you put it like that, it makes the rest of us who are here ranting and raving about the food look like idiots.”

“Not true. You all have food that you all like. I will not deny you that. More importantly, stop letting the purple soak into the rice.”

“Huh? What the hell does that mean? There has to be a more normal way to say that!”

“Hey hey, Kanami. Don’t get so angry... let’s just all have fun, okay?”

Tomonori tried to calm Mihara down.

“But... but...”

The atmosphere started to become tense when a waiter came over.

“This is from the table over there.”

She put a plate of wasabi eggplant in front of us. They probably couldn’t find an Indian elephant to serve us with... yeah, that must’ve been it.

My mood began to sink just as low as Orito’s. My face was also probably stiffening.

“A-Actually... I think sensei also... wanted to have sushi.....
he told us that before break.”

By “sensei,” she probably was talking about the Demon Baron.

“But he also said that he had forgotten his doctor had ordered
him to not have sushi.”

I added onto Hiramatsu’s story.

I was trying to blow away the tense atmosphere that Mihara
and Saras had started to create around our table.

“The homeroom teacher for Class C? Where did your other
homeroom teacher go anyways?”

Tomonori also jumped into the conversation.

Our other homeroom teacher was Kurisu Takeshi. She was
now the strongest masou shoujo and was probably somewhere
gulping down sake. Maybe she was even back at Nene-san’s
place right now.

“I like... that homeroom teacher too...”

Hiramatsu sadly began to eat the wasabi eggplant. She
probably had guessed that I didn’t want to eat it.

“Ah, he wasn’t very exciting or anything, but class always ran
smoothly.”

Mihara still didn’t look very happy as she ate her paella. She
didn’t seem like she was planning on ordering any sushi.

“He didn’t really stand out very much, but he was a good
teacher.”

Orito added his two cents, even though he still looked down.

Saras and I just listened to their words quietly.

After all, we knew that we had to take down Chris.

Tomonori also knew the true state of affairs, but...

“That sensei helped me improve my grades, ya know? He was really, reaaaaaally good at teaching.”

Tomonori nodded a few times. Well, I had heard that even in Virie, Chris had taught Haruna’s teacher, Dai-sensei. So, it’s no wonder she would be good at teaching.

Tomonori... she considered Chris and Kurisu Takeshi as two separate people, didn’t she?

Was it because she was an idiot? Or maybe she was just being tactful.

Everyone started talking more and more about Chris.

Saras and I couldn’t really join in on the conversation, but just ate our sushi while occasionally saying a word or two in agreement.

“... Aikawa-kun... did you... not like Kurisu-sensei?”

Hiramatsu looked apologetic as she asked me that. I shook my head and instantaneously responded.

“I didn’t not like sensei we had named Kurisu.”

“What’s up with that way of putting it? Aikawa, you’re doing it too? You got something to say to us?”

Crap. Looked like I had brought Mihara’s wrath down upon me.

“A tuna roll for table eight.”

Haruna once again made an order for us, sounding almost like she was trying to play a game of battleship or something.

I had wanted to eat a tuna roll... Haruna, nice one.

“Uh, I mean... well, I’m just shy I guess. It’s embarrassing to say you like someone. This girl here too, I’m sure she really thinks all of this is delicious.”

I pointed my thumb at Saras and tried to make an excuse for her.

“No, it really isn’t very delicious. It isn’t unsatisfactory either though.”

Ugh, too honest, Saras, too honest. Honesty can run you into all sorts of trouble, you know.

“What about the yellowtail engawa? You’re the one who ordered that.”

“Well, I mostly was just testing their claim that we could order anything. The flavor itself was... so-so.”

“Tae-chan, what about you? It’s all really delicious, right?”

“... Yes... I... think it’s all very good...”

“As expected, a high-class girl like yourself doesn’t understand the tastes of us commoners.”

Saras just looked resigned as she began to eat a piece of pickled ginger.

We had to try to deal with this gingerly here... as gingerly as the ginger Saras was eating. Haha.

“We have to try to deal with this gingerly here... as gingerly as the ginger she’s eating! Haha!”

I heard the pun running through my head come out of Tomonori’s mouth, and I held my head in pain.

Was I seriously on the same level as that idiot?

“The ginger is delicious.”

Seeing Saras eat the ginger, Mihara also tried a piece.

“Really? It’s not unsatisfactory I guess, but is it really that delicious~~?”

Mihara gave Saras a self-satisfied look. Saras frowned and stiffened.

It looked like these two just were not going to get along.

We approached the onset of an all-out war, when...

“This is from the table over there.”

The waiter set a plate of wasabi eggplant in front of me.

I fell deeper into depression.

TRANSLATOR’S NOTES

(1) Yeah a cursory Google search turned up some R18 results, so let’s not ask either.

(2) A savory steamed egg custard dish, often with meat.

(3) Literally “flowing noodles,” a system where noodles are sent down a bamboo half-pipe with a stream of cold water for people to eat.

(4) There was an impossible to translate pun here. “neta” can both mean “joke” and “sushi topping,” and Ayumu commented on this here. Doesn’t work in English though at all so I omitted it.

Part 5.

After filling my belly up with those awful pieces of wasabi eggplant, I left the sushi restaurant with the others and we headed for Harajuku station. We strolled down Meijidoori, which was so in the Christmas spirit that even the traffic lights seemed like part of the Christmas decorations. I stopped when I came across Sera and Yuu.

“Ayumu.” Sera’s beautiful voice called out to me. Her voice was beautiful... but it was also scary.

“What’s up?”

I watched the girls walking in front of me and responded to Sera without turning to meet her gaze.

“Yuki-chan, that was really good, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah! Let’s come again!”

“..... Sushi is a rare treat... and that makes it even more delicious...”

Mihara, Tomonori, and Hiramatsu were happily walking as a group, while Saras followed them silently from behind, and Orito hobbled along as well with drooped shoulders.

Orito looked seriously dead. Almost like a zombie.

“Well, your face is disgusting so I don’t mind if you don’t look at me, but... exactly why did you not call out to us back at the sushi restaurant?”

“Where’s Haruna?”

The silver-haired girl in front of me suddenly slipped to my side.

Ayumu did not seem to want to pay attention to us, so she went home. = “Ugh, oniichan! Pay more attention to us!!”

T-That was her way of telling us she wanted attention?

“Well, there was a bit of trouble at our table, and there was another reason I didn’t want to bother Haruna too much.”

“You certainly have quite a bit of luggage there. Is that the reason you’re talking about?”

“Yeah... pretty sharp, Sera. So, I know that Haruna still believes in Santa.”

“I see. So you did not want her to realize you had bought her a present.”

She got all that from the little I told her. Vampire ninjas were definitely the masters of perception.

“Ah, we also bought stuff for you two. Just pick out something you like.”

There are so many presents. I am unsure how to respond.

“He zombies up to everyone around him, so he probably plans to distribute what we don’t choose to everyone else.”

Well, yeah that's what I planned to do, but what the hell does "zombie up" mean? Isn't the idiom "cozy up" or "buddy up" or something?

"I think... Haruna really wanted to see snow, though."

I looked up at the night sky. There wasn't any sign of snow falling.

The Tokyo sky was devoid of stars even at this time of year. It was just a bit bright, probably from all the lights around us.

If it weren't for that sky, I might not have noticed.

There was someone on the roof of a building. If that someone hadn't been wearing a white outfit, I probably wouldn't have noticed.

That someone was atop a nine-story building... no, it was ten stories.

It was... Chris. I couldn't see her face, but I could see that she was holding onto something.

What was that? It didn't look like a sake bottle...

Her face quickly slinked back into the shadow of the roof, almost as if she didn't want us to see her.

"Is something wrong?"

"Hm? Ahh, uhh..."

Sera called out to me but I didn't really know how to answer her. But then, I saw Sera's pretty jade eyes bleed crimson, and her face stiffen in surprise.

"T-That is..."

Well, I wasn't surprised she figured it out. "Yeah, it's Chris," I wanted to answer, but before I could...

"A magical bomb," she muttered. I blinked a few times and stared Sera in the face when I heard her say that.

Magical bomb... did she mean those items that Dai-sensei made? Dai-sensei, Haruna's homeroom teacher and also the one Chris wanted revenge on... she made these magical bombs that could blow away everything in a one-kilometer radius. I had been reduced to fine powder once by one of her bombs too...

I looked up at Chris again.

I really couldn't see her well. But Sera was a vampire ninja. Her sight was probably better than mine, and I also remembered something Chris had said before.

"Oh oh. Also, Chris found something suuuuper interesting."

*"Yeah yeah. It goes **boom!** and all the things come sprinkling down~~. It's a super super fun item."*

I was possible she had meant one of Dai-sensei's magical bombs.

But, we couldn't let her set one of those things off.

"Hey, you all!" I yelled at the group that was walking farther and farther away from me.

"What's wrong, Aikawa?"

I probably looked pretty serious, since Tomonori looked at me with a worried expression.

“I just remembered I had to do something, sorry. Just don’t mind me and go head.”

Saras’s eyebrows twitched. Did she figure it out?

“Aikawa does up and suddenly disappear sometimes. He also went off with Haruna-sensei that other time.”

Mihara shook her head in resignation. Hey, you should try and be a zombie too. The troubles honestly never end.

“Okay... then... see you at school.”

Hiramatsu let a small chuckle spill from her mouth and waved at me. She took Mihara and Orito along with her and headed for Harajuku Station.

Tomonori and Saras just stood there, still.

“Yuki-chaan~~. Let’s gooo~~.”

“O-Okay. Umm, Aikawa...”

“Just go. Get them home safely as fast as possible, okay?”

“But... I’m... I can... with Aikawa...”

She looked like she wanted to say something but couldn’t. Saras raised her hand, blocking Tomonori from speaking further. Having lost her chance to speak, Tomonori gave me a sad look before dashing off towards Mihara and the others.

“Darling, is there anything I can do?”

“Can you evacuate all the normal people?”

“... Evacuate...”

“Yeah, we’re dealing with a magical bomb.”

