



The Little Witch's Sure-fire Techniques Volume 01

Original novel by MING XIAOXI

Illustrated by HUANIAN

CKM Scans – Chinatown KM

<http://ckmscans.halofight.com>

16/01/13

DISCLAIMER: This is a FREE translation done by fans of this author. Under no circumstances may you re-upload or distribute this free translation to engage in any activity such as rent, sell, print. All material in this PDF's copyright is reserved by the author (Ming Xiao Xi), the artist (Huanian) and the publisher (New World Publishing). Please respect their rights – CKM Scans' works will be deleted on request by the copyright owners.

BEFORE READING

This novel was originally serialised in “Gong Zhu Zhi” (magazine).

Despite being a Chinese (light) novel, it was originally written with Japanese names. It was serialised with the name “The Little Witch’s Surefire Techniques”. During publication however, all Japanese names were changed to Chinese names. The publication was renamed to “Afternoon Lavendar” (Also known as “The Lavender Tea”).

This translation was done from the original, serialisation format. Thus, all names have been translated into Japanese, rather than the way the usual Chinese pronunciation. There is quite a lot of inconsistency though, such as very traditional Chinese drinks and clothing.

This novel is a spinoff of this author’s former work, Ming Ruo Xiao Xi, but this novel is almost a completely different story. The main female lead in Ming Ruo Xiao Xi, Ming Xiao Xi, was a classmate/good friend of the main female lead in this novel, Koizumi.

CHAPTER 01

The announcement of Senya Kaoru's latest album, 'Night-Time Walkers'!

The light blue balloon and the beautiful butterflies gave a dreamy effect.

A photo.

Distant eyes, stiff lips, high nose...he made people want to shriek "Ahh..."

Everyone knew him. He was the famous singer——Senya Kaoru.

The room was packed full of reporters. They held on to their 'essential items' (video camera, camera, pens etc.), while they stared at Senya Kaoru. They were afraid to miss his words, his expressions, if they ever did lose concentration. News and photos of Senya Kaoru were like money trees and decided whether companies would flourish. Every TV station, newspaper company and magazine would send the best reporter to complete this 'following' task!!

It was called 'following' because Senya Kaoru had never co-operated with reporters before. To make him say something was the ultimate goal for the reporters.

Even now, the singer of 'Night-Time Walkers' refused to introduce his album. His fans were all very excited as they danced with happiness. He just sat there, cold as ice, his eyes hidden under his dark blue glasses. The reporters had nothing to comment on.

"He's asleep!"

Koizumi looked at Takahashi smugly, who was standing beside her.

Takahashi raised an eyebrow and swivelled his camera at her. "You must be psychic, since he's wearing sunglasses..."

"Hey!" Takahashi looked back at the stage, "Questioning time has begun, so be careful."

Why the hell did Boss want this stupid yellow-haired brat to come?! No, that was wrong. She was more like a stupid 'red-haired' brat. Her red hair hurt his eyes and she attracted way too much attention. No wonder everyone called her 'Fire Witch'.

Koizumi fumed. He didn't believe her, the talented reporter of Tangerine Weekly?! It seemed that she'd have to prove herself before they could work together. Fine, Fire Witch takes action, she thought.

"Now we shall begin the interview. First we have——"

Kamiki stood up, eyed his audience. All of them had their hands raised, eager to be chosen. Choosing the first interviewer was very important. It was important to choose someone reputable, someone from a company with high standards, for example East Phoenix Station, whose questions were usually legal and did not usually cause any trouble. It was important not to let Tangerine Weekly or Burst Weekly get a chance to ask questions. They had always been reckless, sarcastic and dull. If they ever decided to get angry, they always caused a huge uproar; an ugly scene.

Kamiki looked for the East Phoenix Station logo, but it was not an easy job as there were too many people.

In the midst of his searching——his eyes were suddenly attracted to flaming red hair!

All he saw was fiery, eye-catching bright-red hair, as radiant as a burning fire! He had seen a lot of dyed hair before, in all sorts of awkward colours, but this was the first time he had ever seen such bright and beautiful red.

Kamiki could not help but hesitate and look down at its owner——He saw a pretty face with a pair of beady black eyes, sparkling with intelligence.

Electricity, light, fire and stone seemed to charge at him!

Those eyes were fluttering! They were as beautiful as a butterfly, as elegant as a dragonfly tapping the water's surface, fluttering at the rate of twenty times per second! The smile on her face was as high as the summer sun at noon!

Kamiki was lost in his thoughts as he stared at the girl, mumbling, “You...”

The red-haired girl immediately took advantage of his dazed state by declaring, “Thank you for giving me the opportunity to ask a question! I am Koizumi from Tangerine Weekly!”

Koizumi from Tangerine Weekly?!

Shouts of protest arose from the crowd of reporters.

Numerous looks of jealousy, envy and suspicion swivelled towards the red-haired girl, who lifted her head proudly. Was she the girl who had jumped through the ranks of her company in a month by uncovering the truth of thirty-eight popular rumours, twenty-six secret stories, as well as successfully interviewed nineteen celebrities, that Koizumi from Tangerine Weekly?!

At that moment, the spotlight seemed to shine on Koizumi.

Koizumi, with her head held high, proudly accepted all of her ‘worship’.

There was always a price to pay for success! Ever since her debut as a rookie reporter, she had worked hard to collect information from whomever or whatever she could find and had put a lot of effort into studying various techniques. Now, she could proudly walk among the rest of the world and easily to get what she wanted.

Tip: Fire Witch's Sure-fire Technique——Bright red hair! Must not be dark red or burgundy, must be astonishingly red, red and eye-catching. That way, during conferences, she would be noticed, for her height and appearance always disappeared into the crowd.

Fire Witch's Sure-fire Technique——Flutter your eyelashes! Never underestimate this trick. While everyone can blink, it is very difficult to flutter them elegantly and quickly. This can make the target momentarily lose focus. Koizumi had spent a whole week practising in front of the mirror, before using on such an idiot. Haha, ten seconds of hypnosis was all she needed to grab that opportunity!

Kamiki clenched his teeth, bitterly!

Despite his careful considerations, how did a reporter from Tangerine Weekly ended up being chosen?! This was bad, as that group was a bunch of troublemakers. The Senya Kaoru scandal? Senya Kaoru's love affair? Had Senya Kaoru had plastic surgery before? ...God, the thought of Senya Kaoru's icy eyes sent a chill up Kamiki's spine.

Utter silence.

Koizumi managed a friendly smile, the Tangerine Weekly logo sparkling on her chest.

Everyone held their breath.

Kamiki broke into a cold sweat.

Senya Kaoru had the faintest trace of a mocking smile on his lips. Bring it on, it beckoned, there's nothing I'll reveal.

“I'd like to ask——” Koizumi's white teeth flashed into a smile, amiable and cute.

The crowd took a deep breath.

Koizumi smiled again, “——did you just fall asleep?”

Eh!

Most of the reporters were shocked!

Takahashi was so dumbfounded that he didn't know whether to cry or to laugh; his camera almost fell out of his hands.

That was——Tangerine Weekly's Koizumi, at the universe's most unsocial celebrity Senya Kaoru's press conference's first question. It was a real ‘bomb’ of a question!

※※※

Tangerine Company office building.

Modern and stylish, the warm orange building was compelling. The world's hottest, spiciest news continuously poured out from this building. Tangerine Company's media industry had three main publications—Tangerine Weekly, Daily Tangerine and Freshest Tangerine News.

Eleven o'clock.

The Tangerine building was always sunny and it was the media company with the best views. A red haired girl lazily leaned against the small but expensive leather couch. Her smile was smug as she received the praise of the people around her.

Koizumi lifted her left hand—and the newcomer of the publishing department, Misa, respectively handed her a copy of that week's latest edition of the Tangerine Weekly magazine. A huge picture of Senya Kaoru had been printed on the cover, together with the catchy headline, 'Unique Prince Whose Dreams are Tender!'

Misa excitedly shook Koizumi's hand. "Front page news! Koizumi's report has been dominating the front page for three weeks already!"

Koizumi lifted her right hand—and the newcomer of the investigation department, Ishii, hurriedly handed her a copy of the circulation statistics. She explained, passionately, "As of today, at ten thirty, today's Tangerine Daily newspaper with Koizumi's article as front page news has now sold over five hundred thousand copies. That's a sixty-one percent increase compared to last week's explosion!"

"Victory!"

All of the newcomers of each department, beside the red haired girl, started to cheer and jump!

Koizumi was their idol.

All of the girls there had entered the Tangerine Company at about the same time, but because they were too new, they were often made to serve tea or water, clean, perform simple printing jobs and do easy errands. Only Koizumi in the entertainment news department had quickly risen like a star and had created an opening for the other newcomers. Due to her excellent performance at work, she was given triple salary and had soon become the focus of attention. The others weren't bullied into doing odd jobs as often with her around.

Koizumi straightened up, smiled warmly, "Please excuse me."

The cheering of the crowd instantly came to an end and they froze, waiting for her to continue.

Koizumi reluctantly sighed, "It's so hot. I've been running all day and my lips are cracking.

Would you girls mind moving a bit, so I can get a cup of water?"

Boom!—The crowd dispersed.

Boom!—The crowd reassembled.

"Koizumi, coke!"

"Koizumi, mineral water!"

"Koizumi, yogurt!"

"Koizumi, green tea!"

"Koizumi, ice!"

....They were amazing, for one of them actually had a cold cup of red bean ice!

Koizumi enjoyed her drink by talking a huge gulp, feeling its coldness slide down her throat. So comfortable, so yummy...Rie, the one who had given her the drink, was also in the entertainment news department. She smiled sweetly at Koizumi, who was gobbling down the drink, and carefully asked, "Hey Koizumi, may I ask you a question?"

Koizumi swallowed a mouthful of drink and replied, "Sure."

"I don't understand, why did you ask Senya Kaoru whether he had fallen asleep or not? Why didn't you ask something more interesting?"

Koizumi puffed out her cheeks and grinned, "Oh. If you were the one doing it, what would you ask?"

Rie thought for a moment, "A normal question of course, probably about his latest album, 'Night-Time Walkers'. But—" she clutched her hands at her chest, "I'd first ask whether he'd dated Tsuka Sakura and Shimizu Hishi before!"

Misa lovingly stroked the Senya Kaoru on the cover, "I'd like to know whether he was born beautiful or not!"

Ishii added, "Maybe he's gay?"

"What type of flowers does he like?"

"What's his ideal image of a woman?"

"Does he really have a secret crush on the Korean celebrity, Geum Hui-hui?"

...Ok! Red bean ice eliminated!

Koizumi put down the empty cups and sighed contentedly. She shook her head to the six curious pairs of eyes. "Wrong!"

"...?" Everyone's mouth dropped open.

Koizumi closed her eyes and smiled leisurely, "Firstly, his views and evaluation of his new album were printed on the record company's promotional materials, which are pretty easy to get. Therefore, there's not much value in that question."

Yeah! Everyone nodded in agreement.

"Secondly, things like scandals, secret crushes, sexual orientation and criteria of choosing friends...are all excellent questions. But—" Koizumi looked at them and laughed, "would he answer me?"

Everyone exchanged looks.

Koizumi shook her head, "Senya Kaoru is pretty famous for resisting media reportage, so naturally he'd just ignore me. If I asked such things, I'd be asking for trouble. He'd send me back if I embarrassed him too much too!"

True!

"Instead, I asked him an unexpected question and as he couldn't figure out my intention, he slowly fell into the trap I had set..."

"Trap?!"

Koizumi smirked, "Yep, a trap! Sleeping during an opening press conference can lead to all sorts of stories. For example, he doesn't respect reporters; no one is up to his standards and is arrogant. You could also say that he's often exhausted, has mental deficiency and maybe it was because he'd spent the night before at Tsuka Sakura's house etc. Another example was because he thought that his new album wasn't good enough to be released yet and angrily protested by sleeping through the conference..."

The crowd were dazed; their hearts chilled. It had turned out that just 'sleeping' could mean so many 'horrific' things.

Rie raised her hand shyly, "Then...why didn't you write that?"

Koizumi raised an eyebrow and stared at her, “Stupid, did you think I, Koizumi, would just go for any flimsy story without proof? After setting the bait, the only way to get more news out of Senya Kaoru is by improving our relationship! That's why I let him go this time and asked for an analysis from psychologists and astrologists about people who fall asleep in public. This includes their personality traits, ideal type of woman, career development trend....I also got them to analyse Senya Kaoru's previous incidents, experiences and gossip. After comprehensive reasoning, such headline was born, attracting countless eyeballs!”

“Wow!” The crowd exclaimed, “You analysed this much?”

Koizumi chuckled breezily, “With a bit of money, a whole book could have been born.”

The orange sun shone through the floor, through the windows in the ceiling.

The Koizumi on the leather couch, in the eyes of the newcomers, suddenly got even bigger, more powerful.

She was like a shining sun, emitting a magnificent glow.

“Koizumi, Boss is looking for you!”

Someone shouted from the door.

Koizumi smiled while standing up, leaving the dazed crowd behind. She felt a little dishonest for forgetting to tell them that the only reason why she had asked Senya Kaoru that question was to prove one thing—that Fire Witch's intuition was never wrong!

※※※

A luxurious office.

The priceless antiques and paintings in Tangerine Company's building were all one of a kind. The orange-coloured table had been personally carved by several famous Italian carpenters. The light from the window fell on the young woman seated at the table. She was wearing a black qipao.

Koizumi gazed at the sitting woman adoringly. She was her boss—the founder of Tangerine Weekly, Shinyo Kane!

Shinyo Kane was a legend.

She was born into a poor family and it was said that she hadn't even been able to graduate from primary school. Her parents died when she was nine, leaving her to live on the streets and make a living from picking up cigarette cases. Ten years ago, Shinyo Kane decided to enter the media industry. She founded Tangerine Weekly and adopted a ‘paparazzi’ system. Topics ranged from entertainment news to political scandals to uncovering history. It had quickly attracted worldwide attention and Tangerine Weekly was an instant success.

Today, Tangerine Company had firmly secured first place in the gossip and media industry and had become the archenemy of other big media companies.

Shinyo Kane looked up. There was a faint scar on her pretty face. It looked like a wound from a knife, but it was too faint to tell properly. She looked at Koizumi and dismissively said, “Sit.”

Koizumi sat down, her fascinated eyes studying her knife wound. It really was a mysterious and beautiful scar. There was probably some thrilling story behind it too. Eh? No, she remembered seeing similar wounds somewhere else. Who, who was it? She tugged at her hair and thought hard.

Shinyo Kane put down her pen and leaned against her rosewood chair. “You're very suited to being an entertainment reporter.”

Koizumi's eyes lit up, “Thank you Boss for the compliment!”

“You've been staring at the scar on my face for a while, probably wanting to know about my past. You were born as a curious person who wants to get to the bottom of every secret and you feel happier each time a layer is uncovered.”

“Oh, my curiosity is only slightly stronger than others. But, I wouldn't say that's a bad thing,” Koizumi drily laughed back.

Shinyo Kane smiled, “It's not bad at all.”

Koizumi relaxed at this.

Shinyo Kane leaned forward and stared into her eyes. “You should——be——meaner, more heartless, more outrageous and more distant.”

Koizumi coughed, choked.

“It is absolutely forbidden to be soft-hearted!” Shinyo Kane tossed over the latest edition with Senya Kaoru on the covers. “The tone in this article is too nice, not stimulating at all. You obviously have several options to thrill your readers and start an unstoppable wave of popularity but, you just lightly skirted over all that.”

“I...” What the hell, then why was it front page news?

“It was the main article not because it was good, but because there was nothing better.” Shinyo Kane sneered, “The only reason why this week it was still popular was because the other publishers are stupid, too stupid to think of the endless possibilities.”

Koizumi poked out her tongue. Wow Boss, she was pretty clever to realise that.

Shinyo Kane continued to sneer, “Only by being merciless can a reporter succeed. You're clever and you have the talent. I have high expectations of you and I will give you more opportunities in the future, so don't let me down on this.”

“Yes,” Koizumi bowed.

“From today on, you'll be in charge of covering Senya Kaoru. In one month, I expect to see results and have Fire Witch as a figurehead of Tangerine Weekly.”

“Yes!” Koizumi waved her fists in determination.

Shinyo Kane went back to work and sunlight flooded in from the window behind her, temporarily blinding Koizumi. She continued to wait for a few moments, but then realised that Shinyo Kane was buried in her files and seemed to have forgotten her existence. She gently stood up, “Boss, if there's nothing else, I'll take my leave.”

Shinyo Kane annotated something on the document in front of her, but didn't look up. “I've informed the finance department to give you a ten percent raise.”

“Thank you boss!” Koizumi grinned, happier than ever. Rising wages meant that her exceptional ability had been recognised once again.

“You're still studying at Kouyu College aren't you? There's still about a month until the end of the summer holidays and if you want, you can continue working part-time after school.” Shinyo Kane closed her file and laughed.

Koizumi was speechless. Gosh, to get a chance to work temporarily at Tangerine Weekly, she had filled her head with all sorts of rubbish and now...Koizumi quietly closed the company president's door behind her.

Finally——she clutched to her chest and heaved a huuuuuge sigh of relief.

Quite the scary woman...

※※※

Saturday afternoon.

Clear blue skies and the sunny atmosphere made people want to scream in delight. There was a light breeze too, that felt cheery towards everyone's good mood.

Ginza shopping centre.

A shaggy dog chased its master while girls not far from him laughed. Their voices were cute and tinkling like a bell. Behind them, there were huge eye-catching, colourful advertisements pasted on the wall. A few pink balloons escaped from the hands of children for the sky, while the drinks in the vending machine glittered in the sun.

It was cold outdoors.

A teenage boy in a white shirt and blue jeans quietly sat under the shade of striped blue and white umbrella. Beside him on a wooden table, was a half-finished cup of orange juice. The teenager had a handsome face and his hair was soft and slightly curled. His eyes had a faraway expression, revealing a childish tint to them.

The orange juice had long been forgotten.

No one knew what the teenager was thinking as he wasn't smiling and he looked somewhat sad.

He held up the glass of juice and looked through it.

How beautiful.

But, someone wanted to destroy it!

A well-dressed, haughty looking man of about thirty sat down on the wooden chair beside the teenager. The man studied him, then in a low, fawning voice he said, "Hello——"

The teenager frowned. Flies shouldn't be flying around here.

"May I ask for your name?"

"Move!"

"From the first moment I saw you," the man desperately wanted to hold the other boy's hand, "I was attracted to you..."

