

nguyễn nhật ánh

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đến từ hôm qua*

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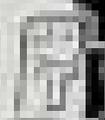
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NGUYỄN NHẬT ÁNH

# The Girl From Yesterday - Chapter 01-02

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# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1

I'm way different from when I was a kid.

In other words, I was more of a brat than I currently am.

Back then, if I wanted to hang out with a girl, I came and made friends just like that, easy. Only now that I've grown up, I have the habit of fidgeting around before women.

That's why sometimes I just sit there and reminiscent about my glorious past with unconcealed jealousy and yearning.

Even now I can still remember that day when my family moved to a new place. I was just a kid that time, around 7, 8 years old or something. The new house was prettier and has far more rooms than my old one. The day when we just moved in, I was in high spirits running all around the place. That time my mom hasn't given birth to Phuong, my little sister, so the house felt really spacious.

It got boring playing by myself, so I went out to watch the vehicles passing by.

Then I spotted a girl playing sand castle by a pile of sand in front of the adjacent house. She was around my age, her hair was tied into a twin tails that shook back and forth.

Even when I curiously drew closer, she still didn't notice, and kept on digging.

Standing there for a while, I raised my voice:

"Hey!"

The girl jumped and turned back. She looked at me with widened eyes.

"Is your house here?", I pointed at the house with the pile of sand.

She nodded, her eyes still inspecting me.

It was our first encounter, so I didn't have anything to say, I grumbled to myself for a while then asked: "What's your name?"

She replied with a small voice:

“Tieu Li”

I laughed:

“Does that mean peeing into a cup?” (TN: This is a Vietnamese pun/word play)

Tieu Li frowned:

“That’s not it!”

Saying so, she angrily returned to playing sand castle.

She made me a little embarrassed.

I circled to in front of her and sat flatly on the pile of sand with a thump, saying: “Can I play with you too?” (TN: Now please, I know my site is R18, but you people better not think darky darky with this) She didn’t even bother answering, but kept focusing on digging the sand.

Seeing that, I got fed up and just dove in playing, not caring to ask. I dug a really long tunnel with all I got, it went through the pile of sand. After a while, my hand touched Tieu Li’s hand. I immediately grabbed those fingers.

Tieu Li giggled:

“You scared me! Let my hand go!”

I still squeezed her hand:

“Say that you’re not mad at me, then I’ll let it go!”

“I’m not mad anymore!”

I laughed and let go of her hand.

And that’s how I made friends with Tieu Li. Easy, you people see?

Then it was Tieu Li’s turn asking me questions:

“What’s your name?”

“I’m Thu”

“Did you just move in?”

“Yeah I just came in today”

Tieu Li laughed:

“I’m just asking for fun because I already saw your family moving in this morning”

I widened my eyes:

“If you saw me then why didn’t I see you?” (TN: I know there are more fancy ways to word this, but these are kids talking, how come an 8 year old knows fancy way of speaking...right?) “I stayed inside the house, how could you see me!”

I raised my voice like an adult:

“That means you were peeping on me. Peeping isn’t good!”

Tieu Li pouted:

“I wasn’t peeping. I looked through the window!”

I snorted:

“That’s the same thing to peeping. Next time you have to look through the... front door!”

Seeing me acting tough too much, Tieu Li didn’t dare to argue back.

She sat there playing with the sand for a while then said, admiring: “Mrs.Tu Map’s house is really pretty, don’t you think?”

I was surprised:

“Who’s Mrs.Tu Map?” (TN: This is a nickname of this woman. It was basically built by combining that this woman is the 3rd child and she’s fat) “It’s currently your house. It was Mrs.Tu Map’s house before”

I frowned:

“I don’t care about that! If it’s my house now then just call it my house!”

“It’s a habit already”

Tieu Li said with an apologetic expression.

Seeing her seemed to be gentle and docile, I said:

“I just moved in so I don’t know anyone, I only know you. If you have anything fun to play, count me in!”

“Okay”

Tieu Li nodded, her mouth curled up into a friendly smile.