Saras fully understood the situation after hearing me say those two words, and gave me a firm nod.

“But this place at this time makes things quite difficult. Getting all these people to safety is most likely impossible.”

That was true. If you tried to evacuate people during Christmas in Tokyo, then you’d probably just end up causing panic.

Chris probably deliberately picked this date just because of that.

“Excuses. We vampire ninjas exist for the sole purpose of protecting people. So we will manage.”

“Thanks. Of course, I plan to stop her, but... just in case I fail, yeah?”

“Yes. I am counting on you.”

“I am too. Come, Sera. While she is still unaware of our presence.”

If that magical bomb really went off, then I knew of no way to defend against it other than Sera’s Dragon Fang Thunder God Thrust technique.

What about me?

“Yuu, you should get out of her too. You won’t be able to do much if you’re holding onto this.”

I passed her the paper bags I was holding onto. But, I still didn’t want Haruna to find the stuffed horned owl, so I decided to keep one of the bags myself.

I mean, if it was just one bag, then I could just toss it somewhere when I had to fight.

I started to proceed into the building, wanting to go up to the roof quietly so as not to attract attention, but Sera grabbed me by the collar as if she was catching a cat and then kicked off the asphalt.

The couples on the road around us looked up dumbfounded at the ponytailed beauty and high school student as they suddenly flew up into the air.

“Hey, Sera! People are looking at us funny now!”

“We should act quickly here. Do not worry, there are not many normal people who will understand what they are seeing.”

After we had landed on the roof, Chris caught sight of us and gave us a smile.

“It’s oniichan and his friends. You always show up with such great timing. It’s almost a bit too convenient.”

“We do know someone with the power to change fate and bring about events such as this.”

Sera glanced down at Yuu. But that was only for a moment, and in the next moment her crimson eyes were once again looking at Chris. Chris was holding onto an alarm clock.

Nobody walks around randomly with an alarm clock. That was definitely the magical bomb.

Sera’s black mantle draped around her as she looked me in the face.

Her eyes were telling me “we should only aim for that magical bomb.”

Yeah, I agree. Our first priority here wasn't defeating Chris.

“What exactly are you doing around here? Or rather, what are you *trying* to do?”

“Hm? The way you say that... it's almost like you know what this is.”

Chris tossed the alarm clock up a few times into the air. I felt my heart race, wondering when that clock would explode, while Chris seemed to be enjoying the look of worry on my face.

“Kyaha! So oniichan *does* know what this is! Chris wanted to use this bomb and make a big boom and kill lots of people, but there aren't actually that many people here... mmm... what should Chris do...?”

Chris began to say some awful things like they were nothing.

“What exactly do you hope to accomplish with that?”

“If something awful happens, I can pretend like it was Ariel's fault. And then the Queen should go and kill Ariel for me.”

The one who had created these magical bombs had been Ariel... in other words, Dai-sensei. She had been forced to make them by the King of the night, but it's true that Chris might be able to push the blame onto Dai-sensei... so we couldn't just stand by and let her commit an act of wanton terrorism.

“Ah, right. Let's start with the puppy.”

Puppy? Chris turned around, still smiling.

She was facing... Shibuya. Wait, she didn't mean Hachiko, did she?! (1)

Even though it was Christmas, Shibuya was always bustling with people. You could get there by going just a bit South on Meijidoori. It was pretty close. It'd probably take masou shoujo or vampire ninjas just a few minutes to get there.

Chris broke out into a sprint. Her cute shoes clattered against the rooftop as she kicked off into the air.

"Sera!" As if responding directly to my voice, Sera also began to run. She had leaf swords in both hands.

When it came to speed, nobody in the universe could hold a candle to Sera.

"Here I go. Hiken, Tsubamegaeshi!"

"Ahaha! Pretty quick, pretty quick!"

Chris dodged Sera's blade extremely easily. In her position, I would've found myself missing an arm already at this point...

Another attack, and another. Sera ran alongside Chris as she sent attack after attack at the masou shoujo.

Sera didn't manage to make a single mark on Chris, but she at least slowed Chris down plenty.

I caught up to them two and launched myself at Chris like a cat, aiming for her right arm.

She nimbly dodged me as well, and I found myself on the verge of doing a cordless bungee jump off the building when Sera grabbed me.

“Ayumu, this is not good.”

“Hm? What happened?”

“She has already pushed the detonation button on the device. The bomb will probably explode after five minutes or so.”

Seriously?! I felt a shiver run up my spine. A nauseous feeling began to form in the pit of my stomach.

That sudden nausea was almost crushing.

Sera and I both desperately attacked Chris, but she lightly dodged everything we threw at her.

I also tried waving the bag with the stuffed animal in it around in the air, but none of my attacks landed.

A bystander might say that we looked like we were just playing a game with each other.

Sera’s sword passed centimeters from Chris’s hair.

“Wooow! You got faster, didn’t you? Too bad it’s still too slow for Chris!”

Sera made a face, as if she was chewing on something bitter. She continued to attack.

The minute hand on the alarm clock continued to move.

This was getting worse and worse. Wasn’t there anything we could do? The cold and my nerves were making it hard to think.

I couldn't do anything more but dance around and jump at Chris. I must've looked like one of those daimyo in those old Japanese movies wearing a blindfold and chasing a girl around with both his hands thrust out in front of him.

Chris leapt from the roof onto a pedestrian bridge. Shibuya Station was already in sight.

Sera also jumped for the bridge, and I followed her.

Krchh! I was a bit too in a rush, and I felt my ankle twist. But I couldn't fall over here!

Hyahh... hyahhh! I spun around and tried to minimize the shock to my body. But I also wanted to desperately retaliate against Chris, and threw the bag I was holding at her.

Chris chuckled mockingly at me and dodged.

“Dragon Fang, Thunder God Thrust!”

Noooo! Don't yell that out! Don't make the person who came up with that name feel any more embarrassed!

At that moment, a miracle occurred.

The paper bag flying through the air suddenly stopped.

Sera also stopped, in the middle of her sword stroke.

The lightning coming from her blade also seemed frozen in midair.

And I also stopped, my body on one knee with my hands both thrust out in front of me.

The only person who could still move was Chris. Her eyes widened in shock, as she let out a small “ah.”

Chris was moving based on what she expected her opponent's movements to be. And now that something completely unexpected had happened and screwed up her timing, she couldn't stop the lightning that had come from Sera's Dragon Fang Thunder God Thrust attack from shooting straight through the magical bomb.

This was... the time-stop technique I had learned just the other day.

I see, so I had unconsciously input the commands that activated that technique.

However, I had failed. Chris could still move... and I couldn't.

"Hm? It's not moving anymore... oh, this thing is weak to electricity, isn't it? Ugh! Oniichan, you're so mean! Chris is gonna kill you!"

I could almost see steam rising from Chris's head as she pushed Sera's frozen body out of the way.

Boing.

Sera's amazing breasts fit right into the palm of my hands.

So soft..... oh god, so so so soft.....

If I could move my fingers I'd take full advantage of this situation, but...

"We could've set off some really fun fireworks too..."

I couldn't move. I couldn't move a muscle.

Chris pointed her right hand towards us.

This was bad. She was going to kill us. But just when I thought that...

“I got you!”

Another girl wearing a black mantle appeared behind Chris. Just like the first time I met that girl... she was holding onto a bowl of tonkotsu ramen.

It was Tomonori. Tomonori, weren't you supposed to have gone home with Mihara and the others?

Chris threw herself over the side of the pedestrian bridge, trying to evade the ramen.

She still had a daring smile on her face, but then she realized that a bit of the tonkotsu broth had gotten onto her sleeve.

“Ahh, this is the worst! Chris doesn't wanna play anymore. She's going home!”

Stains showed up really well against her white clothes. And her mood probably did a complete one-eighty at seeing that stain on her favorite outfit.

Chris vanished, and I sighed a sigh of relief. I wanted to thank Tomonori for saving us, but I couldn't get my mouth to move.

Also, Sera was sending me a fierce glare. “How long are you planning to fondle my breasts, you rotten little rag?” her eyes were saying to me.

Well... I mean, I don't exactly know how to cancel out this technique.

After we finally regained our freedom and I got my face beaten in, I went over and picked up the magical bomb that Chris had casually discarded a few moments ago.

Sera's Dragon Fang Thunder God Thrust had completely broken through the clock and we had managed to somehow save the day, but Chris was probably going to try something like this again. Ugh.

"Tomonori, thanks. You seriously saved us."

"... I got kinda tired of Aikawa just saving me all the time, you know? So I wanted to help Aikawa just today. I mean... it's Christmas too."

Tomonori blushed a bit, while Sera let out a small chuckle.

What the hell was up with this awkwardness in the air?

I turned around, wanting to run away, and saw the paper bag with Haruna's stuffed owl in it.

... It was burnt black.

I saw a paper bag there that had been burnt to a crisp.

I timidly took the stuffed animal out of the bag, and saw that the owl had been poked full of holes by Sera's attack.

"Ah, that... that's Master's Christmas present, isn't it?"

"I guess it's a bit late to be saying this, but I probably shouldn't have brought this along."

I scratched my head and let out a huge sigh.

My sigh misted white in front of me and dissolved into the air.

"We could go back and buy another one?"

“Nah, they’re already closed. If only I could get it to snow... that would be the best present I could give to her.”

I looked up at the Christmas sky. It showed no signs of snowing.

What should I do here? Maybe God could do me a favor here and just let it snow...

... Wait.

Was there something I could use in place of snow? I could take something like cotton and make it seem like it was snowing for Haruna...

But, exactly where was I expecting to get so much cotton at this time?

Oh, wait. Yeah, there was definitely a bunch of cotton back there.

If I tried this now I might miss the last train back home, but...

I set off back to Nene-san’s place to try and bring my last, desperate plan to fruition.

TRANSLATOR’S NOTES

(1) A famous statue of a dog in Shibuya, right in front of Shibuya Station. A very popular meeting spot.