The teenager lifted the glass.

Splash! Orange juice spilled down the man's face.

He'd seen lots of idiots before, but shameless ones were rare.

The man paled, for he had been in and out of love in the last twenty years. His appearance and family background were both top class so this was a first for him. It was obvious that this beautiful boy was a nasty brat, who liked pretending to be cool. But, he really was beautiful enough to make one drool. He seemed to have forgotten to introduce himself first, so it was no wonder that the teenager had dismissed him without a second thought.

The man tried to remain composed. He took out a handkerchief and wiped his face, coughing loudly. "Well, I'd like to introduce myself. I am the Ishizuka family's eight generation successor..."

Bang! The glass came down heavily on Ishizuka's forehead and blood flowed out!

The teenager rubbed his fingers against a paper towel, as if the glass had dirtied his hand.

"You bastard!" Ishizuka angrily shouted, his bloodied forehead making his face look exceptionally grim. "You hit me! Come with me to the station, I plan to report you for harming me with intention!"

He grabbed the teenager's arms, his blood staining the clean white shirt.

"Let go!" The teenager tried to throw him off, but it didn't work. He thought that the man's blood was dirty, so he was resisting very hesitantly as his face turned a shade of angry crimson.

By now, a lot of passersby had surrounded them curiously watching, pointing. They didn't know what had happened between them.

Ishizuka loudly accused the teenager with a pointed finger, “You damn gay. I told you, I'm not interested in you, so you should let me go! Did you think using violence would make me interested in you? Unless you're punished by the law, I doubt you'd ever be polite in public!”

Uwah! A gay!

The people in the crowd all raised an eyebrow. No wonder the boy was so handsome.

The teenager finally exploded in anger, “You're the one who's gay!”

Ishizuka sneered, “If you're brave enough to be one, then you should be brave enough to say so!”

“You!”

The teenager was about to explode!

Suddenly, someone in the crowd yelled, “Who's the one bullying my boyfriend?!”

The crowd parted aside with a brushing sound, to reveal a red-haired girl with furious eyes, stomping forward and jerking Ishizuka away from the teenager.

Ishizuka screamed in pain and when he looked down, he realised the girl's fingernails had created five bloody marks on his hand!

“You——” He pointed at the red-haired girl.

The red-haired girl pushed away his hand and angrily asked, “Did you say that my boyfriend was gay?”

“He——”

“If he was gay, then what am I?” The girl pointed at his nose and scolded, “We're here on a date. All I did was go to the bathroom and he instantly became gay! You damn old man, it's obviously you who wanted to seduce my boyfriend and as you didn't succeed, you put all the blame on him. Some dog you are!”

The crowd erupted in laughter.

Ishizuka's face was as green as liver but he couldn't find a suitable retort to fight back. The girl continued to criticise him, “Leave, go to the police station! I want to report you of sexual harassment!”

“You don't have any evidence!” Ishizuka was a little nervous now, for he had only been trying to intimidate the teenager. He didn't actually dare to mess around at a police station.

The girl laughed three times then glared at him. “It's not like I don't know who you are. You're Ishizuka Jiro, the eighth generation successor of the Ishizuka Family, who specialises in real estate.”

Ishizuka Jiro gave her a defiant look, “At least you're well informed.”

The girl snorted through her nose and sneered, “At eleven years old, you were expelled from school for harassing your classmates. At sixteen you were suspended by the court on charges for alleged sexual harassment for two years and at twenty-three years old you seriously beat the crap out of a man, just because you were jealous of him. Earlier this year, in March, the intimate photo of you with another man was all over the covers of the Tangerine Weekly magazine!”

“You——” Ishizuka Jiro trembled.

“What?!” The girl lifted up her chest and laughed, “Why don't we go to the police station and check then, as I might be wrong?”

Pthu!

The crowd spat at Ishizuka Jiro, who was cowering in cold sweat!

He did have a slightly different sexual orientation, but that had never been used to frame him so shamelessly!

Finally—Ishizuka Jiro slipped away in disgrace, like a rat on the street.

The crowd gradually dispersed.

The teenager was back under his blue and white striped umbrella.

The red-haired girl stretched out a hand towards the teenager. “Hey, I’m Koizumi.”

The teenager thought for a while then asked, puzzled, “Do you know me?” It felt like he’d seen her before, especially her somewhat familiar bright red hair.

Koizumi tilted her head and laughed, “Should I know you?”

Her hand was still held in mid-air.

The teenager stared at her for a long while and slowly raised his hand towards hers. “You can call me——Kaoru.”

Koizumi clenched his hands and gave him a warm, hearty smile. “Nice to meet you Kaoru. Let’s be friends from now on!”

“Friends?” Kaoru repeated with a childish smile, “Just like that?”

Koizumi’s smile was like sunshine. “Yeah, people are all over the world and it’s destiny when people meet each other, so naturally they become friends.”

“What does a friend do?”

“Buy clothes of course!” Koizumi dragged him away.

“Why buy clothes?”

“Stupid,” Koizumi replied while walking. “Your clothes were dirtied by that old pervert, how could you not feel disgusted? Quickly change into something else.”

“Okay.”

Evening.

Red sunset.

Koizumi and Kaoru sat on the stone steps of the harbour, each holding a cup of bubble tea. They watched the sun gradually set over the sea.

“Why did you help me?”

“I have a friend who told me that a human should always stop injustice where they can. She leads a very happy life and I thought that maybe I’d be as happy as her if I do the same.”

“You’re an interesting friend.”

“Yeah,” Koizumi swallowed a mouthful of tea. “It’s a real pity that she’s not here. I miss her.”

“I don’t have any friends,” Kaoru drawled. No one ever wanted to be his friend; they always just stared at him in a strange way.

“I’m angry!”

“...?”

“You said that we were friends and now you take that back!?” Koizumi bit her lip angrily, “Say that again and I’ll ignore you forever!”

“But...such a simple way like that...you can make friends?”

“Friends are not lovers, so it's not complicated to do at all. It's not like you have to exchange blood as a ritual or something. There's no need to be so hung up, right?” Koizumi rolled her eyes, “Oh come on. If you don't want to be my friend then be honest. It's not like I'd kill you or anything!”

“But——”

“That's fine,” Koizumi smiled, “you see, having me as a friend won't do you any bad. If anyone bullies you, I can help you fight back and then help you choose clothes.”

Kaoru looked down at the purple shirt he was wearing and remembered how she had bought it. She had directed a simple command to the shop assistant to pick out all of the purple shirts in the shop. Then, she had picked out one and gotten him to change into it. It had taken less than fifteen minutes.

Koizumi touched her chin while studying him. In a satisfied voice she said, “Your eyes are rather purple, so when you wear a purple shirt, your eyes shine like a beautiful gem.”

Kaoru frowned, “Don't say I'm beautiful.” He hated that word.

“Ah, but you're really pretty.” Koizumi touched her nose but seeing his unhappy look, she quickly added, “Fine, I won't say that word again in the future.”

“Thanks.”

Koizumi studied her hand and continued to drink her bubble tea.

The sun reflected on the sea gradually faded.

The red of the sunset made the two on the harbour dazzle like a painting, from behind.

Kaoru looked at her, “How did you know so much about Ishizuka Jiro?”

Koizumi smiled happily, “He really has bad luck doesn't he? I'm actually a reporter and I've memorised basically everything about celebrities off by heart as part of my job.” To be a successful reporter, lots of effort was required to master the basics. She hadn't told Kaoru that she also knew that Ishizuka Jiro had several lovers, the location of his villas, the number plates on his new car and which night clubs he liked best.

Kaoru was taken aback, “You're a reporter?”

“Yeah.”

“Which aspect?”

“Entertainment.” Koizumi smiled, “Also known as a reporter of gossip.” The worst name though, was the term ‘paparazzi’.

Kaoru eyed her, his violet eyes almost squinting. Oh, no wonder he had thought that she was so familiar, her special red hair...so she was actually...

Koizumi frowned when she noticed, “Do you dislike this career?”

Kaoru was speechless; he gave a pained smile instead.

“Hey, you have a funny expression on your face.” Koizumi lightly pushed him, “Say something!”

Pink clouds in the sea.

“Koizumi, have you seen me before?”

She tugged at her hair and thought for a while, “Am I supposed to know you?”

He gazed at her for a few moments then finally broke into a smile. “Yeah, this is a first meeting and from today on, we’re friends.”

“Yeah! Friends!” Koizumi’s smile was like blossoming flowers in spring.

Koizumi finished her bubble tea and ‘helped’ Kaoru drink some of his.

Then.

The time for separation came.

“I should get going.” Koizumi was reluctant to leave. “I still have to interview a very tough character tonight.” It was Senya Kaoru’s concert and she wasn’t about to waste this opportunity.

Kaoru’s expression was strange.

“Why won’t you wish me luck?” Koizumi asked, confused.

Kaoru coughed loudly, “Good luck.”

“Thank you!” Koizumi danced in happiness, “I’ll definitely do well this time! After all, I am Tangerine Weekly’s ace, Fire Witch!”

Kaoru stiffened.

Later, he’d remember everything as a day by the beach with an energetic girl who loved to drink bubble tea.

※※※

On the taxi, Koizumi watched the figure slowly disappear. She looked away. Finally——she could loosen the muscles on her face——and laugh loudly——

“Hahahaha....”

The driver’s face turned green, and wondered if sending her to a mental hospital would be appropriate.

Koizumi grinned as she gestured, “Victory!”

Fire Witch’s Sure-fire Technique——Top class acting! Honest and innocent eyes, outspoken personality and a simple expression good enough to win an Oscar. This trick was mainly talent for her, but it could also be learned through hard practice.

A small worry nagged in her heart——Did her lies make her feel bad?

The answer——Probably not as she hadn’t lied. He’d probably just misunderstood her.

She flashed a wicked smile——“As reporters, only by being ruthless can one succeed!”

CHAPTER 02

Fire Witch's Sure-fire Technique——Effort!

Edison once said that a genius is made up of 'one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration'. To become the genius entertainment reporter, Koizumi had personally paid 99.9 percent effort!

Senya Kaoru's concert was to be held in the lobby of Jiari Hotel. The admission time for reporters was at eight pm, but Koizumi had arrived early at half past six. The room was filled with fans and staff and when the admission time finally came lol, she was the first to enter the reporter's area, seizing the best position to observe the shooting!

With nothing blocking the camera lens, its field of vision was wider than ever.

Takahashi laughed, being at the front was always the best, with no other photographers and reporters constantly blocking the view panel. This red-haired brat was pretty clever, she had let him stay at home while she waited and had found such a good filming position.

He handed her a hamburger, "Koizumi, you ought to eat something."

Koizumi was moved to tears, "Thank you Takahashi-senpai." She uncovered the wrapping paper and munched down on the hamburger. Yeah, it smelled so good and she was hungry. She had been rewarded for her efforts and it seemed that Takahashi-senpai had changed his views about her. Victory! (Note: Having a partner who appreciates and trusts you means that you can work happily without much worry.)

The lights dimmed.

Rhythmic music.

The spotlight was blue as a handsome figure appeared in the centre of the rising stage. In the blue light, the man's silhouette gave a dizzying, suffocating effect.

The fans screamed!

They waved their glow sticks crazily!

"Senya Kaoru!"

"Senya Kaoru!!"

"Senya Kaoru!!!" ...Their cries were as passionate as fire and rapidly swept across the huge crowd of fans!

A dazzling beam of light suddenly flew up the darkness then exploded like fireworks booming in the night sky!

Senya Kaoru!

In the light, he took his silver guitar and calmly stood at centre stage. His slender, graceful stature was worthy of being known as the 'Heartbreaking Prince', for his eyes were cold, dark and freezing like ice. A trace of mockery played on his lips, cruel and harsh. His looks were like the most deadly dagger in the world, one that stabbed the hearts of every girl.

"Senya Kaoru, I love you!" One girl screamed out loudly. Perhaps it was because of the squeeze in the crowd, she fainted soon after and had to be dragged out by the staff.

Tch, what a pity, she had wasted such an expensive ticket. Koizumi recorded this down, while feeling sorry for her. There was no point in yelling to Senya Kaoru. He'd probably dismiss her as a mosquito.

Senya Kaoru sang a total of five songs.

Koizumi studied him, as snowflakes began to fall and flutter in the backdrop behind him. Eh, she hadn't realised that he actually sang 'really well'.

While doing her homework, she had once heard all of Kaoru's albums three times in a row. Although his songs had been nice, she hadn't taken them to heart. This was because technology these days were so advanced that even a pig's

grunt could be made into a popular, catchy tune.

She had only been to a teen singers live concert a few times before and she had gotten goosebumps every time. Once, at the singer Tamajo's concert, she had been so shocked that she had rushed out, ran past five streets, then continuously vomited for half an hour. She felt that the Tamajo's talent was wasted because she was best suited for horror films. However, when the CD was released, her singing was actually quite graceful. Sigh, sound engineers were really good at this stuff these days.

She had always thought Senya Kaoru's songs were also the result of editing. It wasn't really her fault thought, as his looks were spectacular. In the entertainment industry, looks were inversely proportional to musical talent.

Tonight, listening to Senya Kaoru's songs up close really shocked her, as none of it was 'fake'.

When he sang slow songs, his voice was as gentle as a Dutchman's pipe opening at night and it seemed to colour the words he sang. During upbeat songs, his voice was full of enthusiasm, causing the fans to erupt with excitement.

Koizumi shook the script in her hand and suddenly felt that Senya Kaoru was more than just popular in the entertainment industry. Not only was his looks good, but his voice was good too. She had underestimated him.

She couldn't help being in a trance.

*I am a person who walks in the night
No star, no lights, no one understands
The coldness in my expression
Oh, I'm really lookin' for the direction
To guide me in your eyes*

*I want to be the child by your side
Laughin' with you, cryin' for ya and sleepin'
By your side without the blankets
When ya tuck me in bed
I want to be a bad kid and
Get ya to scold me but nah
You can't do anything 'bout me*

*I wanna be a child by your side
Listening to ya say ya love me
Never leavin' me behind
No, please don't leave me
I don't wanna be a person
Who walks in the night*

Senya Kaoru sang in his low voice. His eyes were dark and exotic as if something was flashing in his thoughts.

Koizumi's heart went 'ba-dump' once!

Wow, he really did have an extraordinary charm. She had seen many beautiful women and men before, but this was the first time she'd even been so captivated by someone.

"Click!"

"Click!"

...Cameras flashed as reporters took as many photos of Senya Kaoru's current expression. Hirakawa from Burst Weekly happily cried, "Tomorrow's cover is solved. Kaoru's expression is so dazzling today!"

"It's like the expression of someone in love..."

"I'm going to faint!"

Ten pm. End of Senya Kaoru's concert.

The war of the entertainment reporters had just begun!

At the exit door, various media reporters battled for the best position. Once their cameras were ready, their microphones in hand, the reporters were prepared for an ambush! The moment he opened the door, he'd be caught by the 'human net' and him, the 'fish', wasn't about to be let off so easily without answering a few questions first!

Security guards? Too weak! Then, what if he lost his temper and hit a reporter? If he did, the headlines the next day would be, 'Senya Kaoru Hits Innocent Reporters'!

Find a clear path and run away? What a joke, these reporters had lasted through countless wars; they wouldn't be so slack would they? Senya Kaoru's BMW and the Yoshisumeragi Recording Company's car were already surrounded by reporters, so leaving that way was impossible.

Haha, the reporters sure were pleased. Even if he was the famously distant Senya Kaoru, there was no way he could escape.

"Senya Kaoru came out!"

The horn of battle sounded!

A golden light lit up in the eyes of the entertainment reporters as they charged towards Senya Kaoru! The security guards had weaved a tight circle around him but they could do nothing against the reporters, who dodged with an agility that could even put NBA players to shame.

"Did Tsuka Sakura really come to your studio during your recording?!"

"Have you broken up with Shimizu Hishi yet?!"

"CBS new singer, Miyano Yoshie, announced that she has always had a secret crush on you. What are your thoughts?!"

"It was rumoured that you were gay. Does Yoshisumeragi Company's warning to you have something to do with that?!"

"Have you ever been sexually harassed by the Yoshisumeragi Company president, Adachi Kaku?"

...The questions were thrown like bombs towards Senya Kaoru.

Throughout the attack, Senya Kaoru's expression remained icy cold. He frostily glared at the entertainment reporters who couldn't hide their excitement. Standing straighter, he spat disgustedly, "Scram!"

The entertainment reporters turned blue.

Damn guy for looking down on them! Which star was as cruel to reporters as him? Those reporters with just a pen in hand could easily make someone more than red-hot popular, but at the same time could easily make someone sink into the black depths! To insult them, he shouldn't expect to thrive any longer in the entertainment circle, should he?

The reporters gritted their teeth.

The detestable Senya Kaoru was like a perfect egg, for the reporters couldn't smell anything fishy about him. They could never find enough evidence to scandals that would make his life living hell.

Senya Kaoru's secretary, Kamiki, broke into a cold sweat. He flashed awkward smiles at the reporters, saying, "Haha, his daily schedule is too tight so he's not in a very good mood at the moment. Please don't take his words to heart and bear with it. Please forgive him too, children aren't always the politest..."

"Just scram you damn people!" Senya Kaoru roared again.

Kamiki felt his legs go soft and collapsed to the ground.

By now, the entertainment reporter's faces had become a miserable green. They tightened their circle! If he wanted to go, he'd have to inspire tomorrow's headlines first!

"Who's better on bed, Tsuka Sakura or Shimizu Hishi?"

“Is Adachi Kaku pleased with your body?”

“I heard that you'll be acting in three films at the same time very soon?”

...Senya Kaoru was pushed shoved to the left and right by the entertainment reporters. The questions continued to pile on like insults and soon, his forehead seemed to be throbbing and he had clenched his fist. It seemed that he'd snap if this continued any longer!

The entertainment reporters were excited! Good, Senya Kaoru was angry now. The reporters wanted him to hit them! When that happened, he'd be sent off to court! A whole month of news would be solved then, as they planned to tightly bite onto him and not let a single piece of juicy news slip by!

The night seemed to solidify.

Senya Kaoru's fist made a squishy sound...as the entertainment reporters continued to provoke him with the most exciting story in mind...Senya Kaoru's eyes were like the lightning before the storm...ready to attack the reporters' grinning mouths...when——suddenly——the roar of a motorcycle pierced the night sky and screeched towards the crowd of reporters!

It was loud enough to puncture their eardrums!

The sound of the accelerator!

The daylight-like glare of headlights!