Seeing her smile, I suddenly yelled:

“You’re missing some teeth!”

Tieu Li flinched closing her mouth and turned her head to a different direction.

I nodded, acting all understanding:

“Maybe you ate too much candies!”

Seeing her not arguing, I continued:

“Next time you have candies share it with me, I’ll help you eat them all!”

Tieu Li nodded again, but this time she didn’t smile broadly anymore. She smiled to me with her eyes.

That day I went home feeling all excited. I turned in bed all night thinking, I wanted to see if I can bully Tieu Li in any other way than “baiting for candies”. I thought about all sorts of things, anything seemed interesting, and gladly concluded: girls are really stupid!

○

But that’s a conclusion of the past. Right now I made a different conclusion, less exciting: girls get smarter as they grow, while guys turn stupid!

That’s the reason why, to me, making friends with girls nowadays is a damn difficult thing to do. For example, with Viet An.

My class has 40 people in total, with  $\frac{3}{4}$  being all guys. There’s just a small group of girls, sitting in a lump at the firstmost 2 desks. (TN: Not American desks, these desks are 3 times the width of an American school desk) ‘We’re endangered species’, the girl were being arrogant and ridiculous! They just lump together all day whispering and giggling, not paying us guys any attention even a bit. Among them, Viet An is the ‘worst’ one.

Viet An is the most beautiful in my class. That everyone admitted. Viet An herself...also admitted that fact so she all the more showed cold attitude towards our eyes of admire.

Every time a guy tries to start a conversation, she always replied properly. But her form of speech was something appropriate, polite, formal, not showing a bit of emotions. That said, none of us guys have the guts to mess with her.

Pessimistically speaking, her prideful attitude is such an eye sore! Optimistically speaking, the more a girl looks like an eye sore the more she seems...cute! That's why I'm in misery! The worst thing is that, since the first time seeing Viet An, I suddenly realized that from now on I won't be "free" anymore. I think about her all the time, not just her gaze, her smile, her hair but even the name Viet An has become so close and strangely familiar as if I had fallen in love with that name since...my previous life! Sometimes when I sit alone, thinking about Viet An I subconsciously call her name and that sweet sound always give me a strange loving nostalgia and excitement.

Unlike other girls, Viet An wasn't moving up from lower grades. A few years back, she was studying all the way in Nha Trang. This year, she followed her family and moved here. Right at the beginning of the school year, Viet An suddenly appeared in my class and since then has been "disturbing" the quiet lives of us guys. (TN: Nha Trang is a city) Because her "background" is so special I never had the time to wander around and get close to her. Then class periods blankly passed by like a stream. And I'm like the leaves falling into the water, every once in awhile turned my head looking at Viet An feeling all upset.

But they usually say that "adversity is the mother of wisdom", in the end I thought of a way to make friends with Viet An.

I was writing an essay that day.

When there's 15 minutes left, my classmates turned in their papers one by one. Anyone who turned in their papers can leave.

I'm the type that's good in Literature so I only needed half the time to finish the exercise. But I sat there and kept reading it again and again, not turning it in yet. During that time I stole glances to Viet An's direction.

She was still writing endlessly, not seeming to stop soon. So I kept sitting there biting the pen waiting.

Then when the last drum resounded, Viet An hurriedly jotted down some last few lines and brought the paper up to turn in. Then, she held her bag and walked

out to the door. (TN: Most schools in Vietnam use a big ass drum instead of bells to mark periods) Viet An sits at the first desk on the opposite side, I'm at the first desk of this side, which is near the door, that's why if she wants to leave she'll have to go pass me.

Right now, there are only a few people left inside the classroom. Every single one of them were writing with great focus, not minding their surrounding. Ms.Huong was arranging the papers. The scene was perfect for my "dark plan".

As Viet An walked passed me, I grabbed the pen and splashed the ink onto her back. In an instant, the back of Viet An's hem was filled with dots of ink. She had no idea and kept walking straight forward.