「魔王、あんたもEしく……愛態だった」

第四話

私も

「誰ぐら歩を履ついでいのかな」



歩はハルナのために ぬいぐるみを探している
だから 帰りが遅くなっているんだ
私はそれを待ち続けるだけ
クリスマスの夜がどれだけ冷たくても 暗くても
私は歩を信じているから
ハルナもずっと サンタクロースを待ち続けている
そう 信じているから
それにしても 遅い……



Chapter 4 – Nude King, You Truly Were... a Big Pertertifriend.

Part 1.

Yuu was in the living room, drinking tea.

The plasma television, which was usually tuned to a variety show, was now showing a home shopping show.

The next day had already begun.

Four plates of roast chicken were sealed with cling wrap on our low dining table. There was also a space in the middle, maybe for cake.

There was only one silver-haired girl in the room. She put her teacup down on the dining table and glanced at me.

Welcome back.

She showed me that memo, her face unchanging. I looked around the room a bit.

“Where’re Haruna and Sera?”

Already asleep. = “They went beddie bye already~~.”

“I see.” Well, it certainly was pretty late.

“Yuu, you didn’t go to sleep?”

I haven’t had a Christmas party with Ayumu yet.

Yuu... she probably would’ve waited here for me no matter how late I got back. She was a strong-willed, good girl.

I heard a sound above me. It was a rather strange sound, so I looked up.

When I did that, a beautiful girl descended from the ceiling. Her black ponytail fluttered as she lightly touched down onto the floor.

“Are you finally back? If you were any later, I was planning to throw the stove at you.”

Sera looked up and glared at me with her piercing eyes.

“You weren’t asleep?”

“I am a vampire ninja. Nighttime is when my abilities are strongest.”

Well, certainly, I didn’t think vampires or ninjas slept very much at night.

“So, Haruna is the only one who’s asleep... that’s great.”

“Why? Are you planning on doing something disgusting again?”

“Meh.”

Part 2.

I walked outside the house and eagerly climbed over the fence surrounding my house. Then, making full use of my zombie powers, I leapt up to Haruna’s veranda.

I was in a red outfit, holding a huge white sack, and sporting an unfashionable white beard. I quietly peeked into Haruna’s room.

Great. She was completely asleep. I didn’t have the stuffed horned owl that Haruna had wanted.

The sky also looked normal and clear.

However, Haruna believed in Santa Claus.

So, at the very least, I wanted to let her meet Santa.

I opened my white sack and began to scatter the cotton inside around on the veranda.

This cotton was all from those pillows that were shoved in Nene-san's closet. Nene-san said that she wasn't going to use any of those pillows anymore, and so she let me use the cotton.

Shuffle shuffle. Shuffle shuffle.

So, something like this?

Clatter clatter clatter clatter.

“What are you doing?”

The veranda door opened and a small girl wearing pajamas glared at me.

H-Haruna! I thought you were sleeping! Geez, she was just as perceptive as Sera, wasn't she? But don't panic, don't panic! I'm not Aikawa Ayumu right now! I'm Santa Claus!

“Ho ho ho! Haruna-chan, nice to meet you! I came to give you some snow for Christmas!”

I smiled and spread my arms open.

“Snow? That's snow?”

Haruna looked at the cotton scattered all around the veranda suspiciously.

Yeah, I guess it was hopeless to try and trick Haruna with just this.

But then... something fell from the sky.

Something white and soft... but it wasn't cold and it didn't melt.

The huge sack that had been next to me just a minute ago was no longer there.

I glanced up and saw a single ponytailed girl above me.

She was throwing "snow" down from the roof.

Haruna also saw the falling "snow," and muttered two words. "So pretty..."

"Ah, Merry Christmas!"

"Why did you attach an 'ah' to it?"

"I didn't say that! I didn't. Ah, Merry Christmas!"

"You definitely said it! You said it this time! That's gross!"

"Ah, Mer-... Ah, Merry Christmas!"

"For some reason, Santa is just as gross as Ayumu..."

Crap. Did she figure me out?!

"Well, see you next year then!"

I leapt down from the veranda, trying to escape from her suspicious gaze.

"Hey! Wait, you!"

I quickly stripped off my Santa costume and tumbled into my house.

Pitter patter pitter patter. I heard the sounds of feet rushing down the stairs.

I rushed into the living room and shoved the costume under the kotatsu, striking up a conversation with Yuu with an innocent look on my face.

“So, after we went to the rotary sushi...”

I made it by the hair on my chin. I looked at Haruna, the same innocent expression on my face.

“Hey, Haruna. Were you awake?”

“Right now... there was some pretty strange guy on the veranda.”

Babump. I felt my heart beat at Haruna’s sharp stare. Had she figured me out? Haruna was pretty sharp, after all. I had to change the subject.

There were a lot of bags stuffed in the corner of the living room right now, almost as if we had just come back from a big bag sale.

Those were the presents that everybody had bought for Haruna and the others.

“Oh, right. These are all presents that everyone bought for you all...”

“Don’t need any.”

“Huh? Hey, come on, everyone was really trying hard to-”

At that moment, Haruna’s slender arms wrapped around my neck.

“... I thought you were never coming back. I thought you were gonna stay with her forever.”

Her voice was trembling a bit. Stay with her... did she mean Nene-san? Why did Haruna think that...?

Haruna buried her head in my back and tightened her arms around my neck.

“Haruna.” Her ahoge was stabbing right into the back of my head.

“So, I kept on wishing and wishing and wishing to Santa.”

Haruna stopped talking right then. I wondered what she had wished for, when I heard Yuu tap twice on the dining table.

Haruna was lonely without Ayumu. She wished for Ayumu.

She wanted me. That’s what she wished for from Santa?

Haruna did?

“You idiot... this is my house, right? Why in the world would I never come back?”

“B-But... Ayumu said he felt comfortable over there...”

“Of course, my own home is still the best,. Also... you three are here.”

“But... I’m not like her... if Ayumu sexually harasses me I’d kick him.”

“If I actually wasn’t okay with that, I’d have kicked you out half a year ago.”

“But... I...”

She sounded really lonely. I softly placed a hand on Haruna's arm as she gripped me even tighter.

"Right now, I'm the happiest when I'm with you girls. Of course, that includes Haruna too. So... please get rid of all these absurd worries."

"Yeah... yeah, you're right! Of course! Okay!"

Haruna looked up at the same time that Yuu turned her memo over and quietly hid it in her memo book.

"So, just a minute ago there was some strange person spreading cotton all over the veranda..."

She could even tell it was cotton? Well, I guess it wasn't that hard to tell.

"S-Sounds like quite a disaster."

—

"But... that was still the happiest present I've gotten so far."

—

"You mean, all that cotton getting spread around was?"

"As stupid as always... as gross as always... Santa came and brought it to me."

Haruna, did you really think that about-

"Brought me what belonged to me!"

"... Belonged?"

"Ayumu is my tool! He's unfortunately kinda annoying, but he's better than nothing!"

Haruna said that with a smile and then sat next to me, reaching her legs under the kotatsu.

Ah, I see. So Santa had given her a thing named Aikawa Ayumu as a present.

Oh, the complete Santa costume was still stuffed under the kotatsu. She was seconds away from finding out that I had been the Santa on the veranda. So, I quickly used my legs to shove the Santa costume even further under the kotatsu.

“Also, Santa had given me one more thing.”

Haruna’s ahoge bounced back and forth as she pulled the piping hot Santa outfit out from under the kotatsu. Yeah, I guess I had been completely figured out.

“One more thing?”

“Yeah! He taught me that for Christmas, anybody can be Santa!”

“I certainly agree with that.”

A ponytailed beauty was standing outside the doorway.

She had her arms crossed while wearing a red outfit and a red hat. Sera was in a miniskirt Santa outfit.

“For example, even people who have faces that look like burnt pieces of bread can become Santa. That is what Christmas is about.”

Sera sent a glare down at me as she spoke. Hey, who the hell looked like a burnt piece of bread?!

“Let’s do it! Let’s do Christmas!”

Haruna stood up and raised a fist into the air.

Haruna was always starting strange things like this.

Everything she started always ended turning into a huge mess, and I had a feeling that this time would be no different, but...

“Yeah, let’s do it.”

I just gave her a smile.

Part 3.

And so, in that silent and holy night could now be seen three pretty girls in red costumes and myself, who was wearing a red clown-like nose and what was probably a reindeer outfit with its light brown hair and attached collar.

The three girls were running along the rooftops like ninjas while holding big sacks.

Haruna took the lead. She had a fluffy sack and was wearing a fluffy red skirt as well. Her ahoge was desperately trying to peak out from the gap in her fluffy Santa hat, so it was quite an interesting sight.

Then there was Yuu. Her plate armor had been replaced by a red one-piece Santa outfit, while she still had her gauntlets on. She also didn’t have a Santa hat and retained her normal headwear. She was a gauntlet-wearing battle Santa.

Meanwhile, Sera was running parallel to me. I spoke up to her.

“Thanks for that back there.”

“What do you mean? Also, hearing you thank me gives me catastrophic levels of heartburn and makes me quite unhappy.”

“Well, thanks for back then when I wanted to show Haruna some snow. You tossed that cotton down from the roof, right? That was a huge help.”

“Ahh... so you’re talking about that.”

“Well, Haruna saw through everything pretty easily, so it did make me a bit happy to have someone helping me out with that ridiculous stunt...”

“I already said it before, did I not?”

“Hm?”

“I will never be averse to providing whatever support I can to you.”

Just like Nene-san, Sera said that in a slightly teasing way.

She was wearing a very un-Santa-like tight miniskirt, but it wasn’t fluttery enough for me to hope for a panty shot. But, that beautiful skin between her skirt and her socks was just wonderful. (1) I had to restrain myself from yelling out about how amazing her thighs were.

Now that I felt a bit oddly self-conscious, and also because I wanted to shake off some of this chill, I thrust my right hand into the air.

“Thighs are amazing!”

Krch! Hmm, I'm pretty sure the ponytailed Santa just threw a shuriken at me or something, and it stuck right to my forehead... oh well, no worries.