The roaring, thunderous sound headed towards the reporters!

Danger!

The reporters panicked and rapidly scrambled away on both sides! The story of a celebrity's private life was precious and scandals fetched an even higher price but for the reporters, both were forgotten as their lives were in danger!

They all hurriedly dodged out of the way——and the motorcycle stopped in front of the sullen figure of Senya Kaoru. The rider was wearing a shiny silver helmet and she grabbed his hand and screamed, “Let's go!”

Senya Kaoru rapidly hopped onto the motorcycle!

Vast darkness.

The motorcycle disappeared in the bustle of the streets.

All of the shaken reporters raised their cameras to take photos and they almost cried tears of blood when they realised that the motorcycle had already disappeared.

※※※

Mountain Peak.

There weren't many stars, just a few which shone brightly.

The moon was as bright as silver.

She took off her silver helmet, revealing bright red hair, shining in the moonlight.

“So exciting! Great adventure!” Koizumi clutched to her chest, laughing breathlessly.

Senya Kaoru kept his face neutral; his eyes staring at her quizzically.

Koizumi smiled and waved it away. “Thanks for your co-operation. If you kept your bad temper up and didn't get on the bike, my perfect operation plan would have been spoiled.”

Senya Kaoru was silent.

She cocked her head, leaned towards him and winked. "Oi, you can't be scared silly right, saying nothing...Why aren't you asking why I did this? Aren't you curious?"

His face looked like one of a person who detested doing chores, who had just washed a bowl. "That was dangerous!"

Her eyes widened and she had a curious smile on her face. "Wow, you finally talked to me. I thought you were as cold as an iceberg for years, like saying a word would cost your life."

His expression instantly became one of disgust, then one of distance.

Under the moonlight.

Koizumi leaned against her motorcycle and grinned. "Don't be like that, it was just a joke." She patted her motorcycle and chuckled, "It wasn't that dangerous as I only removed the silencer. Although it sounded terrible, I wasn't moving at a very fast speed and it'd have stopped if I braked."

(Note: Fire Witch's Sure-fire Technique——Speeding motorcycle stunt! Barging in and out to save people at sensitive moments always gains their trust! To pull off this technique, not only was superhuman courage and a lot of practice needed, suitable teachers were needed as well. Sigh, for a moment she remembered Ming Xiao Xi who had left her behind...)

Senya Kaoru eyed her warily, "Why did you do this?"

She gave him a sneaky grin, "I wanted to save you of course. I mean, I saw you being attacked by that huge crowd of reporters. Your handsome yet grim face just infuriated everyone and it seemed like you needed help. Then, I felt like I had to be the heroine and save 'damsel in distress', though I guess the 'unlucky prince' would be more suited for you?"

"Koizumi!" He couldn't help yell at her.

She was shocked, "Have I told you my name before? How do you know that my name's Koizumi?"

Senya Kaoru avoided her eyes, "You...reported in that press conference with that name."

Realisation dawned Koizumi. "I see," she laughed, a little ambiguously. "There are so many people at a press conference, yet you remember my name. Don't tell me you..."

She really liked tease him, the cold Senya Kaoru. He looked pretty cute when his face was slightly pink.

But he was a little angry as he said, "Don't talk such nonsense!"

"Ok." She covered her mouth, pretending to be a good girl.

"You...your hair is very eye-catching," he explained.

She smiled, pointed her red hair, and nodded.

No, she couldn't put up with it any longer. This Senya Kaoru was so cute, much different from earlier this morning. She chuckled to herself.

They looked out at the mountain views.

A myriad of house lights, twinkling like an ocean of stars.

Koizumi smiled cutely, eyes even brighter than the stars.

Senya Kaoru gazed at her.

He felt his chest explode in warmth and his heart miss a few beats. His chest felt a bit hot and his palms were slightly sweaty. His breaths became panicked.

He took a deep breath and the stars twinkled in his eyes as he asked, "You only wanted to help me, that was all, right?"

Koizumi tapped her chin to ask whether she could talk or not.

He glared at her.

She quickly put on a smile. "Yeah, I just wanted to help you. Look, they were trying to make life difficult for you by asking all those funny questions. Even I was angry with them so it's no wonder that you're always fed up with them."

Senya Kaoru's frown seemed to be brushed away by the wind.

Her eyes were smiling too. "I may be a reporter too, but I wouldn't ask all those questions to annoy you. In the future though, could we co-operate?"

He felt a wave of unhappiness.

"I am, of course, an entertainment reporter after all, so——" her smile was a bit embarrassed, "finding and creating news is my job and ahh——"

A camera appeared in her hands like magic and the shutter went off with a 'click', successfully capturing a photo of Senya Kaoru!

Senya Kaoru was furious!

Koizumi quickly closed the camera and accelerated on the motorbike. In a blink of the eye, she was already at least five metres away from the wrath of Senya Kaoru!

Her hand was still on the accelerator when she shouted to him, "I'm sorry. Being alive means doing many involuntary things. Please forgive me."

"You're despicable!" Senya Kaoru shouted at the 'outrageous' reporter.

The moon and stars glittered behind the mountain.

The motorcycle was still on, but Koizumi didn't leave.

She shouted from a distance. "I just want one news story only, the title something like 'Despite Being Surrounded by Entertainment Reporters, Senya Kaoru Miraculously Escapes'. It's not gossip or a scandal and it's simple. I can't have hurt your feelings!"

"But you took my picture!"

"Oh come on, it's not like you're naked, no need to be so nervous!" Koizumi's frowned slightly, "Posters with your photo on it are all over the place. I just want a slightly better one with you on the mountain, so that your popularity would increase even more."

He didn't speak.

The feeling of being manipulated made him shiver.

Seeing the lonely figure of Senya Kaoru under the moon, Koizumi felt a little bad.

She secured her camera on her motorcycle and slowly inched towards him.

Standing beside him, she looked up. "Hey, you still angry?" She pouted, "It's just a picture. Just count it as a present for me, for saving you from those reporters, ok?"

He sneered, "Saving me was only to create a better scoop, not because you actually wanted to save me."

Eh, did he just get cleverer?

Koizumi bowed, pretending to be guilty. "Yeah, I want stories, but I hurt you. I just want Tangerine Weekly to get a

foothold. You don't understand that a small reporter like me has much difficulty in surviving. If I can't dig out any good news, I'll get fired immediately!" As she spoke, tears started to fall. "Actually, it doesn't matter if I tell you the whole story: I can make up news as well. But, I don't want you to see such lies when you read the magazine because you'd think I was a liar and you'd be upset! By telling you all this personally, I want you to understand that I don't mean to lie to you!"

Senya Kaoru was silent for some time. "Then, if I were to disagree..."

Koizumi clutched to his hand. "Please, I beg you. This news article won't hurt you, but it'll help me. I beg you, please help me, ok?" She shook his hand, "Help me, I'd be grateful to you!"

Her palms were hot, as warm as the sun.

Finally——Senya Kaoru nodded his handsome face.

The stars started blinking.

Koizumi blinked as well.

Fire Witch's Sure-fire Technique——Tears and begging! This trick is like magic and can heart-warm a crowd. You should try it too!

※※※

Tangerine Daily front page news——'Despite Being Surrounded by Entertainment Reporters, Senya Kaoru Miraculously Escapes!' In addition to an exclusive set of coloured photos!

The newcomers once again surrounded the Koizumi who just came out of her boss' office, chattering excitedly. "Koizumi, you're amazing. All of the other publications could only pull out a boring story full of text, yet you managed to get a series of photos! Amazing!"

"Look at this photo, the one where Senya Kaoru leaps onto the motorcycle...Ah, it looks like a romance between the rider and him!"

"No, this one, this one. Senya Kaoru hugs onto the rider's waist, he looks even more like a serene beauty...Eh, don't they look like an eloped couple?!"

"And this is the most exciting one! On the mountaintop, stars glittering, and Senya Kaoru's eyes are so warm and gentle, as if looking at his first love. Ah, my heart, why am I so happy just looking at him..."

"Senya Kaoru has always been cold and distant. How did you manage to dig out these photos?"

The newcomers eagerly waited for her to speak. "Tell us, how did you do it?"

Koizumi raised an eyebrow and sat down on the couch. She chuckled, "Very easy."

They listened up.

"I knew that there'd be a motorcycle appearing around that time, to pick Senya Kaoru up so, I got Takahashi to prepare to take the best photos at any time. The other reporters couldn't get anything as it was too sudden, so they lost their opportunity." She swapped her cross legs and had a very pleased-looking smile on.

Rie raised a hand to ask, "How did you know that there'd be a motorcycle?"

Oh yeah, how did she know?

Koizumi coughed and stood up. "Well, intuition of course. Intuition tells me what will happen."

Intuition?!

What was with this answer!

The newcomers stood up and glared at her.

Koizumi grabbed her handbag and ran away. "My intuition tells me that you people are very angry! I'm going to work, so you girls won't punish me!"

She stuck out her tongue as she ran. She couldn't help it for if she was found for saving Senya Kaoru, she would be the biggest traitor in the media industry and a public enemy!

Forgive her, for being alive, means saying little white lies occasionally.

※※※

Senya Kaoru's studio.

Senya Kaoru was on the other side of the glass, practising his singing. His sound engineer, Aoyama, looked at Kamiki strangely. "Don't you think something's different about Kaoru these days?"

Kamiki leaned against the wall and touched his chin, "You think so too?"

"Yeah, he seems..." Aoyama paused to think of the right word, "a lot more human."

"Yeah, his expressions aren't as cold as an iceberg as much these days. His eyes are much more emotional."

"He daydreams too!"

"Especially in front of the cell phone he recently bought!"

The two men started to laugh.

"Do you think that he's in love?" speculated Aoyama.

"Love?" Kamiki's eyes widened and stared at Senya Kaoru, who was softly singing. He slowly added, "Now that you mention that, it really does feel like it."

"Adolescence..."

"It's about time for him to have his first love."

"Dunno if it's his first though," Aoyama giggled.

Kamiki laughed too, "Who knows, he won't answer when we ask anyway."

"Yeah he won't..." Aoyama's thoughts got more interesting, "Kaoru might be a virgin actually."

Kamiki's mouth dropped open. "A virgin? Kaoru?" Geez, was the superstar Senya Kaoru a virgin?! That would make the girls in the world scream like mad!

"Silence!"

A loud shout!

Yoshisumeragi Company's ace recordist, Ishibuchi, snickered at the two men. They were in work!

Aoyama and Kamiki lowered their heads in shame.

Ishibuchi glared at them and continued working.

Suddenly.

A sudden burst of music.

Ishibuchi was furious, “Whose phone?!” Cell phones weren't allowed to be taken in during the recording process. Disturbing halfway through was unforgivable!

Aoyama and Kamiki fumbled in their pockets in panic. They were all sweating when he said, “No...not mine...”

Their phones were all shut off and it was the wrong ringtone anyway.

“...Mine.” Senya Kaoru's voice wafted in from the other side of the glass.

His slender fingers were on a silver cell phone. He placed it close to his ears, his mouth smiling. “...Yep...I have time...Ok...” he said in a gentle voice.

Aoyama and Kamiki exchanged looks.

Senya Kaoru always had a foul temper but he had always been serious when it came to work. Answering the phone during a recording was a first.

“Got it...See you in half an hour...Ok...”

Senya Kaoru closed his phone and shut his eyes. He took a deep breath as if he had never known that the air in the studio was so fresh.

Happiness enveloped his body, every part of his face jumped with delight. He looked so happy that light seemed to flood out from his body. Aoyama and Kamiki were too shocked to breathe.

He walked towards Ishibuchi and bowed, “Senpai...”

Ishibuchi waved his hand and interrupted, “I'm a bit tired too so let's call it a day!”

Senya Kaoru bowed in thanks and rapidly left the studio.

Aoyama and Kamiki stared at Ishibuchi for the difference in treatment.

Ishibuchi stood up and looked in the direction where Senya Kaoru had disappeared. He laughed, “He's still falling huh, have a happy time too.” He had been sitting in the sidelines in the entertainment industry for almost twenty years and he knew that it was rare for an artist like Senya Kaoru to have a pure relationship. He hoped that he'd be happy.

It took a while before Kamiki came back to his senses and dashed outside. “Kaoru! You can't go! You still have to do that TV advert in the afternoon——!”

CHAPTER 03

The summer sun was baking hot, so hot that people's skin could be burned off.

Noon. There were many pedestrians on the plaza. The women had a variety of exquisite, fancy-looking parasols, while the men tried to walk in the shade as much as possible, to avoid the invisible flames of the sun.

There was a fountain in the middle of the plaza.

Only a boy in his late teens stood by it.

A cup of bubble tea was in his hands.

The fountain leapt and fell, spitting out silver droplets of water.

The teenager had been waiting for ages.

His once-iced bubble tea had long melted.

The sun shone feverishly on him. His purple shirt was gradually drenched in his sweat, while his violet eyes gradually lost their sparkle.

“Kaoru——”

Finally, at last, a fiery red-haired girl sprinted towards him!

The colour instantly returned to the teenager's eyes.

Beside the fountain.

Koizumi sprinted to where Kaoru was, panting heavily. The sweat dripped down her face as he caught him by the arm and huffed, “Sorry...sorry...I'm late...”

Kaoru held onto her and good-naturedly shook his head. “It's okay, I didn't wait that long.” He had only waited for two hours and that was already forgotten the moment he saw her.

The way she gasped for air while apologising made him laugh.

Suddenly, she frowned.

Kaoru's face was red from the sun and his skin looked like it was about to peel off.

She hurriedly took out an apple green parasol from her bag and covered his head. She angrily muttered, “Geez, you should have found a shady place. Staying in the sun like that, it's not unusual if you get burned alive! Stupid boy!”

Kaoru touched his face and smiled, “It's fine, I think it's alright.” They had promised to meet at the fountain and he had been worried that she wouldn't be able to find him if he waited somewhere else.

Seeing her sweaty face, he handed her a packet of tissues and was about to give her the drink when he noticed that the ice had completely melted and that it was no longer cold.

Koizumi wiped away the sweat and noticed his frustration. “Kaoru, what's wrong?”

Kaoru lowered the bubble tea and laughed. “Nothing, it's just that the bubble tea isn't cold anymore. I wanted to give it to you.”

Koizumi grabbed his hand with the drink and gulped the drink down. She sighed in satisfaction, “Ah, I was so thirsty. That really saved me.” She smiled again, “You know, drinking frozen drinks on a hot day isn't the best for your throat. Warm drinks are better!”

Her hand was on his and for a moment, Kaoru was too stunned to speak.

“Where are we going?”

Koizumi smiled from under the apple green parasol.

Kaoru took the parasol from her. “You choose.”

“Have you had something to eat yet?” Seeing his peeling skin, she realised that he'd probably been waiting for her for ages and hadn't had lunch yet. She rolled her eyes then in a sympathetic tone she said, “You haven't had lunch yet, so why don't we go and get something to eat?”

Kaoru's stomach grumbled a little.

The two laughed.

An Italian restaurant.

Koizumi swirled the noodles in her plate with her fork and looked across the table at the elegantly eating Kaoru, saying, “I had to go to Tsuka Sakura's press conference this morning. It was suppose to start at nine and finish in forty minutes. I thought that'd give me plenty of time before meeting up with you, but Tsuka Sakura took up an entire three hours and I couldn't reach you because your cell phone battery was dead.”

Kaoru stiffened, “She probably had to delay it for a reason.”

Koizumi laughed, “Yeah, it's always explained like that. Celebrities always want reporters to wait. It's rather common, so why would I be angry? It's our fault I guess for living off their fame.”

Kaoru continued eating.

Koizumi stroked her chin and unhappily continued, “Why is the relationship between celebrities and reporters so bad? The two groups should be like helping each other. Without support from the media, the celebrities won't ever be popular. Without the help of the celebrities, the reporters would never earn enough money. My senpai said that they used to get along pretty well with celebrities and they often invited each other for lunch or dinner. But now, so many stars view reporters as enemies, what a pain...”

“It's because they're always digging other people's private life.” Kaoru put down his knife and fork. “They don't like real news, but they love scandals.” Even if it was lifetime regret, the paparazzi would do their best to uncover it.

Koizumi bit down on a noodle and chewed it.

But only the best gossip and scandals could increase the magazine, newspaper sales and make the boss pleased. This system meant that——scandals were the connection between celebrities and reporters.

She laughed. “The newest stars always love their entertainment reporters. Even if the articles were made up of false scandals, they'd be happy so long they were published. Most of them are worried that if they're ignored by the press, they won't get popular.” Her face was unhappy once again, “But the moment they get popular they start being mean to the reporters, who were just like their parents. Gah, it pisses me off!”

Kaoru was a little curious, “How long have you been a reporter?”

“About a month.”

“Then how could you be so emotional?”

“I heard it from Senpai.” Koizumi jabbed at her plate randomly with her fork, “Let's not talk about such unhappy things, it's not like you're interested anyway.”

She did not know that Kaoru was patient.

The sound of romantic piano.

Koizumi licked her fork and grinned at Kaoru. “Hey, we've known for a while now, but I don't know you that well.”

Anxiety flashed in Kaoru's eyes, "I..."

Crap, if he revealed his true identity, would she feel cheated?

"What colour do you like?"

Phew——So that was the type of things she wanted to know. Kaoru sighed in relief.

"Purple." She had said that his eyes were a little purple before.

"What do you enjoy doing the most?"

"Observing people."

Koizumi stared at him in surprise as her guess had been 'sleeping'. His schedule at work was tight so she had predicted that he would go to sleep at any chance.

"Why?" she asked.

"Seeing those who busily pass by seems to mend the hole in my heart." Kaoru's expression darkened. No one would believe that he had always felt lonely and shy.

"Was that why you were staring at the people who passed by, when I first met you?" Koizumi reached out, patted his back and whispered, "Are you lonely?" Her voice was as gentle as the breeze lightly dancing on water in spring.

Her hand was as hot as ever.

The warmth on his back warmed his heart.

Kaoru's eyes twinkled happily and took her hand in his, "No, I have a friend."

Koizumi's heart felt as if it had been squeezed tight.

Crap, would she get punished by God if she betrayed this person who whole-heartedly believed she was a 'friend'?! She clenched her teeth and fought in her mind. That was when an evil voice flashed through her mind——"As a reporter, only by being ruthless, can you succeed!"

She withdrew her hand and smiled 'innocently'. "Yes, we're friends. How could people with friends feel lonely? But, as we're friends, we ought to understand each other more."

She explained, smiling to convince herself and him.