As I saw Viet An walked quite far away, I turned my papers in and dashed out following her.

Mid-way, I caught up with Viet An. She was walking with Hong Hoa.

I called out:

"Viet An!"

Viet An turned back, surprised:

"You called me?"

I pointed at her back, "snitching":

"There's ink all over Viet An's shirt!"

Viet An was half doubtful. She turned back and looked but couldn't see the back of her hem. She turned her back to Hong Hoa: "Hong Hoa is there anything?"

"My god!" – Hong Hoa yelled, bewildered – "There's ink everywhere!"

Viet An had a worried expression:

"Is it a lot?"

"Not too much, but it runs all the way down..."

Mid-way speaking, Hong Hoa yelled suddenly:

"That's right! Somebody really splashed ink on your shirt!"

I acted it out and nodded:

“Yeah! Someone played a prank!”

Hong Hoa said:

“Do you know who splashed the ink?”

I shivered:

“No! I don’t know! If I knew I would have...punished him!”

Holding Viet An’s hands, Hong Hoa said:

“Don’t worry! Find eau de javel at home and wash it out” (TN: eau de javel = bleach) Viet An mumbled:

“What a weirdo doing this!”

I walked by her side, my heart jumping, there was guilt and satisfaction at the same time. Guilt because Viet An was worried about the shirt more than I thought. Perhaps she’s afraid of her mom. Satisfaction because I got to walk with her and converse with her “legally”.

Feeling thankful for me caring for her shirt and mostly I declared to “punish that certain fucker”, Viet An was more open to me than usual.

The three of us happily chatted about the essay just now as we walked until Hong Hoa and Viet An made a turn to a different direction.

That night I couldn’t fall asleep thinking about the incoming beautiful days. The first step was easy so the next ones would go smoother! I imagined tomorrow when I entered the classroom, Viet An would greet me with a smile filled of affection. Then I would also happily return it with a smile full of...affection. After that, the two of us would chat away endlessly, not separating, before our classmates’ eyes of jealousy and admiration.

As I thought about that, I suddenly jumped up and turned the lights on. Then I squirmed around before the mirror practicing...smiling. I practiced 6 styles in total, each of them was filled with affection. Nearly an hour later, only when all the muscles of my jaws went into the right, smooth motion that I turned the lights off jumping on the bed and...continued to stay up.

Next morning, on the way to school, I reviewed a lot while walking, not homework but...the 6 styles of smiling.

As I poked my head into the classroom, I met Hong Hoa. Not even letting me open my mouth, she pointed at my forehead, threatened: "You're doomed! How dare you splashed ink onto Viet An's shirt?"

I turned pale:

"No way! Who spread that rumor?"

Hong Hoa squinted her eyes:

"What are you dodging it for! Chieu Minh saw it obviously!"

Chieu Minh sits at the second desk of the other row, next to Hong Hoa. Seems like she was also one of the people who stayed behind till the end. She probably saw my naughty behavior by chance.

Just thinking about that misfortune made my blood run cold, I hurriedly lied: "That's not it! Chieu Minh must have mistaken me with someone else!"

Hong Hoa seized my wrist:

"It's already like this and you're still lying! Come here and talk to Viet An!"

She dragged me towards the girls' desks row while saying so.

"I'm not going!"

I shouted and broke away from Hong Hoa's hand, dashing outside the door.

I dragged my feet out on the yard, cursing Chieu Minh in my mind. Only until the drum resounded, did I crawled back into class and returned to my seat.

On the other side, Hong Hoa looked at me, and threw me a big snort.

But screw her, this nosy chick! I only care about "my" Viet An.

Viet An was jotting something down in her notebook. She's not even glancing at me once. That made me really upset. Right now I suddenly want to hear Viet An scolding, even badly insulting or at least snort at me big time like Hong Hoa. That would make me feel less guilty. But she kept a straight face, showing that I'm just some fucker, not worth her effort of caring.