Anyways, the first person we visited was Mihara.

The reason was simple: her house was the closest.

Her window was locked, but our resident ninja easily opened the window without breaking the glass. I had no idea how she did it... I guess I'll just chalk it up to ninjutsu and not really pry.

We opened the window gently, trying to make as little noise as possible.

Then, we stole into the bedroom of a high school girl.

W-What the hell was this? What's with all these stuffed animals?! And all those dolls lined up in a row?! There was a yellow bear that was naked from the waist down, and a bunny with its mouth in the shape of an X... many cute and famous stuffed animals were decorating this room.

Mihara always came off as a modern girl, so it was hard to imagine she had such a girly side too.

To be frank, this was just impossible.

Anyways... I took the brand-name bag out from my white sack and placed it next to all the stuffed bears surrounding Mihara's pillow.

"This present really doesn't seem to belong in this room, does it?"

“Maybe we should give her this one instead?”

Haruna took out the stuffed chicken from her sack. Certainly, that probably was the most fitting present considering this room, but...

“Well, she probably has more than one interest.”

Humans live with a mask. Her mask is her makeup.

Haruna gave a vague nod after seeing that memo and put the stuffed chicken away again.

I see. From Yuu’s point of view, this vision of a young girl’s dream represented Mihara’s true nature.

I looked at Mihara’s sleeping face, devoid of any makeup.

Hm? This girl... she was actually pretty cute... ugeh?!

“Who the hell just kneed me?! It’s almost embarrassing how much that just startled me!”

“Do not yell out like that. There’s a time and place for yelling, and this is not it. Nobody likes the person who doesn’t understand that.”

So it was her again? Every single time, it’s her...

I glared at Sera, when I felt somebody pulling on my reindeer costume. I turned around and saw Yuu showing me a memo.

Ayumu looked like a love-struck young girl right then, so I could not help myself.

W-Wait, Yuu was the one who attacked me?! I did not see that coming at all.

“Let’s head to the next one! The next one!”

We slipped out of the house quickly, trying not to be detected. Hey, this was actually pretty fun.

Once again, we ran through the cold night with Haruna taking the lead. We were in the same order as before. I watched Yuu running in front of me as I began to talk to Sera.

“It’s really surprising that Yuu was the one who kneed me...”

“Are you really so oblivious? This is why zombies are so... in any case, you’ve constantly been away from home these past few days, and even on the twenty-fourth when you were supposed to come back, we waited for you, but you did not return. We went to the sushi restaurant and there we saw you with a smile on your face and surrounded by girls. And yet we still waited so long for you to come back.”

I couldn’t really say anything in response to Sera’s point. All I could do was really chew on her words.

“Even Haruna began to feel lonely... so you cannot reasonably expect Hellscythe-dono would be any different.”

“Yeah. All I’ve done these days is make Yuu wait...”

“Hellscythe-dono might not be able to express her feelings, but that does not mean she does not possess any. You must-”

“You sure are more talkative than usual today.”

Sera stopped and looked a bit down at the ground. Crap, had I pissed her off by interrupting her?

This was bad. I prepared myself to avoid an impending Hiken Tsubamegaeshi.

–

“There are also times when I worry... or when I feel jealousy.”

–

Her voice was very soft and seemed to almost dissolve into the night air.

“Eh? What?”

So I really couldn't hear her very well.

Sure, her words had made their way to my ears, but they didn't really sink into my head very well.

They were words that I felt I had to hear... words that seemed important, and yet at the same time they were words that I should never have heard.

I didn't really understand these feelings... and it didn't seem Sera did either.

“It's nothing. We seem to be lagging behind. We should hurry.”

Sera raised her head and I saw the same commanding expression I was used to seeing.

We headed for Orito's house next.

Just like last time, the ponytailed beauty took to one knee and easily fiddled with the window...

“Hng...” Sera seemed a bit at a loss.

“What's wrong, Sera?”

“Well... to think that his window would be this well protected... how impertinent for someone whose face looks like a mud-covered sneaker.”

“Looks like there’s no other choice then.”

Step step step step. Haruna ran along the rooftop away from Orito’s house. I figured she had just given up, but then...

Step step step step. It seemed like she just wanted a running start.

Krssh! Haruna made a cross with her arms in front of her face and crashed fiercely into the window.

The glass magnificently shattered into a million pieces. It was like I was watching an action movie right now.

“Gyaahhh?! What?! What’s happening?! Why on Christmas?!”

Orito’s shriek echoed through the night sky. Why the hell did he sound like such a sissy?

Also, did we seriously just shatter his window?! Ugh, look, our flashy entrance has him completely upright and pulling his futon close to his chest.

“Deluxe Beppin!”

Thump. Haruna’s fist buried itself into Orito’s stomach, and he lost consciousness.

“Seems like he’s sleeping. Good.”

Haruna pretended to wipe sweat from her brow while letting out a sigh.

“Way to force your way through things... is he alright?”

She struck with the back of the sword, so he will live.

I see. That's a relief... wait, what?! When was there a sword involved?! Leave the swords for the swordfights, please! Is what I wanted to yell, but I couldn't. I mean, it was night, and I didn't want to wake the neighbors... yeah, that was the reason.

“Good boys should be asleep right now.”

Sera said that as if it was the most natural thing in the world before stealing into Orito's room. I just stayed outside with Yuu, staring inside from across the broken window.

I really didn't want to go in with all that broken glass strewn across the floor.

Unlike Mihara's room, Orito's room matched his personality. There were posters of models on the walls and his shelves were covered with figures. He had two desktop computers and a laptop.

“He gets a plastic bag and a rubber band.”

Haruna fished through her white sack while Sera slipped something under Orito's pillow.

I seemed to be the only one who noticed.

Haruna wrapped Orito's hands around the plastic bag and the rubber band before coming back with a satisfied look on her face. “Next!” she yelled before taking the lead and running away from Orito's house.

Sera also came out from Orito's room, and I whispered to her.

“You've been a bit soft on him lately, haven't you?”

“..... I do need to repay a debt to him. Are you jealous? How disgusting.”

“Nah, I was just wondering what you did in there.”

“It was just a photograph. I promised to give him a photograph in return for introducing me to a printer. A risqué swimsuit photograph.”

“I see. So that was his condition. But are you okay with that? You hate stuff like that, right? Weren't you the one who said 'perverts deserve to die'?”

“No problem at all. It was a photograph of Saras.”

Seriously?! It wasn't a photo of yourself?! I'm pretty sure Orito had meant that he wanted a swimsuit photo of Sera.

Well, Orito would probably be happy getting a prized photograph of an Internet idol. He probably wouldn't even mind that he got his window broken.

We came to Hiramatsu's house next. This was the first time I had come here.

It looked like a normal single house from the outside. It was situated in a nice place away from noisy areas.

We went up to the veranda on the second floor. Sera unlocked the door and gently swept the curtain to the side.

The inside of Hiramatsu's room was incredibly modest. Everything was very tidy, and in that sense, it was probably closest to Sera's room. I felt a serene calm drift through the air.

If I had guests over, I would tidy up my room to look something like this too, but Hiramatsu's room was like this even when she didn't have guests. That was so like her.

"What do you think she wants?"

Haruna fished through her sack.

"She seemed to be most interested in... the cushion."

Hiramatsu breathed slowly, her hair in a state of disarray I never saw in public. I couldn't help but smile.

I had bought a firm pillow and a hug pillow shaped like an ugly dog for Nene-san.

This cushion looks like Ayumu.

"Yes. It looks identical."

"It looks like Ayumu when he's being gross."

Why does everyone in the world think I look like this dog?!
What the hell?!

I placed the dog cushion near Hiramatsu's pillow, when she turned her body over and hugged the cushion tight.

"..... Hnnnnn... Aikawa-kuun....."

I felt my heart thump at her coaxing voice. I caught a glimpse of her pale skin from the gap in her pajamas. Maybe it was just because there were no lights on in the room, but she looked quite bewitching to me at that moment.

"She seems to be having a nightmare."

Lies! You filthy liar!

“I feel bad for her. When Ayumu shows up in my dreams, his right side is blue, his left side is red, and his head is transparent. It’s seriously gross.”

Was I supposed to be Android Kikaider or something? Well, certainly, if a normal un-modded human had that coloring it would be pretty gross.

“... H-Hmm? Aikawa... kun?”

Hiramatsu’s eyes were slightly open. She didn’t seem to be completely awake and her body swayed from side to side. And then... she suddenly hugged me.

“Yaaay... Aikawa-kun... you came...”

Hiramatsu spoke in a relaxed but sweet tone as she hugged me even tighter and then stopped moving.

She was clearly half asleep. Ahh, how lucky for me-... gfuuh?!

Someone kicked the back of my knee. Dammit, was it Sera this time?!

You had a funny look on your face, so I could not help myself. I apologize.

... Well, I guess I couldn’t get angry at Yuu. Yeah. And I mean, she *did* apologize. Yeah, exactly.

I gently detached Hiramatsu from me and lay her down on her bed, trying not to wake her.

I didn’t know when she would wake up again, so we should make haste and get out of here.

“.... Mmm... mm? Aikawa-kun... gone...”

We leapt outside into the night, not even closing the veranda door.

We had just barely made it.

“Okay, let’s go for Yukinori next!”

Maybe we should stop by Anderson-kun’s place on the way too. He was the one who introduced me to Nene-san in the first place.

“Haruna, Anderson-kun lives around here, so can we go there first?”

“Who’s that? Someone from the Matrix?”

“You’ve met him a couple times already. He was on the jury back during the trial, remember?”

He is an acquaintance of mine.

Haruna took a good long look at Yuu’s emotionless face before quickly nodding and giving us a big smile.

“Alright! There next then!”

“You agreed to that pretty quickly.”

“It’s Christmas! Let’s just drop rank.”

I didn’t think “dropping rank” explained how much more open-minded she was being, but... whatever.

Anderson-kun lived in a single room apartment. It seemed that he lived alone, just like Nene-san and Tomonori did, and just like I had a while ago.