Then, she started to ask many questions——"Do you like flowers? What kind?"

"Whose songs do you like best?"

"What are your favourite movies?"

"Do you like animals?"

"Which part of your body do you like best?"

"What are your views towards plastic surgery?"

"What do you think of homosexuals?"

"Have you ever crushed on another celebrity? Who?"

...Finally.

Koizumi closed her notepad and drank some water. She explained to the gradually quieting Kaoru, "Don't misunderstand. I'm so used to interviewing stars that it has become a habit to ask so many questions. Ah, please don't be

angry.”

She gave him a silly smile.

Kaoru looked at her strangely. After a while, he muttered, “It's fine.”

“Awesome!” Koizumi excitedly waved her fist. “Can you answer one last question for me?”

Kaoru didn't reply.

“What's your ideal woman like?”

He headed for the restaurant exit.

Koizumi eyed the place where he had been then ran away from him like a gust of wind, leaving the words, “Wait there!”

Kaoru stood there, waiting.

People came and went.

Suddenly, a group of teenage girls stopped by and studied him. “Hey look, doesn't he look like Senya Kaoru?”

“He looks different...”

“Senya Kaoru is cold and indifferent...”

“He looks a bit like the pretty guy next door...”

“His eyes are purple...”

“So pretty...”

“He looks a bit like...”

“His nose is so straight...”

“Those thin and sexy lips...”

The girls surrounded him, calling, “Senya Kaoru! Senya Kaoru! You're Senya Kaoru!”

Kaoru hated being studied as if he were an animal. His face went back to being cold but it did nothing to hide his impatience.

“I am not.”

“Uwah, he's angry. You're even more like Senya Kaoru when you're angry!” The girls grabbed at him, not letting him go. “You're Senya Kaoru right? We're your fans! Give us your autograph! We love you!”

“Go away!”

“Senya Kaoru! Senya Kaoru!”

The girls started to chant!

“I'm back!”

Koizumi came like a gust of wind, to his side.

Her eyes studied the other girls and she grabbed his arm. She broke into a smile, “My friend is hot isn't he? He's one hundred, no, one thousand times better than Senya Kaoru!”

The girls were a bit suspicious of her.

Koizumi added proudly, "Maybe one day, he'd enter the entertainment industry and be even more popular than Senya Kaoru!" Her smile was very innocent. "As he's still unfamous, I'm sure he won't mind giving his autograph for one thousand yen. You'll save lots of money when he becomes a megastar! So, what do you think? Pay up!"

The girls exchanged looks, stopped smiling and walked away.

Koizumi let go of his arm and stared at the disappearing girls. She laughed, "The more you don't explain, the more sure they are of your identity. If you brag and lie a bit, they'll give up soon enough." Humans after all, were just interesting animals.

"..."

"Being alive means mastering many skills, or else it's impossible to succeed in life. Sometimes you should be flexible - when this plan doesn't work, swap to another."

Kaoru shook his head, "I'm very stubborn and will continue my reasoning to the end." Even if he encountered many obstacles or got beaten up along the way, he decided to never abandon his principals.

Koizumi's smile was even happier, "That's good, our morals complement each other. Firmness plus flexibility equals invincibility!"

Kaoru laughed too.

That way, she could easily abandon him if needed. She really was a clever fox.

"For you!"

Koizumi took out a tube of white cream.

"What's this?" Had she bought it specifically for him?

"It's a cream for sunburns." She stuffed the tube into his hands, "Remember to apply some on your face, neck and arms every day. You got really sunburnt today so remember to use it."

Kaoru clutched onto the tube and he felt his heart swell. So that was why she ran away, leaving him behind.

"Three times a day, don't forget!" Koizumi ordered, "Wash your face with clean water before applying and don't rub it off. It's colourless and odourless so no one will notice."

"Ok."

"You have to use it. If I see a trace of that sunburn the next time I see you," Koizumi threatened, "let's see——"

Kaoru's gave her an innocent look.

He wouldn't forget to use it.

Koizumi pretend to be cold, "——I will send a complaint through to the chemist." It was the most expensive brand of sunburn cream and the chemist had assured her that it had a magical effect, so she had bought it for more than twice as much as the other brands.

His happiness came from his heart as Kaoru smiled. "Thank you."

Koizumi widened her eyes and grabbed at his hand. She gave him a sneaky-looking smile, "Hey, are you really thanking me? This isn't a dream?"

Kaoru nodded and answered, "Yeah."

Koizumi's eyes brightened and smiled again slyly. "Then, why don't you give me a present?"

“Sure.”

He would give her anything she wanted.

Victory!

So easy!

The fruits of victory had to be picked early on, or otherwise it'd drop away when it grew too big.

Koizumi grabbed his hand and ran!

They ran into a shopping mall!

Through the jewellers!

Through the cosmetics area with awesome posters!

And stopped at a small cartoon-looking ‘house’!

Koizumi shook Kaoru's hand and her smile seemed to reach the tips of her ears. “Hey, let's take some pictures!”

※※※

Deep into the night.

Senya Kaoru could not fall asleep.

The living room felt empty.

He sat cross-legged on the white carpet. His silver guitar was in his arms as his slender fingers gently picked out a melody.

*Your hands are
As hot as the sun
It feels like
I'm in the sun*

*You're a bad girl
You always have countless
Reasons to hurt me*

*But as long as ya
Hold on to my hand
Even if it's a stupid reason
I dun't mind you hurting me*

*Hold on to my hand
Intuition
Tells me this is
Love*

He picked up his pencil and scribbled down the lyrics. He titled the song ‘Intuition’. Images of the red-haired girl seemed to flash in his eyes. His eyes rolled as if he was thinking of something funny and his expression was contented. He wasn't suspicious of her at all.

She was like the flame that had an infinite amount of life and energy, as if nothing in this world could possibly extinguish it. Her way of thinking was weird yet she could pull it off successfully.

Kaoru laughed aloud.

His warm laughter echoed in the living room.

His eyes fell on the coffee table.

The huge tube of cream.

He gingerly picked it up, his thumb gently stroking its cap.

It seemed that her scent was still on it.

...She had personally...given him this cream saying...'You must use it!' and 'Wash your face with clean water before applying and don't rub it off.'

Water flowed out of the tap with a crash. He washed his face in clean water and the handfuls of water he cupped felt fresh to his thinking mind.

The face in the mirror was fresh and moist.

A childish delight danced in his violet eyes.

Senya Kaoru studied himself in the mirror and smiled.

How long had it been since he last smiled?

He suddenly remembered.

It had already been ages since then. At first, he always smiled. The little him wasn't afraid of anyone and everyone praised him as—"Kaoru-chan is just like an angel!"

"Kaoru-chan is so pretty!"

"Why don't you come with us, we love you Kaoru-chan!"

"Kaoru-chan, be a good boy and smile for us!"

"Sing a song for us Kaoru-chan!"

"Kaoru-chan's so good, so obedient. He's the cutest child in the world!"

...Back then, he had always smiled and smiled as easily as he breathed air. He wanted everyone to love him, particularly his busy dad who was often away from home and his somewhat depressed mom. He wanted his dad to visit more often and his mom to be happier, so he tried to be the best child in the world, doing everything they wanted him to do.

Despite everything he did, his mom would always look at him with a melancholic expression, "Kaoru, never talk to strangers. Don't tell them who you are and don't tell them who your dad is. Adults are bad people and they will hurt us if you do."

He didn't understand why he couldn't talk to strangers. Wasn't that the only way to make others happy? Besides, other people talked to him first and ignoring them was impolite. He couldn't afford to be a good child.

Then one day.

A man carrying a camera knelt by him and gave him a kind smile, "Little boy, who is your daddy?"

He had been nervous as he knew that his mom forbade him from telling anyone that. He smiled sweetly instead.

"Tell me, who is your daddy? I'll give you lollipops!" Red lollipops swayed before him.

"Tell me, okay? I want to know! Please help, little boy!"

Yeah, people should help others.

He didn't take the lollipops because he didn't say it because of the food!

He told the man, "My father is Chii Mori."

Everything changed in that moment...His family was surrounded and countless cars, trucks blocked every road. Several men and women, all with cameras, tried to grab a snapshot through the windows, while others climbed to trees of the second floor.

His mom and he couldn't leave the house and the curtains were draped at all times, so there was no sunlight in the room. Their phone rang without stop all through day and night. When they opened the television, photos of his dad and mom were on every channel and the people in the TV said lots of weird things, their faces with ugly vicious expressions.

Mom had smashed the TV on the ground and had thrown the phone in the bathtub. She chose a corner and cried there, ignoring him. She never looked at him, as if he never existed.

His dad never came home.

He was scared and hungry.

There was nothing in the fridge. He had to be a good boy and although he was frightened, he took out some money, ready to run outside and buy some bread. If he didn't, his mom would die of hunger too.

The door opened.

The crazy men and women swarmed inside like a flood. They pounced towards his mom in the corner. His mom cried and screamed like a dying animal and he felt a shiver go down his back.

The spotlight was like a barbeque on his head.

It was so bright he couldn't open his eyes.

He was tugged and grabbed by the countless people and pressed against hideous faces. "Did you know that you're his illegitimate child?!"

"How much money does Chii Mori give you every month?!"

"Did Chii Mori ever mention the name, 'Motomu Kitsune'?!"

"Will you inherit the Chii family?!"

"Will Chii Mori ever openly admit your identity in public?!"

...He had only been nine and he had no idea what to say. His mouth opened and closed like there was a disgusting rotten fish in his mouth. He wanted to spit it out yet couldn't!

Those chaotic days full of horror gradually subsided, but his life could never be the way it used to be.

His dad never appeared once.

His mom got even more depressed and her tears were like a river. Her body got thin and she stayed in bed all day, always crying.

He started cooking for his mom.

His mom wouldn't eat and spilled her food over him, causing blisters.

His mom didn't care whether he was hurt and scolded him while crying, "You damn loudmouth brat. Why did you say that, now I'm ruined because of you! Ruined because of you!"

He had ruined his mom's life.

His mom died.

In the bathroom.

A peaceful death.

The water droplets on Senya Kaoru's face had long evaporated.

He was silent as he squeezed some of the cream on his hand and applied it to his face.

The cream felt cold.

His freezing hands seemed to burn against his skin.

The girl with a head full of brilliant red hair seemed to have infinite magic. She was always laughing, begging, threatening, and she seemed like a bolt of lightning, disrupting his everyday life. She had the job he hated the most, but for some reason, he couldn't resist her.

He liked being with her.

When she had held onto his hand, he had been flustered. It had been a mixture of confusion, anxiety, excitement and an overwhelming childish feeling he couldn't understand. But, she never noticed once as she laughed.

Could she be his angel?

Or his demon?

CHAPTER 04

Dressing rooms.

Senya Kaoru leaned against his chair and closed his eyes, letting his stylist do the work.

His new stylist, Hoshino, sweated while working with excitement!

His chance had come!

Senya Kaoru's head designer, Mubi, took pride in his work. No matter what bold designs were used on the singer, the outside world was always pleased with it! Ah, Senya Kaoru's face and attitude were like an unpredictable kaleidoscope; through the hands of the stylists and make-up artists, countless stunning appearances of him could be born!

Hoshino grabbed a can of hairspray and let his inspiration run freely.

Tonight, he had to make Senya Kaoru——Shine!

Shock the audience!

Someone's phone began to ring.

Senya Kaoru opened his eyes and took out a silver-white cell phone from his bag.

Hoshino was surprised at this. His hand shook and the hair in his hands changed into a very funny shape.

Crap, Senya Kaoru really was lady's man. He had been as cold as an iceberg just then, but now he was as gentle as a boy in spring. If he hadn't been there all along, Hoshino wouldn't have believed that he was the same person.

“Kaoru right?”

“Yeah.”

“I'm Koizumi!”

“Yeah, I know.” This phone was specifically bought for her. Only she had its number.

“Have you been using the cream?”

“Yeah.” Three times a day, according to her instructions.

“Haha, such a good boy.” She was laughing, “I'll invite you out to eat next time.”

“Sure.”

“The cream worked right? You didn't have any pimples right?”

“None at all, it worked well.”

“That's good.” She sighed in relief.

“Koizumi...”

“What?”

“...Where are you?” Was she far away?

“I'm outside the Beniitadaki Stadium as there'll be a super big concert for several of the best singers. I'm waiting for a chance to catch the best location and grab the best news!” She said into the phone, eyes following the celebrities who entered the stadium. “Most of the singers have already gone in. There's basically nothing to do, so I just felt like talking to you on the phone.”

Senya Kaoru couldn't help look out the window. Was she——still outside?

Realising that she was nearby made his heart speed up.

“Koizumi, have you had something to eat yet?”

“No,” she laughed, “there's no time to eat. The singers appear one by one, so I have to chase them one by one. There's hardly enough time to catch my breath you know.”

Senya Kaoru frowned.

She'd collapse of hunger; it wasn't good for her health.

A slap-like sound interrupted his thinking as Hoshino pasted something on his left cheek. Stunned, he muttered ‘eh’.

“What's wrong, Kaoru?” She was a little worried.

“Nothing,” Senya Kaoru gestured ‘sorry’ towards Hoshino. “Are you going to eat something soon?”

“No, there'll be more stars coming soon and I can't leave until the whole concert's over.” Koizumi laughed bitterly, “I can't leave as it's my duty to not leave.” Not only was wisdom and inspiration needed to become a successful entertainment reporter, strength and stamina were required too.

“Koizumi...”

“Senya Kaoru! You ready?!”

The organisers of the concert shouted from outside.

Senya Kaoru hurriedly covered his phone.

But Koizumi heard it anyway.

“Kaoru, are you busy? Then I'll hang up.”

“Fine.” He felt a bit frustrated for some reason.

“See you!”

“Bye.”

Senya Kaoru closed his phone and seemed to be in a trance.

That was when Hoshino gasped in joy, “Awesome! The most dazzling singer is now born!”

Senya Kaoru stood up.

He was dressed in a bright red changpao and a white fox was wound around its high collar neck. His hair was as loose as grass and dyed silver and blue. His face glittered with silver-white powder and his eyes were so dark, like a ghost. His lips were the darkest possible shade of red, while rhinestones were attached to his eyebrows and a flame pattern was printed on his left cheek.

Hoshino clutched to his chest, moved to tears. “Outstanding product! This is a really cool and unique design indeed, no other design could even compare to it!”

There was only one person in this world, Senya Kaoru, who was worthy of being stylised by him!

“Are you pleased? Don't you think you're pretty?”

Hoshino continued to ask.

Senya Kaoru eyed his reflection and replied, “Very good.”

The more outrageous the better.

This way, no one would recognise him.

Senya Kaoru left the dressing room and pressed down a few buttons on his cell phone. "Is this XXX Restaurant?"

※※※

Late at night.

Koizumi stiffly flopped onto her bed. She was exhausted and she didn't even have the strength to lift her little finger. But it had been fairly rewarding, for tomorrow's article was solved.

The aspiring singers these days wanted to be famous as soon as possible and a lot of the female stars' skirts seemed to getting more and more transparent and sometimes they didn't even wear underwear. Other celebrities pretended to be friends with others or kept fidgeting, in order to arouse public intention.

It was strange that although their actions could be made into a story, not many media reporters had interest in writing about them. Likewise, the public never seemed to have interest in those types of articles, as if they weren't stimulating enough to bother reading.

That's why everyone focused on the big celebrities. Their trivial actions were even more valuable than the scandals of the newest singers.

Particularly towards Senya Kaoru, whose popularity soared above the others.

The mysterious Senya Kaoru.

Ever since Senya Kaoru debuted, he had always been tight-lipped towards the media. His personal life, origin and even his age still remained a secret. There had been countless reporters who had tried to dig out his story, but all of them had failed.

He had always had a bad attitude towards reporters and had bluntly refused to talk about his personal life every time. Once, all of the reporters tried to publicly shame him, but the public remained mesmerised by him and every one of his songs continued to rank among the top selling singles in the country. Finally, under the pressure of the market, the media had to stop their attacks and chase after Kaoru. The 'public shaming attack' came to an end as a complete failure.

Stubborn Senya Kaoru. Why did he guard his personal life so carefully when there was nothing important about it?

Koizumi hugged her pillow to her chest.

And sighed.

Her heart felt a little chaotic. She wasn't sure what she was doing was right. If she did them, she wondered if it counted as betrayal and what were the consequences.

She took out a sticker from her pillow.

Kaoru laughed like a child and happiness danced in his violet eyes. His pure and innocent smile was undoubtedly full of trust.

Did this count as betrayal?

Her thoughts were messy.

The phone vibrated once.

She jumped up.

A brief text——'You're tired, sleep well. Kaoru.'

“Ahh——!”

She covered her head with her pillow and rolled on the bed.

Oh come on! She didn't want him to be so nice to her, or she'd feel bad! Why was he so nice, why was he so caring, why did he wait for her under the sun for so long, why did he get a restaurant to send her lunch... why?!

“Ah——”

She cried into her pillow!

Fire Witch's Surefire Technique——Ruthlessness!

Her resolve was now being challenged!

※※※

Something very strange was going on!

Since morning, all of Senya Kaoru's presents from fans were purple. There were purple roses, purple lavenders, purple campanulas, purple stars and purple dolls...Vice-secretary, Hirose, who had been taking the purple gifts off his fans, could no longer stand not knowing. He eyed Senya Kaoru who was busy writing lyrics and muttered, “What day is it today? It seems that everyone agreed to give you purple gifts. Is purple a very popular colour at the moment?”

Senya Kaoru didn't look up. He replied in a vague voice, “Purple is good.”

Hirose was stunned and he staggered, his face almost the same colour as the big purple bear he was holding. “Sen...senpai, did you just answer me?” Uwah, did his idol just answer his ‘nonsense’? And did he say it was good? There really was something weird about today, wasn't there?

Senya Kaoru ignored him; he was back to writing his lyrics.

Hirose clutched onto the big bear and curiously studied Senya Kaoru. He was bathed in sunlight and he seemed to be lost in thought, while holding his guitar. Sometimes something flickered in his eyes and sometimes he'd smile. Hirose thought back to the rumours that circulated within the company. Was he really in love? Only those in love would act in such a strange way. It was true that the iceberg-cold Senya Kaoru had become gentler, more human like. Ah, the power of love...then, the door opened.

Kamiki walked in with a funny expression on his face, a magazine in his hand. He approached Senya Kaoru and leaned on a table. His smile was strange as he asked, “Kaoru, you like purple?”