I was limp the whole morning. The beginning step is done for. Thinking of those affectionate smiles I practiced in the middle of the night, I'm ever more mad at myself. Not knowing how to relieve myself, I turned to 'thin' Hai sitting next to me and gave him three smiles.

My "quiet" smile was so effective! I only gave him 3 styles yet he widened his eyes: "Why the hell are you so affectionate to me today!"

Listening to his comment, I regretted even more. But no worries – I pumped myself up – there are many ways! The elders taught me already!

The whole next month I couldn't face Viet An.

Until one day, during break time, I mustered up and walked up to her. Right now everyone already dashed outside, only Viet An is left reading a book.

I cleared my throat asking:

"What's Viet An reading?"

She looked up at me:

"It's 'Giamilia'"

"Is it good?"

"Yeah"

I spoke, chickening out:

"Let me borrow it when you're done!"

Viet An nodded and went back to reading.

Not knowing what to say next, I stood there for a while and walked away clicking my tongue. What a prideful chick! – I thought feeling upset – but at least she's not holding a grudge for the ink! That's good too!

Two days later, Viet An lent me the book. She said:

"Keep it in good care okay!"

I laughed:

"Rest assured"

She said again, with a straight voice:

“Remember not to splash ink into it!”

My guts twisted, I stuttered:

“No...Not happening!”

I said with a deep red face. Turns out she didn't forget my “crime” the other day. Dammit.

But I'm not dumb enough to splash ink into her book. This time I'll go with a different “operation”.

Before returning the book, I wrote two lines of poetry from Nguyen Binh on the first page with my best hand-writing: Sunny or rain, it's God's illness. But loving you, it's my illness. (TN: No. Stop. Do not tell me to make it sounds poetic cross-language!) Despite trying to calm down, when I gave it back to Viet An, my hand still trembled. Luckily Viet An didn't notice. She took the book and put it into her bag, not opening it.

That whole day, my mood was sloppy like a boy waiting for his final exams results. Thinking about my bold action, I was half happy half worried.

Next morning, I didn't dare to come to class early. I waited for the drum, when my friends were lining up, and squeezed into the rear.

During class, every once in awhile I stole a glance at Viet An, to see if she shows any difference. But she kept sitting calmly making me wonder if she saw the lines of poetry I wrote in the book.

During break time, I stayed in class on purpose to see how Viet An solves my “love puzzle”. As I expected, Viet An raised her voice calling out: “Thu!” (TN: Actually text is equivalent to Thu-san in Japanese) I nervously walked up to her, my mouth curled up into the first-style of smiling. But Viet An didn't even bother looking at me. She took out the book ‘Gimalia’: “What the heck did you write on my book?”

I shyly replied:

“Just Nguyen Binh's poetry!”

She rebuked:

“Who told you to write Nguyen Binh's poetry in here?”

I gulped down my saliva:

“Nobody told me! I thought it sounds great so I wrote it!”

“Next time you find good poetry write it in your book not mine!”

Saying that she held the book out in front of me:

“You buy me a new one!”

I would dig a hole and bury myself if I could. But the ground was too hard I couldn't dig, so I took the book and walk away in one breath, feeling deeply embarrassed.

During all the other class periods, I couldn't squeeze a single word into my head. I kept cursing Viet An to get hit by lightnings, by car, drowned in the river, or even all three is better. Only then, would I be satisfied.

That afternoon, I rode my bike to every single bookstore, determined to buy that goddamn “Giamila” so I can “throw it into Viet An's face”.

I was hyped thinking so but that's it, the next day I saw Viet An, I turned into wet noodles.

When I gave her the new book, I couldn't look her straight in the eyes: “It's compensation for Viet An!”

I spoke stiffly. Then not waiting for Viet An to say anything, I walked away.

But Viet An called me back:

“Thu!” (TN: Again, actually text is like Thu-san in Japanese) I turned back and looked at her with worries mixed into surprise. Could it be that the book is tore somewhere, and Viet An isn't taking it?

Seeing me stood there dead frozen, Viet An smiled:

“Come closer!”