We stepped into his room.

The inside of his room was filled with cardboard boxes; it was as if he had just moved in yesterday.

I couldn't see a TV or any other electronics.

It was honestly hard to believe that anybody could live here.

His shoe rack by the door was crowded with lots of basketball shoes. Collecting basketball shoes was probably his only hobby.

Anderson-kun's sleeping face made him look like an English prince. His fair features were the very definition of refinement.

“..... Uh-huh? ... Yeah... just being an idiot, you ass.”

He sounded really pissed! He was so nice usually, but in his dreams he was just dishing out abuse. (2)

Well, Anderson-kun was from the Underworld... so I guess this much was to be expected.

I glanced at Anderson-kun's dresser, and saw a picture frame on it. Inside the picture frame was...

An abacus eighth level qualification certificate.

He was more Japanese than I expected! How good was he with an abacus exactly?!

Anderson-kun was handsome and great with the ladies, but he was alone under his futon. Well, I admit it'd be a bit uncomfortable to be sleeping under there with a girl.

Wait...

He was completely naked! Anderson-kun slept in the nude?! I couldn't stop my heart from pounding a bit at his chiseled physique.

“T-The Nude King!”

Haruna flushed red from ear to ear and covered her face with both hands.

“Stop making it sound cooler than it is.”

“So, what should we give him?”

Instead of answering Haruna directly, I also covered my face with both hands and put the pair of basketball shoes next to his pillow.

At that point, Anderson-kun rolled over in bed and his futon cover slipped up.

“Gyaaaaaaaaah!!! Pervertttttt!! You bar of erosensual body soap!”

Wow, he had a nice body...

I wasn't in any clubs at school, so of course his body was so different from mine. He was slender but muscular.

Wow, he had a nice body...

Yeah, just look at those ripped abs...

Wow, he had a nice body...

“M-Mmm... nwaah?! E-Eucliwood and Aikawa's friends...?”

Anderson-kun had woken up. He stood up, not even trying to cover his embarrassing parts.

Good evening.

Yuu didn't seem shaken at all by his nudity, and Anderson-kun gave her a bright smile. It was his mask that he used to make all the girls swoon.

Haruna sent her knee right into that smile.

Anderson-kun fell. He seriously had a nice body...

"Nude King, you truly were... a big pervertifriend..."

A pervertifriend? Exactly whose friend?

Ah, she meant me, didn't she?!

"I definitely don't want to stay here too long."

"Okay, onto the next place then!"

Next was... Tomonori.

"She lives in a building with a lot of other vampire ninjas, right? Seems hard to infiltrate."

"Yes. If you try to enter from the front, you will get impaled by bamboo spears and die. The front yard also is a minefield."

That didn't sound too good.

"Okay! Let's go walk through some minefields then."

"How?"

I just asked a simple question, but Haruna and Sera looked at me and gave me a teasing smile.

We soon arrived at the apartment building Tomonori lived in.

I entered the minefield. Carrying the girls. As the reindeer, I had become Santa's steed.

We headed for Tomonori's room, the reindeer outfit acting as our sacrifice.

Eventually, the reindeer no longer had sleeves and his pants had been half blown off. The reindeer shivered and hugged his body in the cold, but nobody paid him any mind.

Well...

Here. Yuu passed me a red scarf.

To be able to put on Yuu's scarf and feel its warmth under this chilly December sky was just priceless to me. The warmth seeped into my heart.

"Thanks, Yuu."

It is a Christmas present.

T-This scarf... it was hand-knit, wasn't it? I covered my mouth with the scarf, losing myself in the taste of happiness.

Tomonori was the room furthest in on the first floor.

Unlike the energy-filled Tomonori herself, Tomonori's room was neat and tidy.

There was a pro-wrestling poster and a set of baseball gear as well as a set of tennis gear. In general there was a bunch of stuff here; she even had a set of kendo armor.

"I guess this is the only present that would work for Yukinori."

Haruna put the soccer ball near Tomonori's pillow.

"Mmmmm... no... I won't join the Ishihara Gundan... sorry..."

(3)

Exactly why was she dreaming about getting invited to join the Ishihara Gundan?

Tomonori reached out for the soccer ball and hugged it to her without waking up. She smiled.

“Mmmm... It’s Morisaki-kun... he can’t stop this shot...” (4)

“It seems she’s dreaming something different now.”

What the hell was “It’s Morisaki-kun” supposed to mean?! Don’t make it sound like he’s hopeless! He’s trying his best! He’s a great goalkeeper!

“So, are we done?”

Haruna sat down on Tomonori’s bed and yawned a bit as she asked that.

“Well... we have Saras left.”

I pointed upwards. Saras lived in the same building. We were in a vampire ninja apartment building, after all.

“Let us quickly go give her her present then.”

Sera put a hand on the veranda door that we had used to come in here.

Do not forget Naegleria.

Yuu showed Sera that memo.

Yuu was right. We had already bought Nene-san a pillow after all.

“Her house is pretty far away though...”

Haruna swung her legs back and forth as she sat atop Tomonori's bed. She didn't seem to care at all if we woke her. She wasn't a zombie or a vampire ninja, but a masou *shoujo*. She was still a little girl. So when the night ran long, she got sleepy. Look, she was rubbing her eyes already.

"Well, maybe I could just go alone?"

I suggested that, but Haruna leapt off the bed with her usual bratty smile on her face.

"... Santa has to go around the world in a night, so I'll try my best too!"

"I agree. We cannot lose to him here."

Haruna gripped her fists tight in determination and Sera looked at her with loving eyes. I wish she would send those eyes my way sometimes...

In any case, we headed for Saras's room.

Saras's room was a high-class, elegant room. It also didn't seem like it was used very much, perhaps because she was so busy with work. It looked like a brand new room, and there was not a speck of dust in sight. I had to say that it suited her perfectly.

But there was something strange in one corner of the room.

In her closet there was a little hidden room, and in a corner of that room was a multi-tiered display stand which was decorated with lots of different stuffed animals. Her stuffed animal selection was pretty much the same as Mihara's.

I see... so Saras knew about that stuffed animal shop because she went there a lot, and Mihara knew about that shop because she also had the same hobby.

Saras didn't want us to know about this side of her, which is why she was acting a bit strangely back then.

Saras and Mihara always seemed at odds with each other, but they actually had the same hobby.

I couldn't help but laugh at that, drawing a suspicious look from Sera.

"What happened? Your disgustingness just went up by sixty percent."

"Don't worry about it. I just remembered something funny."

Saras was not in bed right now.

"Hm? She's not sleeping. What a bad girl!"

"She is probably at work. Vampire ninjas don't get a break just because it's Christmas."

"Tomonori was in such a deep sleep back there that she thought she was getting invited to join the Ishihara Gundan though..."

"Okay, let's go with this!"

Haruna fished out the stuffed chicken from within the now mostly empty sack.

Saras had looked like she wanted the stuffed chicken. Yeah, it all made sense when I saw her stuffed animal collection.

But, why did she want the chicken?

That particular mystery was soon cleared up.

I saw three animals standing on top of each other on the top level of the display.

A donkey. A dog. A cat.

Three of the four animals from the Town Musicians of Bremen fable. Saras probably wanted to put the chicken on top to complete the set.

This... how do I put it? It really didn't suit her.

“Haruna, give me the chicken for a sec.”

“Hueh? Aren't we putting the presents next to their pillows?”

Haruna looked at me suspiciously as I took the chicken from her.

“Yeah, this chicken... fits here the best.”

I placed it on top of the cat.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

(1) There is actually an idiomatic phrase in Japanese for this part of the female body: zettai ryouiki, which translates roughly to the “Ultimate Zone.”

(2) Yeah, so... there was also a point here that Anderson-kun was speaking in English. I chose to omit this because it would sound really awkward if translated literally. I also considered putting it into another language like French, but the running theme here is that Anderson-kun looks like an English prince so having him speaking in any other language would seem strange.

(3) A group of Japanese actors, mostly older males.

(4) A reference to Morisaki from Captain Tsubasa, a soccer manga. Morisaki was a goalkeeper who was notoriously bad at the beginning of the series.

Part 4.

We ran all the way down to the Koto Ward with the last present in tow.

It was already the dead of the night, so there were no more trains running. It was pretty far, but for a vampire ninja and a zombie, it took less than an hour to get there.

However, I was pretty exhausted now.

We wanted to go in through the window, but there were so many racks and dressers jumbled up all over the place that we ended up going in through the front door instead.

“She’s sleeping?”

“Yes, sleeping as usual.”

“Ahh, I’m tired. I’m gonna sleep too!”

I had carried Haruna on my back all the way here, but she had also maintained her high level of energy all this time. So, the minute she got into the room, she began to lay out a futon with practiced motions.

Well, Haruna had certainly stayed here once before at least.

Now that I took a good look, I noticed that my bag was here. Ah, right, I had brought over a full set of clothes for staying over and had left all that stuff here.

Great. This was a good chance to change out of this half-destroyed reindeer outfit into my normal clothes.

I restlessly fished around for a change of clothes, when...

“Fuwaaaah...”

As usual, Nene-san suddenly woke up.

“Hm? Who are you?”

“No way! We worked together for so long!”

“Ahaha, I was joking, of course. Don’t screech like that.”

She laughed loudly as her breasts swung magnificently from side to side.

“I feel like we’re back to the point when you called me Aikawa Kinya...”

“So, why are you all here at this time of night?”

Yuu came forward after Nene-san asked that question.

We came to distribute Christmas presents.

“Ahaha, so you’re all playing Santa? Eucliwood’s also into this kind of gag now too, hm?”

Nene-san nodded a few times, and each time she did her breasts swung back and forth.

Each time they swung, I thought about how soft they were.

“Santa Claus brought this gift for you.”

Sera took the pillow out from the sack. And with this, our job as Santa had reached its conclusion.

“Thank you~~.”

“So, what should we do now? Looks like Haruna is sleeping... should we make something to eat?”

“Where the hell did that come from?! Do you seriously want to cook that badly?!”