Senya Kaoru looked up and stared at him

Kamiki opened the magazine and laughed. “You like your eyes best and you like to observe people who pass by. You don't like animals because you find them too dirty and you don't like Korean celebrities because they wear too much make-up...”

The sound of his laughter.

Senya Kaoru felt his heart sinking.

Kamiki studied him, “Is the interview real? Don't you hate interviewers asking you questions? Or did the publisher just make up this stuff?”

Hirose interrupted, “Senpai just he liked purple. It's probably all true.”

Kamiki was even more curious now. “Kaoru, did you really get interviewed? Strange, I never noticed.” But, that was good nonetheless. Being positive towards reporters wasn't a bad thing as revealing irrelevant things occasionally would satisfy the public curiosity.

Senya Kaoru took the magazine off Kamiki!

Tangerine Weekly!

The eye-catching title on the cover——‘Koizumi's exclusive interview! Senya Kaoru finally exposes his private life! The megastar who debuted three years ago finally opens his heart!’

His face turned pale.

His heart felt as if it had been drilled through. He closed his eyes.

“Tangerine Weekly's Koizumi sure rose to fame pretty fast. She has already made dozens of interviews, top headlines and written the best articles on latest gossip and scandals in the past month. No wonder they call her ‘Fire Witch’! She seems to be able to manipulate all of the celebrities, for example, she even managed to get an exclusive interview with the aggressive Shimizu Hishi. You could say she has written an article on every one of the singers already.” Kamiki continued to praise her, “Each generation succeeds the next. I have high expectations of Koizumi and I'm sure she'll become a popular figure among the entertainment reporters' circle.”

No, Kaoru had never cared about the gossip articles in the magazines Kamiki had given him before. Kamiki hadn't been shooed away like usual.

Wait, why was Kaoru's face as pale as a piece of paper?

Kamiki asked him nervously, “Kaoru? Are you alright?”

Hirose grabbed onto Kaoru. “I think senpai isn't feeling too well, I hope it's not some terminal illness. Should we call the ambulance?”

Kamiki eyed him.

Stupid kid, the moment someone called the ambulance, Kaoru would become the focus of a media siege.

Senya Kaoru shook them off.

Tears formed at the corners of his eyes.

He bit his lip and walked towards the door. His body was in pain and he only had enough energy to breathe in then breathe out.

Kamiki and Hirose exchanged looks.

They had no idea why Senya Kaoru looked like as if he'd just been hit, or why he emitted a strong, mournful atmosphere.

Then.

Someone's phone rang.

Kamiki and Hirose relaxed. They knew all about Senya Kaoru's ‘lucky phone’. Whenever it had rung in the past, he always turned into a happy-go-lucky boy.

Senya Kaoru stood a little straighter and stiffened.

He took out his cell phone. A harsh light reflected on the silver case and his ringtone's merry tune seemed to mock him as if to say——“You're a fool, you're a fool.”

He threw it away with all his strength!

The phone crashed into the wall and broke!

His ringtone came to an end.

An eerie silence in the workplace.

And the door slammed shut!

※※※

Koizumi finally closed her phone.

Suddenly, as if all of her energy had been suckered away and had left a gaping hole in her chest.

The Tangerine company newcomers who had surrounded her hadn't noticed anything. They were still cheering excitedly. "Koizumi is amazing! You managed to melt down the iceberg-like Senya Kaoru and were able to get so much personal information!"

"Senya Kaoru too, no one has ever succeeded before! Koizumi really is a miracle maker!"

"Koizumi! Tell us, how did you do it?!"

"Don't say it was intuition again!"

"We're not as stupid as that!"

The newcomers laughed happily and eagerly awaited her answer.

Koizumi's mind was a mess. Her throat felt dry.

She forced a smile, "Very easy."

Eh?! Easy?!

She laughed bitterly, "By being ruthless."

The newcomers were so shocked that they forgot to blink.

Ruthless?

What was she hiding?

Koizumi slipped out from the building. She sighed.

Never mind.

Even if she had to go up a mountain of knives or through a sea of fire, she knew she had to find Kaoru. She had to explain herself and hope he wouldn't get too angry. Was this desire a bit too luxurious?

And, was she really that ruthless?

No way, she hadn't done anything wrong; she had only given the public some minor details about a certain celebrity.

But, why did she feel so disgusted with herself?

Thump.

Her feet collapsed and her head narrowly missed the ground as she fell.

※※※

Koizumi's report was like a trigger as it finally broke Senya Kaoru's refusal to accept private interviews. A fight had ignited among the entertainment reporters and they aspired to see who could dig the most data out of his mouth. Publishers sent even more reporters to study him!

But, Senya Kaoru seemed to be ever more secretive. It seemed that he had learned the art of escape and could come and go in the shadows without a trace.

It had already been five days.

Despite the reporters who closely guarded him, all of their efforts came to nothing.

Even Koizumi hadn't seen half of Kaoru's shadow in the past few days and he wouldn't pick up his phone, so she still hadn't explained herself to him. When she happened to see Senya Kaoru on TV, she felt herself freeze all over.

She was sure of one thing, that he was angry.

No!

This couldn't go on!

Standing still wasn't part of Koizumi's life!

She had to catch Senya Kaoru tonight!

Senya Kaoru was due to finish his recording at nine and knowing his character, the staff wasn't going to stop any later than that. According to the Law of Conservation, moving freely is crucial and now, he had to find a secret passage to leave through.

She knew all about the TV building as she had once studied detailed plans of its exterior design and its interior plan. Now, she had done a simple 'exchange' of information. First, she ruled out the possibility of Senya Kaoru leaving from the main entrance (there was a large group of reporters standing there and waiting). She also ruled out the possibilities of him leaving through the side doors (it was an open secret that many celebrities left through a side door and there would never be less, if not more, reporters waiting here). The only remaining exit would be the door for the building's other employees. One led directly to the underground parking lot well the other, haha, happened to lead to the bustling streets.

Which door would Senya Kaoru take?

Koizumi wasn't sure.

Finally, she decided to use Fire Witch's Technique——Inspiration!

Intuition, in other words.

※※※

It was somewhat bright, out on the streets.

The items in the shop windows were appealing.

Most of the pedestrians had just finished work and were in a good, leisurely mood.

Koizumi sat on a bench, under the street lights. She clutched onto a cup of bubble tea, refusing to look away from the little door.

Nine sixteen.

A boy in his late teens scurried out.

Victory!

Koizumi's intuition was right! Ha, she was a reporter made of 99.9% effort and 1.1% inspiration. Who could challenge her, the genius reporter?!

Koizumi pounced towards him in delight, "Kaoru——!"

Ah, she had——finally——met up with him!

She was so happy that she was temporarily speechless!

Senya Kaoru froze and slowly raised his eyes to meet hers, the eyes of the red-haired girl. He hadn't expected to see her. He had thought he would never see her again.

What was she doing here again? Wanted to trap him yet again?

Koizumi eyed him curiously. His make-up hadn't been fully removed and its outline seemed to make his eyes look more indifferent, deeper, darker and colder. Strange, how could someone change so easily in appearance and attitude in such a short time? She still liked the smiling, happy Kaoru.

Without thinking, she blurted out, "Kaoru, are your eyes really black or purple?" But it was too late, her curious instinct had already kicked in and it was too late to take back.

Senya Kaoru sneered, "Planning to use my eyes as your next headline huh?"

"Hehe, I didn't mean it like that."

She really wanted to kick herself. She had started off badly, very unprofessionally.

She grinned, "Kaoru, I'd like to explain."

"Is there any point?" He asked disdainfully.

"Yes! Yes!" She nodded rapidly.

"I'm not listening."

He spun around and started to walk away. She was definitely going to explain in sweet talk, which wasn't worth listening too.

"You can't go!"

She grabbed his arm!

"Let go!"

He threw her off!

"I'll tell everyone you assaulted me!"

She warned him with a smile, an evil light in her expression. "If you don't sit down and listen properly, I'll go ahead and accuse you. The police will come and people will make a crowd to trap you. Oh, you'll be tomorrow's headlines as well!" Oh wow, she couldn't help praise herself at her quick thinking. It was worthy of being the best thought among all the entertainment reporters in the world.

Senya Kaoru eyed her warily.

He didn't understand how she could threaten so shamelessly while smiling like an angel.

But, she happened to say what he hated the most.

Under the streetlights.

On the bench.

Koizumi clutched onto Kaoru's hand (because she was afraid he'd run) and in the eyes of the other pedestrians, the two looked like a sweet couple.

She handed him the bubble tea, her smile like blossoming flowers. "You must be thirsty, so have something to drink. Videoing under the streetlights should be very comfortable."

Kaoru didn't say a word.

“Why aren't you drinking? Don't you love bubble tea?” He had always given her this drink.

When did he ever say he liked bubble tea? She was the one who liked it...Kaoru muttered, “Just get to the point.”

Straight into the point?

But she wasn't ready yet.

Koizumi sat a little straighter. She tidied up her thoughts and unwittingly put the straw into her mouth and drank up some of the bubbles in her tea. She thought for a moment then boldly smiled. “Kaoru, I'm actually very nice to you.”

That was her explanation? Kaoru almost spat up blood as he looked at her.

“Well, you're the most popular singer and the moment. Everyone likes you, everyone wants to know you. In other words, everyone wants to be your friend. Being friends means knowing a bit about you. But, for some reason, no one knows what you like thus causing even more communication barriers. I gave away some very minor details that have broken some of those barriers so that more people can become your friend. See, I'm very nice to you, aren't I?”

Koizumi broke into a sweat.

She had started rambling, but then again, it was better if he was so confused that he'd forgive her. She secretly eyed him. Uwah, his expression was so angry yet so cold. Had she not succeeded? She wanted to cry, someone help her...

Kaoru's heart hurt.

“That's your explanation?” Did she think he was some idiot?

Koizumi brushed away her sweat, “Did you understand? I meant...”

“You were lying to me all along.”

“...” She looked down, guilty.

“That scene with Ishizuka was your self-direction too, right?” He seemed to be covered in ice now, “You got him to insult me then came out to ‘save’ me, right?”

“No!” Koizumi jumped up, “I did not! How could I get someone to insult you? Besides, I really didn't get Ishizuka Jiro to attack you! Feel free to check Ishizuka Jiro's data! I swear on my honour, I did not lie to you!”

He glared at her. “You knew who I was from the very beginning.”

“Well, hehe...” Koizumi smiled embarrassedly, “Yes, I knew you were Senya Kaoru.”

“How?”

When he had removed his makeup, his black contact lenses and put on plain clothes, very few people could recognise him.

“Hehe,” she laughed proudly, “as a reporter, I should do everything within my abilities. I studied your villas, found your entrances, then waited for three days and three nights and finally saw a teenager that looked a bit like you. I wasn't convinced that he was you at first, but then I kept on seeing him. Finally, I realised that he was your other appearance.”

“And then you stalked me.”

“Hehe.” She couldn't meet his eyes anymore, “I couldn't just rush in and introduce myself, I had to wait for the best opportunity.”

“And then you created that incident.”

"I didn't create it, I told you." She whispered in protest, "I was only being the hero and saving the damsel." She almost glared at him for not being grateful for that.

Kaoru breathed in. "Why did you pretend to not know me?"

She glanced up at this and her smile was brighter than the lights. "You're wrong! I never lied to you about that! Think back, when you asked me 'do you know me?' I asked back, 'should I know you?'. Of course I *must* know you, I'm a reporter. How could I know not the super popular Senya Kaoru? I didn't lie to you about my identity either; I told you straight off that I'm Koizumi from Tangerine Weekly. See, I never really liked to you, you were the one who..."

"Yeah. I. Was. The. Idiot."

Kaoru's face was very pale. "You dug a trap and I fell in. I bet you thought it was funny."

That's...Koizumi tugged her hair in frustration. "I didn't do it for fun but because..."

"Yeah. You got close to me because of your work, because you wanted to get news off me." Kaoru's heart hurt so much that it had become painful to breathe. "I was a tool to increase Tangerine Weekly's sales."

"Kaoru..."

Koizumi looked a little helplessly at him. She did not dare to approach him for it seemed he'd collapse if she poked him.

A century seemed to pass.

The cup in Koizumi's hand had been squeezed out of shape and the tea was beginning to stain her fingers.

She sighed, "Kaoru, I am an entertainment reporter. Finding news and writing articles about my findings is my job. You are a singer, so you would do your best to sing songs. I didn't actually want to do this, but I couldn't help it. You wouldn't answer my questions even if I asked them at the press conference. I only wanted to..."

She lowered her eyes and smiled bitterly. "Yes, I lied to you and nothing would change about that. I did all sorts of nasty things to you, so you probably won't trust in me anymore. Kaoru, I apologise for all the things I did to you. Please forgive me!"

She bent down and bowed apologetically.

Senya Kaoru frowned at her. "In order to achieve your goals, you wouldn't mind doing anything, right?"

Koizumi stiffened.

"You can deceive others, threaten them, apologise and cry. To make interesting news, you wouldn't mind doing anything, right?" He growled, "Your work is so sacred that you can freely manipulate others at will?"

She was shocked by what she heard.

Slowly.

She clenched down on her teeth, clenched her fists and she was so angry that the veins in her forehead began to show. Her eyes were furious as she screamed, "Enough!"

Everyone on the street was surprised and turned to look at her.

Only to see a red-haired girl erupting like a frog.

"What have I done that's outrageous? Have I committed arson or murder?! Did I fabricate my articles?! I just published some trivial things, nothing special! A secret? I can tell anyone on the street what colour, what flowers, which animals I like, which things I like to eat...what's so special about that?! Would you die if I told other people about stuff like that?! It's only because you're a celebrity and everyone's interested in you. Your details have value!"

Her eyes were infuriated now. "You're a celebrity, a public figure. Every one of your moves is recorded under a spotlight. It's because the public likes you, that they buy your work. Your fame could be easily forced down by media

propaganda, you know! Each celebrity's data is usually shown to public anyway; do you know how strange it is that yours aren't?! If you weren't a celebrity, I would never have bothered about you!"

She waved her fist. "It's so obvious that I hurt you, but it's not like I owe you anything! Even if I misled you a little bit, I've apologised, so go get the bloody police if you want! And, I hurt you?! If I really wanted to hurt you, I could make even more sensational news than this! Why didn't I do that though?! That's because we're friends! I, Koizumi, am a loyal friend! I would never betray a friend!"

The night felt so weird.

The stars, above the streetlights, looked rather bleak.

The people on the street almost laughed at the quarrelling teenagers.

It was so nice to be young...Teenagers' mouths moved so fast when they were arguing.

Koizumi panted rapidly.

Her heart pounded.

She nervously eyed the frosty-looking face of Senya Kaoru. Oh no, she had done Fire Witch's Sure-fire Fail Technique—Blaming the Target! It would never work, so she never used it.

Kaoru seemed to be immersed in ice water.

Freezing ice water.

So cold that it froze his blood.

His frozen blood had caught in his throat. He was unable to talk and it was so cold that he felt helpless and distressed.

How could she just give up?

Fire Witch's Super Sure-fire Technique——Persistence and Perseverance! Those who want to be successful, must keep this in mind!

She hugged him from the back and wrapped her arms around his waist.

Then, she humbly begged, "Tell me, what must I do to make you stop being angry?"

Kaoru's cold body stiffened once more.

He spat out, "Unless. I. Die."

Oh come on! Koizumi's face crumpled, how could he be so cruel?

Her arms had lost their strength and her head went limp against his back. In a soft and weak voice she asked, "Is there really no hope" She paused, "I~~Are~~we~~still~~friends~~?"

"No."

Kaoru's expression darkened.

Koizumi looked as if she was about to die. "Haven't you ever heard the saying that 'a friend one day is a friend for life'? You can't be that heartless, right?"

He threw off her hand.

And didn't look back at her.

Koizumi sighed.

It wouldn't work...so——!

Don't blame her for being ruthless!

Her eyes lit up. She blocked Kaoru's path and an evil smirk appeared on her face, “As we're no longer friends, then I don't have to be so nice anymore.”

She took something out from her bag and shook it proudly. “What's this? Oh, it's a big sticker of you. Ah, so many interesting expressions, you have such pretty violet eyes. Oh, such a nice smile here too. Once these photos are published, don't expect to walk in public unrecognised from then on.”

Senya Kaoru was furious!

He tried to snatch the sticker. “You're bloody shameless!”

“Hehe,” Koizumi smiled apologetically. “I didn't want to do this, but there's no other way I can get news off you. Sorry ok, please forgive me, being alive means doing lots of involuntary things.”

Senya Kaoru understood.

If she was her friend, she'd be able to openly get what she wanted from him. If not, she would threaten and blackmail him.

He finally realised why everyone called her, ‘Fire Witch’.

She really was a demon.

Late at night on the streets.

Senya Kaoru turned into a man of ice.

Koizumi's smile was more ecstatic than ever. “Don't forget, I have many more photos made into stickers like this...But, don't worry. I won't publish them unless you co-operate with me...”

Fire Witch's Top Sure-fire Technique——Ruthless...to be successful, even high prices must be paid!

CHAPTER 05

Life passed slowly and tediously.

Koizumi felt like a gyroscope, chasing after so many celebrities every day. She was still an excellent entertainment reporter and her exclusive interviews and articles were always being published in Tangerine Weekly and Tangerine Daily. She was getting more and more popular and some celebrities' secretaries had contacted her boss to get an exclusive interview with her. Even Burst Weekly tried to get her to join their group, with higher pay.

But she was unhappy.

Reporting on eye-catching news was giving her less and less satisfaction. She suddenly felt lonely and realised, that she didn't have any real friends.

She once had a good friend——Ming Xiao Xi. But she had left and could only contact her through phone calls. Koizumi had been busy recently, so she hadn't been able to call her friend either.

She once had another good friend——Kaoru. His pure smile and trusting eyes were like a cool wind in summer. However, he was so angry that he ignored her. Although she had threatened him with the sticker, he refused all interviews and he was always as cold as a snake when she saw him. She felt a little sad.

She wasn't a cute girl, was she?

No one had ever wanted to be her friend.

Countless spotlights.

The recording studio was as bright as daylight.

Takahashi held on to his camera and shot a side look at the listless Koizumi, who was sitting on the ground. How strange! Tangerine Weekly's ace reporter usually always had enough energy to do eighteen somersaults in a row, but today, she looked as dejected as a stray puppy.

“Koizumi, are you sick?”

He eyed the shooting scene. Today was Senya Kaoru's first shooting of the MV of his new song, ‘Intuition’. Only East Phoenix station, Burst Weekly and Tangerine Weekly were allowed to enter the recording studio. Securing a place to interview at this place had been very difficult.