I walked to her in bewilderment.

Viet An put her hand into her bag and took out the book “The white ship”, giving it to me: “You read this too! It's also from Aimatov! It's really good!”

I took the book thinking that all of this is a dream, not understanding one bit.

Viet An babe, are you intending to spin me around like a cricket?

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# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2

It's only now that I got into this miserable state, had it been like when I was still a kid, ain't no girls would be able to spin me around. It had only been me "spinning" them like crickets.

I must admit that, back then, I had much more of a presence in front of girls.

My guts twist every time, thinking about it.

I just told Tieu Li the other day to call me over whenever there's something fun to play and she called me the day right after.

She held a rope, shaking it in front of me.

"Wanna play rope-jumping with me?"

I pouted:

"I don't want to play a game for girls!"

She 'hmp!' at me:

"Guys can play too you know!"

I squinted my eyes:

"Who told you that?"

"I don't need anyone to tell me that! A bunch of guys in my school played rope-jumping!"

I licked my lips:

"Really?"

"Really"

"Then I'll play."

Having that said, I snatched the rope from Tieu Li's hand.

She yelled:

“Let me jump first to show you.”

I snorted:

“I don’t need to! Don’t treat me like...a kid!”

I swung the rope over my head, telling Tieu Li: “Count to see how many hundreds can I jump!”

Tieu Li giggled:

“You’re just bluffing! At most 50!”

I clicked my tongue once, raising my tone: “If I’m going to do it, why just 50?”

But I only reached 7 jumps. At the eighth one, the rope tangled my leg suddenly and I fell head-on forward, slamming my face on the ground as if hit by lightning.

Tieu Li ran to support me in utter surprise. I sluggishly sat up, aching all over my body.

Looking at my face, Tieu Li yelled:

“My god! Your forehead swelled up!”

I lifted my hand and touched my forehead and asked, worried: “Is it bleeding?”

Tieu Li shook her head:

“No, but it’s turning purple.”

I frowned and ordered her:

“Go find me some oil!” (TN: It’s not cooking oil btw, it’s oil with medical effects) Tieu Li looked me hesitantly:

“Maybe let me help you into the house first?”

I retorted:

“You’re so dumb! I can’t go inside like this! You want me to get beat up?”

Seeing me getting angry, Tieu Li hurriedly ran away.

A little while later she came back with a bottle of oil: “Would this work?”

I didn’t even bother looking:

“Whatever is fine! Apply it for me!”

Tieu Li obediently listened to my orders. But as she just touched my forehead, I shook her hand away, raising my voice: “Is your hand made of iron or something! Hurts so much!”

Tieu Li blinked her eyes:

“I did it gently!”

I snorted:

“Gently my butt!”

Then seeing her fidgeting with the oil bottle, I urged: “Don’t just stand there! Apply it!”

This time Tieu Li didn’t sweep her hand left and right anymore, she applied the oil on my swell gently, and softly. All the while, making pained sounds with her mouth.

I frowned:

“What are you doing! It’s your fault!”

“Why me?”

“You’re asking me that! You called me over to play rope-jumping!”

Tieu Li was surprised:

“But you told me to call you if there’s anything to play!”

I frowned:

“I meant other games! It hurts to fell when rope-jumping!”

“It’s your fault! I never fell, playing this!”

“We’re different! You’re a girl!”

I cleared my throat and continued:

“On top of that, they usually play rope-jumping with rubber-rope, not this rope! If it was a rubber-rope then I wouldn’t have fallen.” (TN: A long-ass rope made by putting rubber bands together) Seeing me accusing her so much, Tieu Li quietly applied the oil, not arguing one word.

The next day, Tieu Li came running, showing me a rubber-rope. She was excited: “Here’s a rubber-rope!”

I shrugged:

“I don’t care! I’m not playing rope-jumping anymore!” (TN: This nigga LMAO) I made Tieu Li disappointed. She sat flatly on the ground and wrapped the rubber bands around her wrist, one round after another, with a sad face.