I desperately tried to stop the bewitching miniskirt Santa as she began to put on an apron.

Why not try another Christmas party here? = “Yeah! Let’s have a party!!”

“Hm. That is not a bad idea. In that case, please allow me to make some-”

“I can go get some cake at a convenience store then~~.”

“If you would like a cake, leave it to me. As for ingredients...”

Sera took a glance down at the tatami.

“We have enough.”

“No we don’t! I’m definitely not eating a tatami cake! I’ve never seen tatami used as an ingredient in anything!”

“Excuse me, but please keep your voice down. I have an Ayumu allergy, so that is quite unpleasant.”

It was almost as if my right to exist was being questioned here...

Tea, please.

“Well, you sure are making yourself at home real quick.”

“Ahh!” Haruna suddenly sprung up. Her ahoge was sticking straight up and her eyes were half-lidded...

“Ah, it’s Byston Well...”

“Exactly where are you getting spirited away to in your dreams?”

Haruna didn’t answer me, but instead just crashed back down onto her side. It was almost like she had picked up Nene-san’s habit of suddenly falling asleep. She was probably really tired...

Tap tap.

Ayumu. Tea please.

“Yeah yea, I’ll get you your tea.”

“Ahahaha! I see, I see.”

Nene-san smacked herself on her bewitching thighs, and I was confused.

“You see? What do you see?”

“Aikawa-kun brought a bunch of his friends over here... but he really looks like he has the most fun with these three.”

“Really? I get the feeling that all we do is get angry at each other though...”

“Yeah, you get the most emotional with this group, and that’s proof enough. I mean, if you aren’t close enough to someone, then you can’t really say mean things to them or have a real argument with them, right? All that would do is make things awkward. You have to believe... you have to have faith that doing stuff like that is okay before you can lay your emotions bare like that.”

I looked at Sera, and Sera looked back at me. And then, we pointed towards each other.

“No, it’s been like this with him (her) since the beginning.”

Nene-san burst out laughing again.

But... well, she might have a point.

I’ve known Orito and Hiramatsu since I was young, and Tomonori’s always been in the class next door and so I’ve taken gym class with her plenty of times. However, I never really got that close with any of those people, so I’ve never been able to speak my mind and say harsh things to them.

... Well, I certainly have spoken my mind to Orito though.

But right now... after I met these three, I found myself able to express my own opinions.

And I also realized that expressing opinions was a fun thing indeed.

Yuu had been the one who had taught me the joys of being with others.

And who had taught me the joys of butting heads with others...?

I took a glance down at Haruna as she slept. Even when she slept, she looked like a brat. She was probably causing absolute chaos in her dreams as well.

I really wanted to pay Haruna back for what she did for me.

I couldn’t just let this debt I owed her go unpaid... it would just be annoying otherwise.

“Nene-san.”

“Hm?”

“I want to talk with Chris again.”

“You mean, right now?”

Right now... ah, yes. My Christmas present to Haruna would be the magical energy that Chris had stolen away from her. So I wanted to get that back right now.

“Yes. As soon as possible.”

I steeled myself. I probably looked pretty cool and stylish right now, if I do say so myself.

Nene-san took a look at that cool face of mine, and...

“Zzzzzzzzzzzzz...” She’s not even looking!

“Hey! Wake up!”

Almost as if by conditioned reflex, I began to shake Nene-san sharply by her shoulders.

I could speak my mind and butt heads with Nene-san as well.

Yes... that meant I really felt like I could place my faith in her.

Part 5.

The next time Haruna opened her eyes, the Christmas party would be in full swing. So, it would be best if we didn’t wake her now. Also, Sera should go and buy a **convenience store** cake for the party.

After I told Yuu and the others that, I left with Nene-san.

Nene-san brought me to an oden food stall, which was apparently where she had invited Chris to for a drink.

Right, I remember seeing Chris at an oden stall before too. That was when we were at the mixer and were chasing Kyouko around.

When we got to the front of the stall, Nene-san patted me on the shoulder.

“Well, Aikawa-kun will have to figure things out by himself from here on. I’m going back.”

“Okay. Thanks a lot for everything you’ve done.”

“Ahh, right. I forgot your Christmas present.”

Saying that, Nene-san wrapped both her arms around my neck and closed her eyes.

Eh? What was this? Her soft lips hovered right in front of my eyes. If I dropped my gaze just a bit, I would be able to see a particularly tasty pair of breasts.

This was... a kiss? I could kiss her right now?

“Nene-san. This is a bit... umm...”

I put my hands on Nene-san’s shoulders and tried to peel her off from me, when...

“Okay, done.”

It seemed that my bonus time with Nene-san had ended. I sighed with a mixture of disappointment and relief.

“My my, Aikawa-kun. Did you actually want a kiss~~?”

“Nah, it wasn’t anything like that...”

“Well, now at least if you two do end up fighting, you won’t end up getting blasted into another dimension.”

“Eh?”

“I infused this scarf here with my powers.”

“Ah, that’s what you meant by ‘Christmas present.’”

“Were you hoping for something pervy instead?”

“Nah... thanks a bunch.”

“I have the power to cancel out all other powers and magical energies. As long as you have this scarf, you won’t have to fear any kind of magical attack.”

“That’s pretty amazing. Ah! Don’t tell me that Yuu’s gauntlets are...”

“Yup. I gave them to her. The reason people call me an S-Class Megalo is because I can get rid of all magical effects. In other words, no magic or special abilities work on me. One touch from me and the masou shoujo lose their transformation~~.”

One touch from her and the masou shoujo can’t transform. I see... that’s why no matter how many masou shoujo go up against her they can’t win.

“That scarf is now even stronger than Eucliwood’s gauntlets. You basically have just as much of my power as I do now. However, that scarf is now negating your own abilities as well, so be careful, ‘kay?”

“So what exactly is going to happen to my powers?”

“Well, of course I don’t have the power to really do anything about your immortality... but all the powers you have that are the result of magic – your miraculous rate of healing, for example – those you should assume are not in effect.”

Ahh, so that ability had something to do with magic.

Well, that’s not good. I could push my body beyond human limits purely because I knew my body could heal quickly. If I punched someone at full strength, then it wouldn’t just be a question of whether my bones broke; my entire arm would probably fly off.

So, this was basically saying my defenses were reduced to zero, along with my offenses.

But, I knew Chris’s weak point. And I didn’t need any actual strength to just tickle her on the side.

“I understand. I hope it doesn’t come down to a fight though...”

“... I do know that guys sometimes talk with their fists, right? But, if you fight, then be sure to make nice again afterwards. Promise onesan you’ll do that, ‘kay?’”

Nene-san smiled and began to walk away.

Meanwhile, I pushed aside the curtain at the entrance to the oden stall and poked my head in.

There was only one customer. It was a small girl who looked like an elementary schooler. Her cheeks were flushed as she enjoyed her oden.

“Oh my my. Oniichan?”

A cute girl who was wearing a white Gothic Lolita outfit.

“Chris. I really wanted to talk to you again.”

“Ahh, looks like Naeglaria tricked me. That stupid cow.”

Chris stood up as she said that.

“Oh, are you done for today already?”

The shop’s owner was wearing a towel headband on his forehead. He gave Chris a smile.

“Today’s Christmas, right? So Chris has a date~~.”

Chris entangled her slender arm around mine and we left the oden stall together.

We soon came to a park. This was the small park where I had battled that wild goat Megalo.

Chris sat herself on a swing and began to lazily swing back and forth.

“So, what do you want?”

“I want you to give Haruna’s magical energy back.”

“Well, sure. Chris already knew about that. Is that all?”

“That has been the only thing I’ve been thinking about for a long time. I’m here to get Haruna’s magical energy back, and nothing more.”

“Mmmm, okay. You sure love that girl, don’t you? But what does Chris get out of that? Absolutely nothing. So nope.”

I got serious and began to speak from my heart, not trying to make any sort of play.

“In exchange... I’ll do something about your curse. So, please give back Haruna’s magical energy.”

Chris looked surprised.

“Mmmm, so that’s Aikawa’s offer.”

“Yeah. I’ll do something for you, so you need to help do something for Haruna.”

“How do you plan to help Chris?”

“I’ll think of a way.”

“... There’s only one way. The queen herself has to remove the curse. It’s also possible that defeating the queen will get rid of the curse, but nobody has ever done that...”

“Well, I’ll be the first guy to do it then.”

Chris blinked at me before giving me a smile.

“Okay, let’s play a game then. If you beat Chris, then Chris will believe you.”

So... it really was going to go down that way.

I was used to it coming to this when I dealt with masou shoujo.

To them, fighting was the only solution.

Or rather, fighting was just how masou shoujo talked things out.

Chris hopped off the swings and then turned to look at me across her shoulder. Staying in that position, she then pointed her right hand at me.

A burst of air crushed the iron fence surrounding the swings, ripped up the earth, and went right past me.

“Wha-?” I was the one who said that.

The cement fence behind me had been destroyed behind me.

Was this my scarf at work?

“Is this really the time to be getting distracted?”

I heard a voice right next to my ear.

Crap. I was dealing with Chris here, and I had just looked away...

Chris had used her magic to quickly close the distance between us and assert her control over this battle.

Her small hand was like a blade as she ripped through my upper arm. Fresh red blood fell onto the sandy park ground.

“Oh my, you evaded that quite nicely. Chris was planning on taking your whole arm there. You deserve some praise for that.”

“Well, thanks. But more importantly, I don’t intend to fight.”

My legs were shaking.

Chris was aiming for my arms. And it wasn’t like my legs were shaking from fear this late into the battle.

No, I had just poured a bit too much power into my lower body to evade Chris, and my muscle fibers were now torn.

Well, crap. I’m so used to pushing my muscles beyond their limits that I couldn’t help myself.

Chris opened her palm up wide and held her hand out towards my head.

A huge gale roared around me, my hair flying up into the wind. It was hard to even breathe in this space.

“Hm? That should’ve been quite a strong attack, but your skull is still there. What happened?”

“Solving that mystery is part of the game, isn’t it?”