Koizumi looked up at him pitifully, “Senpai, am I a very unlikeable girl?”

Takashi was so surprised that the camera almost fell out of his hands. After much thought, he earnestly reply, “Ahem, Koizumi, you're——very talented!”

What was with that reply!

Koizumi buried her head in frustration and tears dripped from her eyes and nose. She knew she wasn't cute, that no one liked her and no one wanted to be her friend...Takahashi realised that he had probably said the same thing, as she now had the expression of an abandoned child.

“Koizumi...”

He was prepared to comfort her, when he heard the sound of arguing from the shooting side.

The MV director, Makishin, shouted at the indifferent-looking Senya Kaoru. “Love! You have to portray your love! Your expression is both cold and bitter! Tenderer, or else the audience will think you hate her!”

He then shouted at the new model, Rika. “You should have a big, sunny smile on your face! Smile at him and inspire him with your enthusiasm! What's with that complaining face?! It's not a song of separation or death, but one of being happily in love!”

Rika hunched over, while Kaoru simply stared at her with his icy eyes. She couldn't smile; it was difficult enough not to

cry....

“Again!”

Makishin ordered everyone back into place! Action!

The soundtrack sounded——

*... Your hands are
As hot as the sun
It feels like
I'm in the sun*

*You're a bad girl
You always have countless
Reasons to hurt me*

*But as long as ya
Hold on to my hand...stop!*

The fan fluffed up the girl's pretty hair. As the white veil fluttered, there was hope in the girl's eyes as she lifted her hand towards his...

Senya Kaoru closed his eyes! {Note: The next set of lyrics weren't sung aloud - see translation note}

*She smiled like
A mountain full of wild
Golden sunflowers*

*She smiled, said
“We're friends” yet
She waved her fist
And cried, “I'm
Tangerine Weekly's ace
Reporter, Fire Witch
Koizumi!”*

*In her outstretched hand
She gave him a tube
Of cream, saying
“For you!” and then
“The cream worked right?”
“You didn't have any
pimples, did you?”*

*Her hands were
Hot and warm
As if holding his
Was always taken
For granted*

*She grabbed his arms
Hugged his waist
Hey, “Are we friends?”
But “No” was his reply
As he slowly sank
Into the depths of hell*

Senya Kaoru turned around and left the recording studio, leaving the group of stunned staff.

“Senya Kaoru!”

The group instantly started to yell.

Makishin stopped them from calling him back. He had worked many times with Senya Kaoru before. Senya Kaoru had always been able to fulfil his requests and had always been dedicated and very serious about his work. He was acting very unlike himself and there was presumably a reason for his bad mood. Anyway, it wouldn't hurt to wait until he was in a better mood.

“Everyone can take a twenty minute break!”

They hoped that Senya Kaoru be back by then.

※※※

It was pitch-black in the utility room.

Senya Kaoru sat quietly in the corner. He didn't need light as the darkness gave him a sense of security.

He really was an idiot.

It was so obvious that he had been lied to and although he was very upset, he wished that she had continued lying to him. He would rather her lie, even if it was a ridiculous excuse. However, she had already given up on lying to him.

He hugged his knees, while sitting in the dark.

It felt like he was back to being the vulnerable child he used to be.

Time passed.

A petite figure tip-toed in.

He turned his head, refusing to look at her.

She went up to him softly and sat on the ground. She was so close, just a breath away.

“Hey...”

She gently greeted.

He ignored her.

“It's rather funny,” she laughed unnaturally, “that these days, I feel unhappy.”

Her voice seemed to make the utility room float.

“Will you forgive me?” She cried softly, “I ask for your forgiveness with everything I have, so can you please don't be angry with me anymore? Forgive me once, just once and I swear that I won't publish anything without your approval. Just give me one more chance, okay?”

Still, he ignored her.

“You don't understand, I actually feel sad...”

She lowered her head, tears forming at the corner of her eyes, “I know I was wrong, it was all my fault. Just give me one more chance, I...I...”

Her voice caught in her throat.

“...I didn't know you would be so angry...I thought it'd be alright if I just made you happy afterwards...I didn't expect you'd be so upset...I was a real heinous villain...but please don't be angry anymore...”

“Kaoru...”

She sobbed, while begging him.

Darkness.

Kaoru's face was tight and pale.

His fingers were clasped tight and he bit his lip, still refusing to say a word.

She paused, whispering. "Kaoru, was that song written for me?"

He couldn't help look at her.

She tried to remember the lyrics.

*Your hands are
As hot as the sun
It feels like
I'm in the sun*

*You're a bad girl
You always have countless
Reasons to hurt me*

*But as long as ya
Hold on to my hand...*

She sang a little off tune, but it felt strangely sincere.

Her hot palm was touching his back.

Warmth seeped from her palm.

She took his hand in hers.

Two hands: One hot, the other cold.

She smiled at him, her red hair shining like a flame. "See, I'm holding onto your hand...will you forgive me?"

Why?

Why had she failed again?!

She cried.

Although she had actually apologised to Kaoru from the bottom of her heart, he still didn't forgive her?! He didn't say a word as he knocked away her hand and stomped out of the room, leaving her alone.

'Failure' was finally in Fire Witch's book of records for the first time.

She sat on a cardboard box and looked helplessly at Senya Kaoru, who was still filming.

The MV filming location in the afternoon was out on the street. Fortunately, it wasn't the weekend, so most of the people were at work. There wasn't a huge crowd and the staff could easily usher them to one side, leaving an empty footpath for Senya Kaoru to walk on.

Cars and trucks drove by.

On the street.

Senya Kaoru walked alone.

The bustling street atmosphere seemed to suddenly slow down and got quiet as its people saw a lonely, sad-looking

figure. In the sea of cars, there was a pure yet tragic figure of a beautiful teenager, who looked as if he was heartbroken.

Everyone was captivated by him.

Makishin was secretly pleased; it seemed that his decision to change the cheerful romantic scenes into one that featured a boy in grief was correct! Currently, Senya Kaoru was good enough to star in 'Hamlet' and possibly even win a few Oscar awards.

Rika sighed in regret. It had been difficult to get the opportunity to work with Senya Kaoru and she had wanted to be in the centre of a scandal with him. This way, everyone would know her name. However, that wish was all ruined now that it had become a one-man show.

How disappointing...the entertainment reporters and the public were rather disappointed. There was to be no kissing scene, no exchange of feelings and now, Senya Kaoru wouldn't even need to say a word to the actress. How were they supposed to write an article now, or were their efforts just about to get wasted?

Koizumi wracked her brains and looked across the road and the cold-looking Senya Kaoru.

Ah, she missed the smiling Kaoru, whose violet eyes were as lovely as daisies.

She tugged her hair desperately, trying to think. What should she do to make him forgive her?

She suddenly had a thought. What about the movie classic—a gunshot?! Taking a knife for him?! In the pool of blood, while coughing up more blood, clutching to his hand with a pale face and saying, 'Kaoru...please forgive me...' should lead to a distraught Kaoru. He'd hold onto her frail body and cry, 'Koizumi, please don't die! As long as you're all right, I'll do anything!...'

She snickered. Many directors used this scene these days, so it was probably useful. The problem was, firstly, she had no idea where to find a person with a knife and secondly, if everything went wrong, someone could be hurt very badly.

What else was there?

Oh yeah, a car crash! If a car crashed over and he was about to be hurt, she could come flying pat and push him away. She'd fly into the air with a bang! She'd then smash into the ground with another bang! Blood would gush out! Ah! That would hurt!

She shivered.

Never mind, even that was too horrible...she pinched herself and couldn't help look at the passing cars. She wondered how she thought of such an evil idea when...suddenly——Koizumi's eyes widened!

Her body jumped like a spring!

Her frightened voice was stuck in her throat.

“Kaoru!!!”

Her voice hadn't even called out before she flew out like a bullet!

Everything happened too fast!

The driver of a black Toyota sedan seemed to drunkenly approach Senya Kaoru. The car wasn't driving too fast, but Senya Kaoru was completely immersed in his world of silence and was completely oblivious to the danger he was in!

When the crowd realised, the Toyota sedan was already only two metres away from Senya Kaoru!

It. Was. Too. Late!!!

“Senya Kaoru——!!”

“Danger——!!”

The crowd screamed!

In the midst of the screams, a figure leapt towards Senya Kaoru!

And hugged him!

She opened her arms and hugged him tightly!

His body felt cold.

Pity seemed to flash in Koizumi's eyes. In that lightning-like moment, she realised that she might have really hurt him. Despite that everything was too late, she really wanted to hug him.

He still hadn't realised what was going on. His eyes were blurry and for a split second, they betrayed a childish delight that resembled purple daisies in a spring breeze...oh no, she was supposed to push him out of the way!

But—but in that second, all she did was hug him close.

She gave him all of the warmth in her body—was it still too late?

It was like a movie in slow motion—the Toyota sedan was about to hit both of them at the same time!

Only one metre left!

A figure flashed past!

The huge impact forced Koizumi and Kaoru to fly in the air!

At this moment—she clung on to him!

He clung on to her!

She wanted to hold on to him forever and wanted him to hold onto her forever.

The two flew into air—and fell—but it didn't matter anymore. Koizumi shut her eyes and waited for pain to envelope her body. She didn't want to die at such a young age as there were a lot of things she wanted to do. She didn't want to say her last words to him while coughing up blood, nor see him hold onto her lifeless body crying...but, it didn't matter anymore.

Koizumi quietly lay on the floor, tears slipping from her closed eyelashes...

“Call the ambulance!”

“Hurry and call the ambulance!!”

The shooting site was chaotic. Everyone rushed towards the place of the accident, while cars braked hard to stop any further crashes. The sound of sirens pierced the sky as people panicked...Koizumi lay on the ground, hearing footsteps. Her ears twitched as she sniffed.

Weird...where was the pain?! Had she just died this fast? She hadn't even said her dying message yet. No, her bottom felt a little sore. Why was there no one by her side, but heading in the other direction? Was no one going to care about her, even as she was dying?

This world was so mean.

Eh, someone grabbed her hand. Who?!

She opened her eyes.

It was Kaoru.

Wow, his face was pale and his eyes were so mournful that it wouldn't have been strange if she died.

She managed to moan out, "...Kaoru...are...you okay..."

"Get up!"

His voice was harsh.

"Uwah~~" Koizumi was so surprised and started to cry. "You heartless villain, I died trying to save you and yet you still yell at me~~~Uwah~~~I don't want to save you any more~~~and let you~~Uwah~~" She wanted to curse him yet couldn't. She was so annoyed though.

Kaoru frowned and whispered, "Just get up. You weren't the one hit by the car - someone else saved us before that."

Eh?!

Koizumi got up and it was true, although her bottom hurt, she wasn't in pain. She glanced around, only to see a massive crowd of people around three metres away from her. The ambulance had arrived and doctors, nurses had taken out their first aid kits while someone else carried a stretcher into the centre of the crowd.

She heard people whispering, in worry. "Such a brave girl..."

"She rushed over, in order to save them..."

"She pushed them out of harm's way but got hit herself..."

"Dangerous huh..."

"She probably won't make it..."

"So young too..."

"What a pity..."

Koizumi's heart felt like it had been squeezed and sweat emerged from the palms of her hands and her forehead. Someone else had saved her and gotten hurt? Serious injury?! Maybe even death?!

Her legs felt soft.

Kaoru pulled her hand towards the crowd and squeezed open a gap. They looked at the injured girl.

There was enough blood to fill a sea.

The girl lay unconscious in the pool of blood. Her pale face was like a faded flower and her lips were curved slightly.

Kaoru asked the busy doctor, "How is she?"

The doctor didn't look up and loudly commanded, "Quick! The patient is in need of immediate treatment."

This seemed to be like lightning exploding through the skies!

Koizumi found herself trembling.

She knew the wounded girl!

She reached out, wanting to touch the girl's face, but was blocked by the crowd...she recognised the wounded the girl—and it felt like the devil had grabbed her throat. "...Xiao Xi..."

She was her best friend, a friend she hadn't seen for a while...she was the Ming Xiao Xi she missed so much!

Koizumi fainted.

※※※

Nintoku Hospital.

The media reporters seemed to know that the injured girl had an unknown relationship with the girl who had been saved.

The teenage boss of the Makino Yakuza, Makino Ryuho was in the hospital, as was the next prime minister's contender, Kazama Yuji's genius son, Kazama Tetsu and the heirs to the biggest company in the country, Toji Hiroo and Toji Hiroyuki. Uwah, all of Japan's most important teenagers were assembled and even the mysterious Senya Kaoru was there! This news was just too sensational to miss out on!

Unfortunately...the Makino family had sent several delinquents their way and had forced every one of the reporters a way. They had forbidden them to publicise this incident. The media reporters were furious, but even they knew better to infuriate the Makino Yakuza, who had even terrorised the police before.

The silence outside the emergency operation room was scary.

Toji Hiroo's fist was clenched and he was muttering, cursing nonstop. He paced up and down the hallway. Kazama Tetsu stared at the red light above the operating room's door, his hands squeezed tightly and his body as rigid as a glacier. Beads glistened from his forehead. Makino, dressed in black, stood furthest away from the room. His beautiful face was unusual pale and his eyes were full of desperation.

Koizumi hugged the bench. She bit her lip and tried hard not to cry.

Toji Hiroyuki could no longer stand it. He tugged her arm and asked, "Koizumi-nee-chan, do you think onee-chan will make it? She only just came back, so why did she get in this accident before she met up with us?..." She couldn't stop crying, "Koizumi-nee-chan....say...do you think onee-chan will die?"

"Shut up!"

Toji Hiroo erupted!

Why yell! Everyone was agitated enough!

Toji Hiroyuki grumbled and pouted. She was upset, so what was wrong with crying a little? Besides, she was really worried about her friend.

Tearfully, she approached Kazama Tetsu. "Kazama-niichan, Ming-nee-chan isn't injured too badly, right?"

Kazama Tetsu didn't seem to hear her.

It seemed that his soul had been pulled out; his eyes could only stare at the red light. As long it was lit, he knew that there was still hope.

Toji Hiroyuki thought that Kazama Tetsu wouldn't answer her.

Kazama Tetsu's voice was faint in the quiet corridor. "I believe in Xiao Xi, that she won't leave us like this."

A gush of tears fell from Koizumi's eyes. She suddenly began to cry like Toji Hiroyuki. "I was the one who killed Xiao Xi! Me!"

It was her evil way of thinking that had hurt Xiao Xi. If she hadn't wanted a crash to happen, all of this could be prevented! She knew that she had harmed Xiao Xi and that she had ruined her best friend!

She felt a pair of hands on her shoulders.

She sadly looked up, into Kaoru's warm eyes.

Makino Ryuho remained in the corner and there was no trace of light in his eyes. His long hair had been ruffled in the wind and his beautiful face looked like it was on the brink of destruction.

The red light went out.

The indifferent-looking Doctor Osamu came out, his face a funny expression.

Toji Hiroo was the first to ask and he was so worried that his face was red. "How is she?!"

Osamu looked coldly at Makino Ryuho and sneered. "I don't need to tell you that sort of thing."

"What do you mean?" Toji Hiroo really wanted to punch this guy!

Kazama Tetsu stopped Toji Hiroo and asked, "Doctor Osamu, please tell us Xiao Xi's current situation."

His voice wasn't high, but it was rather threatening.

Osamu leisurely put a cigarette in his mouth. He chuckled, "I've never seen such a thing. She had been hit by a car full on yet her organs weren't damaged. She's just a bit traumatised, that's all."

What a miracle but then again, Xiao Xi had always been a miracle maker so he wasn't that surprised. He did, however, think that the teenager, clothed in black, in the shadows had overused his power.

"In other words, Ming-nee-chan is all right?!"

Toji Hiroyuki cheered!

Kazama Tetsu closed his eyes and calmed his shaking body.

Koizumi went limp as the strong tension from the nervousness relaxed.

"But..."

Osamu wanted to tell them one more thing.

Everyone stopped immediately.

"Xiao Xi was hit on the head and she has had similar injuries before. When she wakes up, she may lose a part or all of her memories."

Eh?!

Amnesia?!

Everyone was shocked.

CHAPTER 06

The first rays of sunlight in the room.

Ming Xiao Xi's butterfly-like lashes blinked then she slowly opened her eyes.

The first head that leaned towards her was Toji Hiroyuki. Her voice was nervous as she asked, "Ming-nee-chan, who am I?"

The second head that leaned towards her was Koizumi. She was sweating. "Xiao Xi, who am I?"

Ming Xiao Xi's eyes were filled with wonder as she sank back into her pillow. She turned to see the smiling Kazama Tetsu and the anxious Toji Hiroo. A little further away, she called see Makino Ryuho, whose eyes burned like dry ice. She chuckled wearily, "You..." She tried to think.

Toji Hiroyuki almost fainted.

Koizumi smiled bitterly. "Do you remember how you got hurt?"

Ming Xiao Xi blinked her eyes.

"Do you remember who you are?"

She blinked.

"Do you remember anything?"

She blinked again.

Toji Hiroyuki burst out crying. "Uwah...Ming-nee-chan lost her memories! She doesn't remember anything!"

Suddenly——Ming Xiao Xi raised her hand and playfully slapped her. Although weak, her voice was crisp, "Tch! Lost my memories? I thought this was a drama lol. Anyway, don't underestimate this world's one and only Ming Xiao Xi."

Toji Hiroyuki was surprised. "Ming-nee-chan, you remember everything?"

"Yeah." Ming Xiao Xi didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Was she that fragile to get something like amnesia? They were pretty weird to think of something like that. "My lovely spoilt Yuki-chan and you're gossip-loving Koizumi. Oh and you're hot-tempered Toji Hiroo and you're..."

Her gentle eyes gazed around the room. "You're the best Tetsu in this world," she said, smiling.

Finally, she looked at the ice-cold yet beautiful boy standing in the corner. "Ryu..."

It had been a while since she'd last seen him.

Even now when she saw him, her heart still hurt.

The hospital room was strangely quiet.

Koizumi clenched her teeth; she really wanted to strangle the girl in the bed. "Ming Xiao Xi! Why did you pretend to be like that? Trying to scare us? We almost died from that!" It really was a very bad joke to play immediately after awaking.

Ming Xiao Xi looked at her and snorted. "I only played a joke on you and you just got unnecessarily angry. Then what do I get, after almost dying for you in that crash?"

Koizumi was speechless.