After a while of putting on airs, I suddenly felt pity for Tieu Li, saying: “Give me the rubber band!”

Her eyes shone:

“Are you jumping?”

“Jumping my butt! I’m making a sling.”

Tieu Li stared at me:

“Eh, if you make a sling, what do I have left to play?”

I pressed my voice:

“Idiot! Why rope-jumping! Let me make a sling, get a couple tens of birds everyday and rôtir them, that’s way better!” (TN: Rôtir is a French cooking method, c’mon, you already saw this word reading Shokugeki no Souma) Tieu Li widened her eyes:

“A couple of tens?”

I nodded:

“That’s right! It can even be more! If I’m in the mood, I’ll shoot hundreds of them.”

Having done making the sling, I ordered Tieu Li to go collect rocks as bullets.

She ran away for a bit, and brought back a load of rocks before me.

From that bunch, I selected 4, 5 good ones, then threw the rest away.

Tieu Li was bewildered:

“Why did you throw them all away?”

I replied, my tone scolding:

“You sure don’t know how to pick rocks!”

As I said that, I held out the ones in my hand: “You have to pick the round ones like these!”

Tieu Li snorted:

“You didn’t tell me, I didn’t know.”

I squinted my eyes:

“Do you know now?”

Tieu Li said honestly:

“I do know.”

I pointed with my chin:

“Then go pick up some more!”

Tieu Li wiped the sweat on her forehead: “Right now?”

“Yeah, now.”

With all “armaments” prepared, I dragged Tieu Li along, peeking from under the bushes. But for 3 consecutive days, I got zero birds.

Tieu Li asked, feeling anxious:

“How come you always miss?”

Embarrassed, and pissed at the same time, I scowled: “It’s your fault!” (TN: hahaha I swear to god this nigga...) Tieu Li was scared:

“I didn’t do anything!”

I bluffed:

“Seeing you, the birds didn’t stay still for me to shoot.”

“Why is that?”

“I have no clue. Ask the birds!”

Tieu Li had a sad face:

“Then I’ll stay home tomorrow, I won’t follow you.”

I made a sound with my mouth:

“Yeah, stay home! I’m staying home too!”

“Eh, why aren’t you going?”

I sighed:

“I don’t like bird-shooting anymore.”

Saying so, I threw the sling into the bush before Tieu Li’s bewildered face.

On the way home, Tieu Li asked me:

“Then what are you playing next after this?”

“I don’t know. You come up with something for me!”

“Why don’t you come up with something?”

I stuttered:

“Me? I gotta think about...other things!”

Even if I said so I had no idea what was that ‘other thing’. Luckily Tieu Li didn’t press for the answer. She just gladly nodded: “Yeah, let me think. If I think of something, I’ll call you.”

Seeing her obeyed me, I happily thought: this girl is naive!

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Then I grew up, and everything changed completely.

Viet An asked me:

“Did you finish reading “The white ship”?”

“Just half of the book.”

Viet An frowned:

“Why are you so slow? Hurry up, I need to lend that to Hong Hoa.”

“I’ll return it soon.” (TN: Soon™)

“No soon or anything! Read it tonight, and return it to me next morning.”

I broke out in sweat:

“How can I read that fast?”

“Why not?”

“I have to sleep!”

“Then don’t sleep!” (TN: No, seriously, this chick is Yukinoshita’s cousin or something...) I actually didn’t sleep that night. I stayed up til 3 in the morning to finish the book. In the morning, my face was rubbish.

When I gave the book back to Viet An, she looked at me carefully: “What did you do that your face is so terrible?”

I scratched my head:

“I was reading til 3 o’clock this morning.”

Viet An flinched:

“Uwaa, I was joking and you really did it?” (TN: Actual text is “Oh god” but this Japanese vibe sounds better so I took my opportunity) My smile twisted:

“I didn’t know you were joking.”

Viet An was troubled before my naivetivity. She took out a candy from her bag and gave it to me: “It’s for you!”