Chris gave me a satisfied smile before her body blurred.

Huh? What the hell? My vision was...

I swung a fist, and grazed Chris on the jaw.

“Hawah?! That surprised me!”

I’m the one who should be surprised. I almost hit her right there. Honestly, I didn’t think I would be able to land a single attack. I hadn’t even transformed yet.

Chris’s slender legs came at me with tremendous speed.

Ugh! I had no time to be surprised here. I scrunched my body and met her attack with my hands.

But, I was easily blown away.

My left arm went numb.

But, I was still moving. I had jumped back right when her attack hit me, so I had managed to minimize the damage.

Well, cracks were now running through my arm’s bones though.

It seemed that I really couldn't defend unless I put extra power into my muscles.

I had to stop Chris from moving around somehow, or else we wouldn't get anywhere with this conversation.

Chris could maintain her current form because of two items she had stolen: the pendant she was wearing that sucked up magical energy, and the ring she was wearing that allowed her to control that magical energy.

So, I had to snatch one of those things away from her, or I had to tickle her on the side.

Those were the conditions under which I could win this battle.

But, the pendant was probably under her clothes, and if she clutched her fists, then I wouldn't be able to snatch the ring away either.

So... this game would be decided based on what happened first. Would Chris break my body into pieces first? Would my body no longer be able to endure the added strength I was pouring into my muscles first? Or would I be able to tickle her sides first?

"Chris, just listen. I'm-"

"Let's go with fire next!"

It seemed that she wasn't listening to me. In the next moment, her long white sleeves were engulfed in flames.

Zombies were weak towards light and fires, so if I took one of her attacks now I would just lose all my strength like anpanman when he was doused with water.

I eyed Chris's slender right arm which was surrounded by flames. She kicked strongly off the earth and flew at me.

At that time... once again something strange happened with my vision.

I could see her!

I could see her movements... the action lines in the air that told me where she was going to move!

I see... these were all motions I already *knew*.

They were motions I already *knew* from Nene-san's manga.

While I helped Nene-san draw her manga, I was already learning how Chris moved.

Maybe Nene-san had planned it that way too.

But... this could work.

This... maybe this could work!

Seeing that one single strand of hope, I couldn't help but burst into a grin.

Two hundred percent!

I took Chris's next attack head on.

I heard an ominous cracking sound coming from my entire body.

But as soon as the flames touched my scarf, they vanished like a candle that had just been blown out.

"Ugh, something's really strange here!"

Chris puffed out her cheeks and she didn't seem very happy, but she continued to attack me one after another in succession.

But I turned each and every one of her attacks aside.

I was okay.

If magic wasn't a problem anymore, and we were relying purely on physical technique, then I wouldn't lose.

But... what should I do here?

I would just get worn down like this.

If I was just a normal zombie here whose only ability was not being able to die, then I would eventually lose.

My left arm was also trembling, possibly from having stopped Chris's attack from a moment ago.

I was already at my limit.

If I could feel pain, I probably would die purely from the shock.

Chris's sharp hand went for my neck.

I swept her hand to the side from below.

At that moment, I felt my right knee being crushed. I lost my balance and then felt my left leg getting swept from under me.

My mobility... had been stolen from me.

Goddammit... she changed up her movements.

Was there no way for me to win here?

I was so close.

I had to just get to her side so I could tickle her and get her to a state where we could talk civilly.

Yes, right. There was *that*.

Time stop. And also... my scarf.

The scarf Yuu had given me was fluttering in the wind. I took one end of the scarf in my hand while maintaining my distance from Chris. This scarf would negate any magic and special abilities, just like Yuu's gauntlets.

Could I use this as a weapon, then?

Nene-san had said that just touching this scarf would be enough to dispel a masou shoujo's transformation.

So it really might have some effect.

I wrapped the scarf around my arm down to my hand.

"Hm? Hm? Can't make a fist anymore?"

My legs were broken and wouldn't regenerate like usual. But they just had to move for a moment longer.

I'll regenerate you guys as much as you want later. But please... just endure this one more time!

"Sooo~~... shall we go again?"

Chris swung her arms and flew at me, her face all smiles.

Three hundred percent!

Using my zombie power, I wrapped around and took Chris's flank.

Chris looked shocked.

Ahh, yeah, be shocked. You didn't know, did you?

That I had gotten strong.

I concentrated on making circular motions, feeling like I was entering commands into a one-on-one fighter game.

Getting behind Chris bought me just enough time to perform this maneuver.

Chris turned around... but she was already too late.

Time..... stop.

“Hawah~~!” Chris sounded surprised.

Her movements had completely stopped, as if she was a stuffed hunting trophy.

Now.

Now, I could definitely reach out and...

Chris's hand suddenly grabbed me.

“I never expected that oniichan would learn the Selvaria School Assassination Technique...”

So that's what this time stop technique was called?

Wait, no, there were more important things right now.

“You can move?”

“Just the right hand. A century ago Chris was completely crushed by Naeglaria with this technique, so Chris prepared herself for it.”

Chris smiled. It was a cute, child-like smile.

It seemed that I wasn't the only one who understood his opponent's movements.

"You're just way too weak compared to Chris. To think you could dare to think you could do something for Chris..."

At that moment, Chris grabbed the same hand of mine that had the scarf wrapped around it.

And then, the ring that was attached to Chris's finger began to emanate a faint light. That was a ring made by the Demon Baron which allowed Chris to control her magical energy.

The minute it came into contact with my scarf, that ring had probably been rendered useless.

In other words...

"A-Ahh... that scarf... that's why none of Chris's magic was working..."

Chris's eyes widened. She had solved the mystery.

"Exactly. Nene-san's power is infused into this scarf."

Chris's white Gothic Lolita outfit vanished before my eyes. Her body grew bigger, and her slender girl's body transformed gradually into the body of a middle-aged man of average height and build.

"No... Chris... I... I don't want to go back..."

The magical energy that Chris was using rightfully belonged to Haruna. She had been using that ring of hers to control that energy.

So, once that ring had been rendered useless, she could no longer maintain her masou shoujo form.

“Just give it up.”

My legs were trembling and threatening to give out at any moment... and it was no wonder. A human body could only withstand around thirty percent maximum power, and I had pushed my legs to three hundred percent. My muscle fibers and bones were ripped to shreds.

“Aikawaaaaaaaaa!!!”

Chris’s fist, which was now bony and covered lightly in hair, gouged into my cheek.

It wasn’t the monstrous attack of a masou shoujo, but just the punch of a normal middle-aged man.

It was an attack filled with frustration and anger.

Chris’s clothes had already turned into a sweater and a pair of chino pants, an outfit that lacked even an ounce of individuality.

This was the form of Kurisu Takeshi, my old homeroom teacher.

“It’s been a long while, sensei.”

Another fist went straight into my cheek.

That hurt.

I was a zombie who felt no pain, but I could feel a heavy sense of sadness in that punch of his.

His attack reverberated through my chest.



There was no way I couldn't feel some pain in my heart.

“You... you bastard! Dammit! Are you telling me... are you telling me to go back to living like *that*?!”

“Do you really hate that form so much?! Do you really hate your life as Kurisu Takeshi so much?!”

I punched him back, my broken fist being held together by my scarf.

“As if you understand! As if you understand what it's like to get your individuality snatched away, to get your powers snatched away...!”

My serious punch rattled his brains.

“I don't know at all! But you should understand! You should understand what it's like to be Haruna, to have your magical energy stolen away!”

In return, his fist rattled my jaw.

My body was already in tatters, and I couldn't strengthen my muscles anymore.

This wasn't a zombie punch, but the punch of Aikawa Ayumu, a normal high schooler.

And my opponent's punches weren't the punches of a masou shoujo, but of Kurisu Takeshi, a normal middle-aged man.

My punch sailed into his face, and his punch sailed into mine.

“Do you know how many decades I've had to spend like this?!”

“You managed to transform back sometimes, didn't you?!”

“I’m out of breath just from going up the stairs! I can’t remember people’s names! My hips start hurting way too easily! My legs cramp! Do you know how painful all that is to a masou shoujo?! How miserable it makes me feel?! Do you know?!”

“I don’t! So tell me! And I’ll tell you something too!”

“Tell me what?!”

“About Hiramatsu! She’s so meek but she’s really daring when she’s asleep! About Anderson-kun! He’s so nice but he spits out abuse when he’s asleep! Mihara might look like that, but she has a cute girl’s hobby! Saras too! Tomonori is an idiot, but she’s good at cooking! Orito is disgusting, but he’s a nice person! Did you know?!”

“What does that have to do with anything?! What do those people with all their individuality have to do with me?!”

—

“All of those people were waiting for you! Waiting for Takeshi-sensei! Please just try to understand that!”

—

Our arms crossed and our fists plunged themselves into each other’s faces.

And then, I collapsed from the impact.

That right now... that worked, I think.

Ugh, I can’t move at all.

My head was spinning round and round.

I turned around and faced up towards the sky. My hands and my legs weren't moving at all anymore.

My arms and legs were spread wide open here on this sandy ground of this park.

"I... no, all of us... we liked Kurisu-sensei, the homeroom teacher who was such an incurable middle-aged man. That's why... that's why I asked Nene-san to give me this opportunity. Not an opportunity to beat the strongest masou shoujo Chris, but an opportunity to save the homeroom teacher of year 1, class C."

"Aikawa..."

"It's not just me. Hiramatsu and Orito... everyone liked Kurisu-sensei. It doesn't matter if you have a personality or not. It really doesn't. Everyone liked you all the same."

Tears began to flow from Kurisu-sensei's eyes.

Being easily moved to tears was a sign that he had really reverted into a middle-aged man.

"Everyone has their own set of faces. Don't you think that's interesting enough? You might be an unremarkable man, but you really are a masou shoujo who's stronger than anybody. Having those two sides to yourself... that gives you more than enough individuality."

"You don't understand... you really don't understand at all... Aikawa, you need to study Japanese better."

"Well, I'm sorry for that. But, I really wanted to say this. There isn't a single person who can say that they hate you. Do you

really want to lose those students of yours... all for the sake of revenge?"