Ming Xiao Xi sat up and stared at her. "It's not like you don't know how to save someone. When there's a car, you simply push them aside. What were you doing back there, filming for a drama? I mean, you just hugged the person in trouble and wouldn't budge. It took so much energy to push you out of the way that I barely made it myself."

Toji Hiroyuki looked at her worshipping eyes. “Ming-nee-chan, you're amazing. You didn't get any injuries from being hit by a car.”

Ming Xiao Xi, however, was very frustrated. “I actually fainted after being hit though.” Oh come on, her ‘invincible’ body couldn't even dodge a car. It was an embarrassment to all her martial arts training.

She stared grumpily at Koizumi but suddenly chuckled. “Hey, don't tell me you're in love, hugging that guy like that and willing to throw away your life. Will you tell me all about it?”

Koizumi pulled a face and looked pointedly at her. She wasn't like an injured person at all.

Ming Xiao Xi's smile was mysterious. “I'm right aren't I? I'll help you as I'm the invincible Ming Xiao Xi after all!”

Koizumi's face darkened and she turned towards the door.

Since the ‘victim’ was now energetic enough to deal with the troubles of ‘other people’, she wasn't so worried anymore. Instead of being mocked, she would rather dig more valuable entertainment news.

Toji Hiroyuki quietly laughed in Ming Xiao Xi's ear, “Ming-nee-chan, Koizumi's blushing!”

Ming Xiao Xi laughed too. “Keep it down, or she'll blush even harder.”

The two laughed hysterically.

Koizumi considered her two options, one was to grab their throats and the other was to leave the room. She needed to leave the room. The former would never succeed with Kazama Tetsu and Makino Ryuho in the room.

Leaving the room was better.

But she stopped.

Kaoru was leaning in the doorway, holding a large bouquet of flowers. His purple eyes twinkled.

Crap, she hoped he hadn't heard Ming Xiao Xi's joke.

She continued to worry.

Ming Xiao Xi laughed even louder, “Hey, are you the guy who Koizumi tried to protect?”

What nonsense!

Koizumi almost burst into tears.

※※※

Although Ming Xiao Xi wanted to leave the hospital and had declared herself to be completely fine, the doctors were still worried and told her to stay for a little longer. Ming Xiao Xi finally agreed to stay in hospital after the influence of the others. She decided to play the role of being the most obedient patient of Nintoku Hospital.

Sometimes during free moments at work, Koizumi would secretly fumble towards her ward. It had been ages since she'd talked to someone so happily!

Sometimes, she'd see Senya Kaoru.

Whenever this happened, Ming Xiao Xi would create opportunities for them to be alone.

That's right, she had once hoped to get a chance to get along with Kaoru and understand him, or strive for his understanding but so many things happened all of a sudden and now, she had become disheartened at this goal she once had.

This time, Ming Xiao Xi ‘commanded’ Koizumi to accompany Kaoru out of the room.

The hall of the hospital.

The two walked in silence.

Koizumi tilted her head and eyed the silent Kaoru. She couldn't help ask, "Hey, why are you here almost every day?"

Kaoru continued to walk ahead, ignoring her.

Koizumi sighed. "Please don't be like that, just how long are you planning to stay angry?"

Every part of him was cold.

Koizumi stopped and said to his back, "Kaoru, I've already done everything I can. If you still want to be angry, I...have to give up."

Her heart felt bitter.

Most of the time, people only realise what was precious to them when they're gone. Maybe it was the feeling of emptiness that made the preciousness clearer. She knew that it was already too late and trying to mend their relationship was like trying to restore shattered crystal back into its original shape.

If she continued any longer, she would end up annoying and harassing him. She would rather stop completely.

He never glanced back.

She forced down the intense sorrow and grief she felt with all the strength she had.

And turned away

Kaoru's hands were tightly clenched together.

He heard her footsteps.

Did she leave?

She had finally left.

The remaining red colour left his lips.

※※※

Koizumi was about to push open the ward's door, when she suddenly saw a familiar figure on the terrace attached to the corridor.

She hesitated when she recognised Makino Ryuho.

Makino Ryuho stayed in the shadows, so she couldn't see him too clearly. Although he was far, she could feel his pain and longing. She had never liked him very much and thought Xiao Xi with him, was light being swallowed by darkness.

However, in that moment, she seemed to appreciate his feelings.

Such hopelessness and helplessness...If only he was closer to Xiao Xi, he would be happy.

She felt sad.

And saw another person a little further on.

Such a tall boy, with a scar on his face. She had heard Xiao Xi mention that he was Makino Ryuho's right hand man, Onido. Eh, that scar on his face seemed to remind her of someone...a thought flashed into Koizumi's mind.

Were they related?

Ming Xiao Xi was sitting on the bed and biting a red apple. She winked at her. "Planning to dig out some insider news?"

She was taken aback, "How did you know?"

"Ah, whenever you smell something fishy, your eyes begin to shine." Ming Xiao Xi shook her head, "I'm really pleased though as you can notice little clues despite being in a hospital. You're a very good reporter after all."

Koizumi proudly smiled, "Of course, I'm Tangerine Week's ace reporter, Flame Witch!"

"Clap, clap!" Ming Xiao Xi applauded while holding the apple, "In acknowledgement of the greatest entertainment reporter!"

Koizumi sat down by the bedside.

Ming Xiao Xi handed her an apple. "But, why do you look so unhappy?"

Koizumi was distressed. "To get the best news, I used some abnormally harsh methods and someone won't forgive me."

"You mean, Senya Kaoru?"

"Yeah."

"What did you do?" Ming Xiao Xi was curious.

Koizumi held onto her apple, while telling her everything that had happened, honestly.

Ming Xiao Xi was shocked by what she heard. "Eh, you actually came up with such approach?!"

Koizumi's shoulders collapsed. "Amazing isn't it?"

"Ahh," Ming Xiao Xi patted her on the shoulder, "your acting is pretty good. You should consider joining the showbiz and I'm sure you'll be a top actress tomorrow!"

Koizumi glared at her. "Do you only know how to make fun of me?"

Ming Xiao Xi saw that she was angry and hurriedly sat up. "Sorry, that was unnecessary. Let's get straight to the point." She coughed. "Ahem, first of all, do you think what you did was wrong?"

Koizumi tugged her hair, thinking, thinking.

"You——" Ming Xiao Xi was sure of it, "You don't think that you were actually wrong, right?" No way, Koizumi's values were so weird and she still hadn't realised what went wrong.

"I really didn't do anything bad!" Koizumi waved her fist in protest. "I didn't expose his privacy, did not fabricate a scandal, or publish about his daily life! You see, I just wrote about some insignificant details! Even so, I've apologised to him heaps of time before, I just don't see why he's still so stingy!"

Thump!

Ming Xiao Xi punched her.

Koizumi saw stars.

Ming Xiao Xi huffed on her fist. "This punch is for Senya Kaoru. He was obviously so deeply hurt by you and yet you still have no idea why. Hey, when you apologise to me, you actually feel sorry, right?"

Koizumi's head felt beaten up as she nodded. Geez, that punch really hurt!

Ming Xiao Xi lay on the hospital bed. "Koizumi, Koizumi, are you really ruthless or heartless..."

Koizumi thought the two words were pretty much the same.

Ming Xiao Xi breathed out slowly and sat up to stare intently at her. "Firstly, you lied to Senya Kaoru! You obviously knew who he was but pretended that you had never seen him before. This lowered his defences. You were in the wrong!"

Yes, that was true, but Koizumi was frustrated nonetheless.

"Secondly, Senya Kaoru told you what colour, flower he liked, but that was to a friend, not a reporter! Would you just publish something a friend told you? If I told Yuki-chan, Hitomi, Tetsu or even more people about what you told me today, wouldn't you feel upset because I had betrayed you? Senya Kaoru feels the same."

Koizumi clenched her hands, speechless.

"Then, you mentioned that Senya Kaoru never mentions his private life. Even if they're just little details, whatever the reason, he cares a lot about them. Everyone has their own weaknesses and everyone has fears. These may be irrelevant to others, but to another person, these things are intolerable." Ming Xiao Xi eyed her and accused, "Back at Kouyu College, the school newspaper club always had first-hand information from me and don't pretend that you don't know why!"

Koizumi took a deep breath. Oops, that had been her past crime but...She smiled, "Hehe. You weren't too angry, because we're good friends, just like sisters."

"Were you a reporter of that club? Informant?" Ming Xiao Xi had always wanted to ask her this.

Koizumi touched her nose. "Hehe, I was the deputy editor."

Ming Xiao Xi sighed in anguish.

At that moment, she finally realised that the Kouyu College newspaper's motto, 'fast, accurate and relentless', had always been Koizumi's doing. No wonder...no wonder...

Thump!

Koizumi was punched in the forehead.

Ming Xiao Xi glared at her, understanding the feelings of Senya Kaoru even more.

Thump!

She was so angry she couldn't help punch Koizumi again.

Koizumi's head was full of lumps and she was mumbling in pain. Where was the doctor...she wanted treatment...Ming Xiao Xi glared at the upset Koizumi. "Say! Were you wrong?!"

Koizumi stroked the lump on her head and tears began to form in her eyes. "Yes, I was wrong, I know I was wrong, but...but...are you still my friend?" She didn't want to lose Xiao Xi too.

Ming Xiao Xi eyed her. "What do you think?"

Koizumi burst into tears. "Xiao Xi, don't scare me anymore. I only have you as a friend, if you get angry, I...I..."

"What would you do?"

"Will...will..." Koizumi could no longer suppress her grief. She felt despicable enough to be cast aside and ignored for life. Only the darkest corner would be good enough for her then. "Will...have a very sad death..."

Ming Xiao Xi's heart was soured by her crying.

She had never seen the clever, energetic Koizumi crying, as vulnerable as a child.

She couldn't help hug Koizumi and pat her back. "Fine, don't be upset. How could friends harm each other like that?! A friend one day is a friend for life."

Koizumi's eyes were misted. "Are you really not angry anymore?"

"Yeah."

"Uwah——" Koizumi cried even more loudly. "Xiao Xi, I betrayed you so many times yet you still forgave me...Kaoru...I didn't do anything that bad but...he still refuses to forgive me...I've apologised over and over again...I've done everything he could...he still ignores me...he must hate me..."

Ming Xiao Xi wiped her tears away with a tissue and sighed. "Everyone is different. I don't mind what you did, but that doesn't mean Senya Kaoru would be the same. Everyone's privacy should be respected. Even if you're a reporter, that doesn't mean you have the right to ruin the privacy of others. That's how you should be towards normal interviewees, let alone Senya Kaoru, who treats you like a friend, right?"

Koizumi listened to her words, her tears still streaming steadily.

"The more Senya Kaoru trusts you, the greater the damage. The more he hates you now, the more——" Ming Xiao Xi blinked, "he used to like you."

Like?!

Koizumi was so shocked that even her tears stopped flowing.

She swallowed. "You mean——Kaoru likes me?"

Ming Xiao Xi casually leaned back into bed and grabbed the half-eaten apple. She munched on it, saying, "That's right."

Koizumi wanted to steal her apple to get her to hurry up. "Can you please expand on that?"

Ming Xiao Xi lazily took another bite of the apple. "Oh, you want to hear all about it?"

"Yeah!"

Fine, she decided not to torment her any longer.

Ming Xiao Xi put down her apple and studied Koizumi with sparkling eyes. "Say, if Senya Kaoru didn't like you, would you be his friend? Why would he wait for you under the baking hot sun, get someone to send you a bento, listen to your every word and give you everything you wanted, for another reason that wasn't love?!"

Koizumi was dazed.

"And, why does he visit me so often?"

"Because you saved him."

"Stupid." Ming Xiao Xi eyed her, "He paid for my medical expenses so how could he not get other people to bring flowers and fruit to me? Why does he personally come to see me every day?"

Koizumi tensed up. "Could it be...he fell in love with you?!" A lot of people liked Ming Xiao Xi, so perhaps Kaoru had decided that she was cuter than her?

Thump!

Another punch!

Girls in love always had a low IQ! Ming Xiao Xi muttered, "Idiot", at Koizumi and realised that she felt very violent today.

"What was that for?!"

"Because you're so dumb!" Ming Xiao Xi was annoyed, "How did you come up with such an absurd conclusion?! Firstly, Senya Kaoru came to see me because I saved him. Come to think of it, Koizumi, you haven't thanked me yet for saving you. How mean..." She shook her head, not exactly in a friendly way. "Senya Kaoru was very grateful to me

because I saved your life, thus implying how important you are to him. Secondly, it's because he can see you here. Haven't you noticed that his eyes often follow you?!"

Koizumi desperately wailed at this. "No way, he never looks at me."

"True. He stops looking at you when you look at him." Only a bystander could notice this.

"He likes me..."

Koizumi gradually started to believe it.

A smile formed on her face, like the sun breaking through the cloudy sky. Kaoru liked her.

However, almost a second later, the smile disappeared.

"But, he's so angry that he's ignoring me." Koizumi started crying again. "Even if you say that Kaoru used to like me, he hates me now."

This was a problem.

Ming Xiao Xi thought for a little longer and finally said, "You were the one who screwed everything up..."

"Yeah."

"...Therefore, you need to mend it."

"Yeah."

"Then go and think of something up."

"Think of what?" Koizumi's face was hopeful.

"How should I know?" It wasn't her problem and there was no point in getting an extra headache.

Koizumi was annoyed, "You've got to be kidding me!"

"Haha, no way." Ming Xiao Xi bit into her apple while thinking, "Koizumi, regardless of what method you use there are two things you must remember."

Koizumi listened carefully.

"You must be honest."

Koizumi nodded.

"You mustn't use those little tricks of yours."

Koizumi frowned.

Was she talking about her sure-fire techniques? That seemed a little hard.

Ming Xiao Xi's smile was pure. "As long as you can master these two points, you'll be invincible!"

Koizumi studied Ming Xiao Xi, who was propped up on the bed. Her legs and arms were still wrapped in thick bandages, but her cheeks were as pink as the apple in her hand and her eyes twinkled like stars.

"Xiao Xi, thank you."

Koizumi's voice was solemn and very serious.

Ming Xiao Xi shot her a stunned look and shook her apple. "Why so mushy? Worshipping me secretly would do well enough, I'll know anyway. Haha, after all, I'm the world's one and only Ming Xiao Xi!"

Koizumi narrowed her eyes.

She regretted it! That cocky Ming Xiao Xi!

Koizumi stood up and suddenly had a thought. "Oh yeah? When I came in, I saw Makino Ryuho outside. Should I get him to come in? You look kinda bored anyway."

Ming Xiao Xi's expression had suddenly become very strange and the apple seemed to be caught in her throat.

※※※

The Annual Golden Melody Awards ceremony.

Gleaming starlight!

All stars gathered!

In addition to the stars themselves, the executives from every record company and presidents from all sorts of media organisations, all of the other rich and powerful people who had profited from the entertainment industry were assembled. The stars, other celebrities and famous people all dressed up glamorously, in fear of being excluded. Only Shinyo Kane, the president of Tangerine Company, was dressed up in normal, dark-coloured qipao. She was quietly sitting in the guest room.

Koizumi was among the entertainment reporters and was eying the distant Shinyo Kane. She had once looked at the founder of Tangerine Weekly with adoring eyes, but now she questioned whether she really wanted to idolise her anymore.

Shinyo Kane just sat there, alone, as if she had the plague and no one wanted to get close to her. Only one other person, Shimayama Osu, the president of Burst Weekly, was alone like her.

Shinyo Kane had once said that all one needed to be successful in the media department, was a ruthless heart. She had even once claimed that she wasn't a real businessman, but a person who knew how to earn lots of money.

Being ruthless meant countless articles of the worst scandals in history. Shinyo Kane had succeeded in life, but the cost of that was no one dared to approach her.

Did she want to be like that?

Koizumi was horrified at the thought.

The host was witty as he handed out the awards one by one.

It was the same as the last two years, Senya Kaoru, from the Yoshisumeragi Company, remained the best lyricist and composer. His singles held four places in the list of top ten selling singles in the country and he was named the best male singer overall. The host tried to get him to speak as much as he could, but all he did was thank his company and the partners he had worked with.

The audience was disappointed when the singer who received the Best New Artist award, Tsuka Sakura, subtly pointed out that she was dating Senya Kaoru.

At that moment, the entertainment reporters roared in delight!

All cameras swivelled towards Senya Kaoru and Tsuka Sakura. They wanted to capture them 'exchanging' looks of love!

Koizumi stiffened.

Although her intuition told her that Tsuka Sakura was lying, an uncomfortable feeling still swept across her body. That was when she realised that she too, had unconsciously fallen for Kaoru.

She gazed at Senya Kaoru, in the VIPs' seats across her.

Senya Kaoru was wearing a white suit. His eyes were black and his lips were cold and thin. He was as handsome as the prince in fairytales, but he was able to mercilessly crush the hearts of the girls who had fallen in love with him.

She didn't like Kaoru being like that.

She liked the Kaoru with eyes as gentle as purple violets in spring, happiness dancing in them.

Koizumi hung her head in dismay.

Would she ever be able to get the Kaoru she used to know back?

Late at night, on the highway.

The number of vehicles gradually diminished.

Kamiki frowned, after observing the car mirror. "Crap, there's a bunch of reporters following closely behind. It's impossible to throw them off." Ever since Tsuka Sakura's 'hint' that her relationship with Senya Kaoru was 'not usual', the entertainment reporters decided that they had smelled something fishy going on. Now, they were chasing Senya Kaoru's car with their 'high-tech' driving skills.

Senya Kaoru didn't seem to hear him. He was in a daze.

Kamiki turned towards him. "Kaoru, you seemed to have been a little depressed these days. What happened?"

He and Kaoru had grown up in the same orphanage. Kaoru had been the prettiest boy in the orphanage, but he seemed to always be drowned in a melancholic silence. Kamiki had tried a variety of toys to become friends with him, but he had always failed. Later, Kaoru entered the entertainment circle because of his handsome looks and brilliant voice, while Kamiki had become his secretary. The closer Kamiki had gotten to him, the more confused he became. Kaoru was often stubborn and indifferent, but sometimes he'd act childish, especially when his 'phone of happiness' used to ring. Kamiki had realised that his innocence had always been hidden and someone had finally managed to uncover it.

These days however, Kaoru's smile was gone and his atmosphere became increasingly cold. Almost all of the light in his eyes had disappeared.

Senya Kaoru closed his eyes.

He remembered those two hours ago, Koizumi had looked at him.

She had looked at him.

As if she felt that he was very far away.