I took the candy as if holding a comforting gift, my stomach was dancing with a strange feeling.

Seeing me keep holding onto the candy, Viet An urged: “Eat it!”

“I’m saving it.”

“For what purpose?”

I was about to say ‘souvenir’ but for some reasons avoided it in the last moment: (TN: For Academic Pupose) “For when I’m hungry.”

Viet An giggled:

“Who would eat candy when they’re hungry!”

Having said that, she took out another candy and gave me: “If you’re saving the other one then eat this one.”

I tried to refuse, flustered:

“Viet An eat it!”

She shook her bag:

“There’s a bunch in here.”

I got curious:

“Where did you get so many?”

“I bought them!”

“Viet An likes eating candies?”

“Yeah.”

I swallowed my saliva:

“Then from tomorrow on Viet An doesn’t need to buy anymore!”

“Why?”

I said half-assedly:

“Somebody will buy for Viet An.”

Viet An blinked her eyes:

“Who is it?”

I averted my eyes:

“I don’t know.”

Viet An smiled:

“But I know.”

I tried my best to keep my voice calm:

“Who is it?”

Viet An looked straight into my eyes, her voice straightforward: “It’s you!”

Before my flustered expressions, she naturally continued: “I even know why are you buying me candies!”

I flinched, my heart banged against my chest. Could it be that Viet An is revealing all of my hearty feelings right here? I asked with a bewildered voice:

“Why?”

Viet An brushed her hair:

“Because you want to reflect on splashing ink on me the other day.”

I exhaled, half relieved half disappointed. At the same time, I learned that girls are a kind of creature that hold a grudge. That incident was days ago and yet Viet An is still mentioning it today.

I bit my lips:

“It’s not like that! I forgot about that!”

“How come? I thought you’d always remember?”

I made a sound with my mouth:

“Why would I?”

Viet An laughed:

“In order to buy me candies.”

With that way of speaking of hers, I had no way to rebuke, thus I just laughed along. What’s worse is that, my smile right now isn’t any from that 6 “golden” styles!

Since then, everyday my pocket is filled with candies. Whenever it’s break time or on the way home, seeing nobody around, I shoved it into Viet An’s hand.

But Viet An didn’t eat the candies alone. She was close to Hong Hoa and Chieu Minh so she had to split everything into three, especially things with glucose. (TN: Nah, Thu...you won’t sound like Hachiman even with this kind of cheeky intellect) Since the day I found out about this troublesome relationship, I had to buy triple everything: 3 guavas, 3 ambarella fruits, 3 bars of chocolate, it was as if I loved 3 people instead of one.

In order to serve this restless “union of consumption”, I had to steel my guts and cut off my coffee, books and newspapers, cut off my movies tickets and completely broke up with billards.

After many times of failing to call me out to the billards with him, ‘thin’ Hai got curious: “Are you becoming a monk?”

“Nah! Recently I’m busy...studying.”

‘Thin’ Hai looked at me with suspicious eyes: “Liar!”

“I’m for real.”

“I don’t believe it.”

“Then screw you! Lend me a couple hundreds!” (TN: In terms of money. And FYI, 1 USD was around 16,000 VND that time. I could be very wrong here, but oh well) “For what?”

“That’s my business!”

‘Thin’ Hai didn’t bother asking anymore. He took out money and gave it to me.

Waiting for him to go away, I happily ran with the money to buy...candies.

Despite my efforts, I didn’t get to have peace, one day Hong Hoa told me:

“Why aren’t you buying [mut mang cau](#)?” (TN: click the link for more info.)

Another day I was played, mentally, by Chieu Minh: “Viet An likes eating grapes a lot!”

Thus I bought [mut mang cau](#). Then bought grapes. But the market didn’t just sell those two, I bought longans. After longans, it was purple mangosteens. After that, I came to ‘thin’ Hai: “You have money left?”

‘Thin’ Hai raised his eyebrows:

“For what?”

“Lend me.”

“You just borrowed some recently!”

“Then I’m borrowing more!”