Having said all I wanted to say, I just lay there, staring up into the night sky.

Kurisu-sensei did the same.

And then, I felt Kurisu-sensei steel himself and mutter.

"..... Once I get back, I'm giving you all a huge pile of homework."

"That would be the best Christmas present of them all. Thanks, Kurisu-sensei."

And like that, my eyelids dropped over my eyes.

Zombies might be strong in the night, but they still got sleepy when they were tired.

And zombies might be weak to light, fire, fatigue, and sleepiness... but they were also weak to tears.

Epilogue.

It was December the 25th. Christmas.

Chris had promised me that she would return Haruna's magical energy to her.

In the end, I could only trust that Chris would fulfill her promise.

I was quite worried about whether Chris would really give us the Christmas present she promised us, but I had a feeling she would pull through.

Kurisu Takeshi was a man who half-assed everything and had no personality, but he was still an honest man.

New Year's Eve was right around the corner. I was sitting in the living room under our kotatsu, peeling an orange.

Yuu was drinking tea right next to me. She was as emotionless as always, but she suddenly looked towards me and tapped twice on the desk.

Good work. Haruna's magical energy just came back.

"Really?"

That's great. It looks like Chris really kept her promise.

Back to me.

"Why to you?!"

Chris had returned Haruna's magical energy, but to Yuu. Was this some kind of masou shoujo humor? It definitely was a prank at the very least.

I will transfer this energy to Haruna. But it will take time.

“So, in other words, I can transform into a masou shoujo again?”

Yuu nodded. I see. Well, it looks like everything was back to normal at least.

So I guess we could say we’ve completely solved our Chris problem.

“Ayumu Ayumu Ayumu!”

Pitter patter pitter patter. I heard the sound of feet rushing down the stairs.

“What?”

“Let’s go for sushi! Sushi!”

Haruna gave me a smile. She was brimming with energy. Wait, hadn’t she just gone for sushi yesterday?

It’s not like we could just eat out every single day... ugh. Well, this was quite like Haruna, though, I had to admit.

Next, Sera came down and made a single statement.

“I thought I might try to cook our dinner today too...”

She sighed.

“Hey, let’s go for sushi. Let’s go for sushi right away.”

I stood up. And I held out a hand toward Yuu.

Yuu gave me a small nod.

I hoped that all these people would forever be in my life, and that these days would never end.

That would be the most blissful Christmas present possible. It would be the ultimate happy end.

I wrapped the scarf Yuu had given to me around my neck, and we headed for that rotary sushi where they served anything and everything. On the way, my phone began to vibrate.

I hadn't touched my phone that day yet, but when I checked, I saw that I had five new e-mails in my inbox.

The first was from Mihara.

—

Subject: Don't tell me...

Body of Message: Did you come over?

—

I could almost feel the sadness behind her short sentence. She probably felt humiliated at having her room seen by others.

—

Response: Exactly why in the world would I go over to your house?

—

That'll do it.

If she pushes it, I'll just claim over and over again that Santa did it.

The next mail was from Tomonori.

—

Subject: (none)

Body of Message: Aikawa!! Something amazon happened! Santa Cruz came over!

Response: Watch that autocorrect there.

–

The third mail was from Orito.

–

Subject: (none)

Body of Message: The best.

–

I checked the file he attached and saw a photo of Saras in a swimsuit. He seemed to really be enjoying the photo that Sera had put next to his pillow.

–

Response: Go die.

–

The fourth mail was from Hiramatsu.

–

Subject: Merry Christmas.

Body of Message: Thank you for yesterday. I had a lot of fun hanging out with Aikawa-kun. By the way, I found that dog cushion when I woke up this morning... Aikawa-kun, did you come all the way over to bring that to me? That makes me really happy. Thank you. But... is it really okay for me to take this?

–

There were a lot of apologetic looking emoticons sprinkled throughout her email.

–

Response: That cushion just magically found its way over to Hiramatsu's house. Looks like you have some weird fans.

–

The last one was from Saras.

–

Subject: Thank you.

Body of Message: This e-mail has no content.

–

That was so like Saras. I felt my lips loosen, and I decided to not respond at all.

I started to put my cell phone away when suddenly someone called me.

When I looked at the screen, I saw a rather odd number. That meant... this was a call from Virie.

“Hello?”

“Ah, Ayumu-saaan~~? It's been quite a while~~.”

I heard a lazy, easy-going voice on the other end. It was Haruna's homeroom teacher, Dai-sensei.

“What's up?”

“Weeeellll, it seems something really, reaaaaaaaally serious is going to happen~~.”

“And what might that be?”

“So, the queen... she’s going to go and visit Ayumu-san’s world~~.”

“Wait wait wait wait, why? Chris already turned over a new leaf, so there isn’t any threat left here, right?”

“Well, she seems to have taken an interest in Ayumu...”

“Why?”

“Mystletainn seems to be beating AA-class and AAA-class Megalo left and right, and I told her about youuuu~~. And now she’s reaaaaally excited about it~~.”

“She’s coming here to meet me?”

“Weeelll, technically she’s going to beat Chris, the strongest masou shoujo, buuuut... I’m sure she’ll end up visiting Ayumu-san toooo~~. Be carefull~~. If she gets upset, you can kiss your entire city bye bye~~.”

“Seriously?”

I grabbed my head. I could feel a headache coming on.

I shut my eyes and tried to figure out what to do here, when I felt someone pat me on the shoulder.

“Do your best.”

It was a cute, little girl’s voice.

A girl wearing a white Gothic Lolita outfit had just passed me.

That... was that Chris?

I turned around expecting to see Chris there, but all I saw was an unremarkable middle-aged man sharing a laugh with Nene-san.

Afterword.

Everyone, it's been a while. This is Kimura.

How was Volume 7? How was the new character, Nene-san?

Breaking out a new character always makes me nervous.

I really don't think I'm used to creating new characters.

When I'm creating female characters, I always try to base them on girls I've met in the past. I take all those girls' cute parts and tie them together.

Just a bit ago, I went drinking in the city with the regal girl I based Sera off of, along with a girl with huge breasts and a handsome guy.

“So, you know, Sera's actually based off her.”

I've told the person in question that I was going to base a character off her, but I never told anybody else.

But then, the girl with the huge breasts told me the following:

“Eh? Really? But Sera's nothing like her.”

..... What..... did you say?

Don't tell me..... no, there's no way. But..... eh? Maybe...?

As these words ran around and around in my head, reality slapped me in the face.

“I’m only cold when I talk with Kimura.”

I knew it! I knew it! She would never respond to my mails and when she finally did it was something like “Go die,” she would always click her tongue at me, and look at me with disdain... that was all behavior reserved only for me?!

I should’ve realized sooner that in the five years I’ve known her, we’ve never shared any physical contact at all!

Man, I was depressed. Soooo depressed...

Anyways, that’s why the new character, Nene-san, was made to be a character with strong motherly instincts who was forgiving of anything.

I quickly tried to dig through my memory for a girl I could use as a model.

..... waah... now I just can’t stop the tears.

There were absolutely zero people I knew who fit that bill.

I mean, I guess the fact that I knew zero people like that was precisely the reason I could write a character like Nene-san.

She was a girl with a big heart who would forgive anything and everything.

Was there really a girl like that anywhere?

But, if you wanted a girl like that, your wishes could be granted in the world of light novels.

Now that I thought about it though, all the girls I’ve met in my past were huge sadists.

I mean, words like the ones that Sera spits out have honestly been spat at me in the past.

Of those words, perhaps the ones that most vividly remained in my memory were...

“I don’t want to be seen with you, so can you walk behind me and to the side?”

She said that without even looking at me.

Whaaaaaa?! You were the one who called me out too!! And she had so little faith in me that I couldn’t even stand right behind her? Ugh, I was shocked.

But, if experiences like that became every day, then one could get used to them.

And, having gone through such terrible experiences was precisely why I could say one thing with definitiveness:

–

There isn’t any girl that you can’t make deredere!

–

Don’t give up, know your enemy, and aim right for their weak point. If you do that, then the day when they become deredere will surely come!

Don’t fear sadistic girls! No matter what awful things they do to you, do not cower!

Anyways, in the eighth volume, I plan to introduce another new character.

You could call Chris's story a preface to the story to come. You might call the story to come the "main story."

I'm also getting pretty full with all these tsundere characters, so I think I'll go through some trial and error to figure out what kind of character I'd like to make next.

Oh? Oh oh? Could it be? Seven volumes already? So maybe? Maybe I've... gotten pretty used to the light novel stuff? Oh? Something like that? Making a character? Mmmm, should be a piece of cake? Right? A piece of cake for me?

I said something like that to my sadistic, famous editor M-Oka, but he responded like he was Toguro from Yugioh...

"Don't tell me you still think we can't just cancel this entire series cold?"

Brrrrr... I've never felt my teeth shiver and clatter like this before.

Scary.... sadists are super scary...

—

I'd now like to give out my thanks.

First, to all the people who have followed this strange series for seven volumes, to all the people involved with the anime, to all the people involved with the manga, to all the people involved with the related goods.

I'm honestly grateful and would like to thank you all individually, but that would use up all the space I was allotted for this afterword, so I have to unfortunately omit that part. But I do thank you all from the depths of my heart.

Thank you very much. Please keep supporting me after this as well.

To Kobuichi-san and Muririn-san. Thank you very much for the wonderful character art this time as well. I remember asking you suddenly to draw Haruna and Yuu after the recording session, and I was shocked at how quickly and how well you drew them. Seriously, to think you two were so talented...

I'm also going to try my very best to get to that level, so please don't abandon me.

To M-Oka-san, my manager. We even argued over Nene-san's breasts at one point, didn't we?

Well, good results come only through diligence. Sadists are terrifying, but... I hope we'll continue to have many arguments in the future and produce the best work we can.

In any case, let's meet again in the next volume! I'm going to try my best to make a good character! I'm terrified of sadists though!

– December 2010, Kimura Shinichi