‘Thin’ Hai stared at me:

“What are you spending so much on!”

I shrugged:

“That’s my business!”

However this time ‘thin’ Hai didn’t let me pull that off anymore. She squinted his eyes: “No money if you don’t talk.”

Pressured by 'thin' Hai, I got pissed, and was about to leave. But if I left then I would have no way to dig out some money to buy "offerings" for Viet An. Thinking so, I sighed and reported everything about my "historical love affairs" to 'thin' Hai.

After hearing everything, 'thin' Hai stiffened his face, asking: "Do you know the donkey?"

I stared blankly:

"Yeah I do! But why?"

'Thin' Hai snorted:

"You're a dumb-ass!" (TN: Praise me!!! I transferred that pun perfectly cross-language!!!) My face became red:

"Just screw you!"

'Thin' Hai casually said:

"That's true! You're giving money to the girls all out of the blue!"

I clicked my tongue:

"You just don't know! Everybody's like that when they're in love!"

He made a "sszz" sound:

"What kind of love is that? Why isn't she buying something for you but just you buying things for her?"

I stuttered:

"Viet An...lent me books."

'Thin' Hai broke out in laughters:

"What's with lending books! Has she ever gifted you anything?"

I shook my head:

"No."

"Then she doesn't love you?"

"She doesn't!"

'Thin' Hai widened his eyes:

"Then just you loving her?"

I sighed:

"That's right! I told you earlier!" (TN: Souda!! Ittandarou?!) 'Thin' Hai nodded:

"Then I get it now! This is one-sided love. It's like a one-way, with no returning directions."

Then he clicked his tongue, commenting:

"If it's like that you'd rather not fall in love at all!"

My pride got provoked:

"What if Viet An also loves me?"

He shook his face:

"Base on what?"

"Nothing!" – I replied with a flustered voice – "I'm just guessing so!"

'Thin' Hai shook his hand:

"You can't just guess in love! You need to base it off of scientific proofs!"

I scratched my ear:

"Where do those scientific proofs come from?"

He acted self-important:

"We need to create them!"

I went from this question to another:

"Using what?"

"Using letters."

I suddenly realized:

"Are you telling me to write letters to Viet An?"

"Obviously! You write, I'll offer advice!"

I shook my head vigorously:

“Nope, I’m not playing that kind of game! If she shows it to everyone while she’s at it, I’ll drop out from school.”

‘Thin’ Hai laughed:

“Who told you to write too long! Keep it short within one sentence: “Viet An... Thu”. Only 3 words. Down below you add a few words “love”, “don’t love” or maybe “not yet to love”, “almost love” just for variation, and diversity. Then you tell her to pick the word that suits her feelings and fill it into the blank above. Then, she’ll give it back to you.” (TN: X gon’ give it to ya) I frowned:

“You’re making love letters sound like grammar assignments!”

‘Thin’ Hai tapped my shoulder:

“I told you it’s a scientific test! Else you can just write “Viet An loves Thu” and “Viet And doesn’t love Thu”, after every sentence you draw a box then tell her to check the suitable box. Like in a multiple choice test!”

I threw my arms to the sky: (TN: BANZAAAIIII!!!) “Nope, nope, I am not listening to your dumb jokes!”

‘Thin’ Hai made a dark face:

“You’re calling genius ideas dumb jokes!”

I shrank my neck:

“Doing as you say, if she ticks in “don’t love” I’d be dead.”

“There’s nothing wrong with that! If that happens you’ll get back to be human, not a donkey anymore!” (TN: This dude is savage pfftt) I laughed:

“I like being a donkey more.”

Seeing me so passionate about playing the role of a donkey for Viet An (and Hong Hoa and Chieu Minh) to lead by the nose, ‘thin’ Hai sighed in utter resignation: “Screw you! Go ahead and be the donkey!”

I held out my hand:

“Gimme money!”

‘Thin’ Hai frowned, taking out his money, gave it to me and turned his heels in one go.

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[-\[ToC\]-](#)