He could barely see her bright red hair himself.

...She had smiled at him, her red hair shining like a flame. "See, I'm holding your hand...so will you forgive me?"

...In that moment, she had hugged him. His chest had tightened and he could barely breathe. She had tightly clutched to him, as if she wanted to give her life to him...she had lain on the ground, her face pale and her red hair brighter than usual, as two tears fell from her eyes slowly.

...In that moment.

He had thought that she had died.

His fear and despair suffocated him

When he finally realised that she hadn't died and wasn't injured, the truth had dawned him——He liked her.

Liked her more than he realised.

She was like an unknown poison that invaded every cell of her body. Her smile and lies were all a trap and he had fallen in. That was when she said——"Kaoru, I've already done everything I can. If you still want to be angry, I...have to

give up.”

She had turned away from him.

She had walked away, leaving an empty hall.

Ah, that witch.

She had first deceived him and then left him. Her decisions were nothing to do with him.

Kaoru was gradually coming to a conclusion.

His heart ached so much that it was too heavy for him to breathe.

Then.

A Honda honked loudly and cut in front of Senya Kaoru's BMW!

Screech——

The BMW almost crashed into the Honda!

Kamiki slammed down the brakes, scared into a cold sweat. Oh no, those entertainment reporters were really at it, willing to risk their life like that!

The BMW had only just stopped when all the vehicles on the road stopped and the entertainment reporters rushed off. They were carrying cameras, while microphones were in their outstretched hands. It was crammed.

Senya Kaoru heard a knocking sound at his window.

“What is your relationship with Tsuka Sakura?”

“Tsuka Sakura said that the two of you were dating, is this true?”

“Have you had sex with Tsuka Sakura yet?”

“Have you broken up with Shimizu Hishi yet?”

“Will you two get married?”

...Kamiki stuck his head out of the window and shouted, “Please go away. Senya Kaoru is tired and will not accept any interviews!”

Reporters ignored his words and continued to pound Senya Kaoru's window. “Senya Kaoru, say a few words please!”

“If you don't answer our questions, we will not leave!”

...The entertainment reporters had vowed not to give up and began to threaten him. “You could accept Koizumi from Tangerine Weekly, so why not accept us?”

“What the hell, without our help, could you have been so popular?!”

“Believe it or not, we can ruin your popularity!”

...Senya Kaoru's eyes frosted even more as he heard them.

Then.

The door opened.

He was like an ice sculpture, standing in front of the reporters. His voice sounded like the bitterest winter, “You are a group of unscrupulous vampires and will do anything to make amazing news. I will not answer your questions and feel

free to ruin my popularity if you can.”

His words made the reporters shocked!

They had never seen such hostility towards reporters from any celebrity in public. Usually they would avoid questions, but to say such disgusting words personally! They were furious! The reporters felt like that had been greatly insulted and refused to let go of Senya Kaoru even more. They threw a huge variety of nasty words to accuse him.

Late at night, on the highway.

The BMW was surrounded by a dozen cars and surrounded by several reporters. Senya Kaoru was squeezed in the very centre. The reporters used the most vicious insults they could while Kamiki tried to break the brawl, but it was no use.

The situation was getting worse——and everyone heard police sirens in the distance.

Police car lights pointed towards the reporters. Two policemen got out and shouted, “Why the crowd, just what is going on?!”

The reporters looked at each other. Why were the police here?

The police recognised Senya Kaoru in the middle of the crowd and had a general understanding of what was going on. He shouted at the reporters, “A member of the public called the police and reported that there was traffic congestion here. Move all cars or you shall all be punished.”

The reporters unhappily returned back to their cars. They were infuriated as they wondered who had called the police and therefore, saved Senya Kaoru. They hadn't seen Kamiki or Senya Kaoru take out their phones, so they were sure someone had ruined their plans on purpose.

Kamiki smiled apologetically at the police. “In order to avoid more traffic jams, please let us have a ten minute head-start.”

The two policemen nodded.

Kamiki started up the car and shook his head with a strange expression on his face. “Who helped us? If no one had called the police, we wouldn't have escaped. We really need to thank that ‘member of public’ some time.”

Senya Kaoru attentively gazed out of the window.

He thought that he saw a flash of red hair.

But he wasn't sure and she didn't appear.

Behind a large billboard.

Koizumi watched Senya Kaoru's BMW disappear and the cars of the reporters gradually disperse from afar. Finally, she breathed out a sigh of relief and put her phone back in her bag.

The police had been very slack though, as she had called them seven times before they finally arrived. If only the police could come earlier, then perhaps the relationship between the reporters and Kaoru wouldn't have been so stiff.

She tugged her hair. That was a big problem.

She had heard what Kaoru said. The reporters would never forgive Kaoru and they would do anything to attack him. She didn't want that to happen.

※※※

Ming Xiao Xi's small apartment.

Koizumi was tense. “What? The car was aiming specifically at Kaoru?!” She had always thought it was an accident as the police had said that the driver had been drinking.

“Yeah, that's what Hitomi told me. She was sent to investigate the identity of the driver and she found out that he once had connections to the Nikko yakuza. He had recently deposited a large sum of money at a nearby bank. Hitomi also found out that a lot of people from the yakuza have been targeting Senya Kaoru in the past few weeks.”

“Why?”

“I have no idea.” Ming Xiao Xi looked apologetically at her.

“Yakuza huh...” Koizumi wracked her brains and tried to figure out how Kaoru could possibly annoy the people in a yakuza. “Isn't Makino Ryuho's Makino Yakuza the biggest yakuza around? Can't you get him to find out why Kaoru's being targeted?”

“I've already got Hitomi to do that and I think she should be able to do it.” Ming Xiao Xi thought for a little longer, “But I'm worried if the real problem is with the Nikko Yakuza.”

“Nikko Yakuza?” Koizumi was confused, “Didn't Makino Ryuho destroy Nikko Yakuza already? Why are they still active?”

“The Nikko Yakuza suffered extreme damage, but their boss, Akana Ohata is still in hiding. They've always wanted to make a comeback and have been pulling little pranks of sorts since then.”

“Eh? You have a pretty good understanding of the yakuza world, could it be that you and Makino Ryuho...” Koizumi giggled mischievously.

Ming Xiao Xi smiled, as expected of Koizumi. She really was a queen of gossip.

She stared at Koizumi, sighed and said, “He's my friend, just like you are my friend. You care about what I do too.”

“Eh? Then what about Kazama?” Koizumi continued to ask. She admired Kazama-senpai the most, the genius teenager. She wished with all her heart that Xiao Xi would choose to be with him.

Ming Xiao Xi's eyes soften as she smiled, “Tetsu...”

She immediately snapped back and sternly said, “We were talking about the danger Senya Kaoru was in, how did it end up being about me? I'm angry!”

True!

Koizumi grinned. “Hehe, Xiao Xi, are you really angry? Xiao Xi is the friendliest and most loyal friend in the world!”

Ming Xiao Xi eyed her and didn't bother answering.

Koizumi remembered back to that day and thought that it had indeed been suspicious. Even if the driver was drunk, they should still be able to see someone in front of the car and brake.

Ming Xiao Xi continued to analyse. “I didn't think the car was moving very fast as if it gave people enough time to move out of its way. It should have been too late for me to save you two in the first place.”

“Therefore...”

The people concluded at the same time——“That was a warning.”

The car was a warning directed towards Senya Kaoru. If he didn't accept or do something, there would be more serious consequences.

The problem was: What?

Koizumi frowned.

CHAPTER 07

Night fell.

Outside Senya Kaoru's villa, a red-haired girl sat on the curb, constantly looking at the direction of the door.

She had already been waiting for three hours.

But that didn't matter, for waiting had always been an important part of her job and she had already gotten used to it. Looking at the sky, it seemed that it was about to rain soon. She didn't have an umbrella with her, as she hadn't realised that it would rain.

She looked down at the phone in her hands.

She had sent over twelve texts in a row to Kaoru, telling him that she would wait for him outside. Would he come to see her? Never mind, she couldn't care about that, she just had to wait. She couldn't allow herself to think that he'd never come out again.

She continued to think.

Thunder came from the sky.

The trees swayed violently in the wind.

She grimaced and hugged her cold arms. No way, what bad luck huh?

Rain had started to fall beside her, completely shattering her last shred of hope.

Should she go? Kaoru probably wouldn't come anyway. She would probably get sick from waiting in the rain with a runny nose, high fever and headache...She grabbed her bag, covered her head and sighed. She had to wait. She had to wait until Kaoru came out to see her.

The rain fell, harder and harder.

Her dripping wet clothes clung to her body and she shivered.

She huddled and held onto her head. She looked like a puppy that had been dunked in soup. Her wet hair clung to her pale face.

So——damn——cold——gradually, she realised that her forehead felt hot and was feeling very uncomfortable.

Ah, the relentless rain.

Ruthless Kaoru...she snuffled, wanting to cry.

There was a 'squelch' sound in addition to the rain.

"Why haven't you gone yet?!"

An angry voice by her side.

She thought that she had finally started to hear voices from waiting too long. She slowly raised her head and saw the once familiar, but now unfamiliar face. Tears spilled out from her eyes from her pent up sorrow and grief——
"Uwah——Kaoru——"

She grabbed Kaoru's waist and tightly hugged him, crying, "Uwah——I've been waiting for you for so long..."

Wind.

Rain.

Crying in pain.

The handsome boy holding an umbrella was tightly clasped against a crying red-haired girl...Koizumi felt a little dizzy, probably from crying so much.

She came out of Senya Kaoru's bathroom. Her hair wasn't dry yet and she sat down on the sofa. Ah, she really wanted to sleep, but she remembered why she was here. She forced herself to look at Senya Kaoru in the eye.

"Hey, long time no see."

Kaoru wasn't accustomed to the pale and weak Koizumi. Her lips were blue and her smile was very weak. She was usually waving her fists, always energetic.

Her being like that tore his heart.

He knew that she had been sitting on the curb, waiting for him, all along. He knew that she had waited for four or five hours, but he refused to go out and see her. He wanted her to leave as he didn't know how to face her. He didn't want to act like an idiot in front of her.

Only when she had been drenched in rain and still not left, had he gone out to see her.

He took a deep breath.

But that was just pity. He wouldn't be cheated again.

Chilly drops of water trickled from Koizumi's hair onto her neck.

She forced a smile towards the deadpan Kaoru. "You still care about me, right?" Otherwise, he wouldn't have had come out. That thought made her feel warm.

Kaoru's eyes were indifferent. "What do you need?"

His cold words made her stiffen.

She poked the sofa and muttered. "Oh, I just wanted to tell you that that incident with a car wasn't an accident. It was a warning."

"Warning?" What was she up to this time?

His untrusting eyes made her nose tinge. "I'm not lying to you. That driver has connections to the yakuza. The yakuza recently harassed you, right? I suspect the two might be connected."

"How did you know that someone had harassed me?"

"I..."

"Are you still stalking me?" She really was great at that kind of stuff.

"No!" Koizumi leapt up. "I didn't follow you, my friend told me..."

"You have friends?" He studied her.

"Sen. Ya. Kao. Ru!"

She was so angry that her hair began to puff up. "Do you have to talk to me like that? Am I really that bad in your eyes? Besides, I do have friends! Xiao Xi is my friend! You are my friend!"

Kaoru was as quiet as the night.

"I've told you before that you are no longer my friend."

His words.

Seemed to push Koizumi into hell.

Tears slipped down her cheeks...She regretted it; she had long regretted her actions. If she'd known how he would react to that article, she would have never published it. But, even if she was wrong, why wouldn't he give her a chance?

Her body felt chilled as she continued to cry. "Kaoru, just what do you want to do! I've already apologised over and over, so many times that your anger should have gone down! Yeah, I know I was wrong, it was all my fault. You can kick me and yell at me, just don't ignore me. I really want to just die...uwah..."

The way she cried looked like a child.

Her face was a mess of tears and snot, while her nose was red and swollen.

Rain and thunder, outside the window.

The sounds of the waving branches seemed to indicate that their lives were coming to an end.

Kaoru's hands clenched.

It took all of his strength to refrain from embracing her.

He felt like a moth. He knew that she was the source of the dangerous fire, yet he couldn't help wanting to be close to her. He wanted to hug her and in turn, be hugged by her.

But the outcome would be tragic.

He would die in pain.

Cry...coldness swept over her...and she felt like being trapped in ice and snow!

Through the tears that blurred her vision and her grief and helplessness, she began to ramble. "Fine! Senya Kaoru, you won't forgive me right?! You won't ever talk to me again right?! Who do you think you are?!"

She wiped away the snot from her dripping nose and cried in pain. "I was worried that you'd get in trouble, wanted you to be more careful, so I waited outside...waited for you...kept on waiting...too afraid to leave when it started to rain...it was horrible being out in the rain...and you don't care...you only know how to annoy me...I hate you...I really hate you..."

Her tears fell off her cheek as she continued to cry. "Fine...you're going to ignore me...then I won't annoy you...I won't ever care about you again...never again...will you talk to me so harshly and I...I...I never want to see you again!"

Just like that, she rushed out the door like a burst of wind!

She went out so fast that even Kaoru hadn't seen her stand up!

The door slammed close with a bang!

Like a hammer severely hitting Kaoru's heart!

He shut his eyes in pain.

She had left, after saying those last words. She had finally gone.

Wasn't this what he wanted?

But, it felt as if his heart had been dug out.

The sound of the rain diminished.

The sound of the wind gradually got weaker.

Night, it was still dark.

Kaoru leaned against the window, his limbs felt exhausted and he felt like his heart was replaced with a big hole.

If he had held out his hand.

Maybe she could have stayed a little longer.

If he had embraced her while she was still crying.

Maybe she wouldn't have cried so much.

She was gone.

He had nothing.

Except for the hole in his chest.

And an icy chill.

His head leaned against the cold glass of the window and in his head, he heard——“...I won't ever care about you again...never again...”

...As silent as death.

Time passed.

Time passed.

Then suddenly, soft sobs began to drift in.

Kaoru slowly stiffened.

He listened carefully.

Ecstasy lit up in his eyes.

On the stairs outside.

There was a red-haired girl clutching onto her head and sobbing.

She seemed to have been crying for her whole life.

Kaoru approached her.

He sat down.

Then he asked, “Why didn't you go?”

She looked up, her red eyes swollen like two walnuts. She cried, “I was reluctant to go and I regretted leaving...I don't want to ignore you...I wanna be with you...”

She flew into his arms and hugged him.

Her hot tears wet his chest.

“If you don't want to be friends with me, then don't...” She rubbed her face with his shirt and continued, “...Let me be your lover.”

Kaoru stared at her.

He forgot how to spoke.

Koizumi started to panic.

She tried to explain, “I-I'm serious. I don't know when I started to like you, but I really do. I-I...”

Kaoru's throat was too dry to talk.

Koizumi was anxious, she pulled him closer by the neck—and kissed him!

Her lips had the salty taste of tears while his lips were cold. She kissed him, kissed him hard, and it seemed like a burning flame.

The kiss only lasted a few seconds.

She let go of him.

Her eyes were as bright as stars.

His cheeks were as red as burning iron.

She smiled through her tears. “Let me be your lover, ok?”

She kissed him again.

This kiss was gentle, like a feather brushing across his lips, one that brushed across every inch of his lips.

This one lasted long, it waved away the wind and rain and brought back the glittering night sky.

She lightly broke it off and asked, “Let me be your lover, ok?”

The night wind gently blew in his violet eyes.

Her shy face was reflected in Kaoru's eyes.

He embraced her tightly.

And kissed her, blushing.

Apparently—kissing and being kissed were just as sweet!

※※※

Koizumi was sick.

She lay dizzily in bed, an ice pack was placed on her forehead and her right hand constantly groped for a tissue to blow his nose. How tiring!

However, the sight of the Kaoru taking care of her, she felt happy.

A bowl of steaming fish porridge.

Kaoru helped her up and fed her with a spoon and his careful consideration made her feel grateful.

“Yummy. The fish has a nice texture and the porridge smells nice.”

Koizumi wasn't very good at praising others, but she knew that fish porridge was very troublesome to make, as all of the fish bones had to be taken out prior cooking and careful control of temperature was needed.

She took his hand. “Kaoru, you're so nice to me.”

Kaoru smiled and wiped his mouth with a paper towel to help her. “Do you want to eat anything else?” Seeing her happy was the best thing to him.

“I'll eat a little later. I want to talk to you.” She leaned on him.

“What?”

He wrapped the blankets around her so that she could lean more comfortably.

Her fingers fiddled with his buttons. "Hm, say——why can you make such good porridge?"

He thought about it seriously. "I could cook from a very young age because if I cooked well, mom would praise that I was a good kid." He chuckled, "I liked to be praised, so I was interested in cooking."

"Hehe, so Kaoru was a good child." She was curious though, why had he become so withdrawn after growing up?

"Then later at the orphanage, no one would take care of me, so I had to make simple meals so that I wouldn't go hungry." He smiled bitterly at this.

"Orphanage?"

She was shocked.

Had Kaoru grown up in an orphanage? No wonder his birth was such a mystery.

She stared at him "Kaoru, are you not afraid that I'll tell other people?"

He gently lifted her chin. "Would you?"

His eyes were shining like an amethyst, honest and full of trust.

She bit her lip. "I betrayed you once before, so shouldn't you be a little suspicious of me?" He smiled, "If I was suspicious of you, how could we be together?" Since he had accepted her and kissed her, he felt that he should wholeheartedly believe her.

Her fingers curled up.

He kissed her forehead. "Since I decided to love you, then I'll give you my heart. It's up to you to make it happy or to make it painful."

He wanted to take the risk, despite the costs.

His feelings enveloped her heart like the sea and she hugged him tightly.

In that moment.

She realised.

She had feel in love with the man in her arms. She didn't ever want to hurt him and would rather die than allowing anyone else to hurt him.

She didn't want to the inspiring little witch, but the angel who guarded him.

The two stayed liked that for a long time when she finally murmured, "Kaoru, I really thought that you would never forgive me. When I rushed out of the room, I really thought that all hope was lost, but I just couldn't leave you. It felt as if my heart had been dug out."

He laid his chin on her red hair. "I didn't want to forgive you. You know, my heart really broke when you started to threaten me with those stickers. You're such a bad little witch and I really didn't want to see you ever again...but when you held my hand, when you asked for my forgiveness, when you rushed in front of the car and hugged me...I also felt that as long as I was with you, there was nothing else I needed to worry about."

She pouted, "But you gave me the cold shoulder instead."

He gave her a childish smile. "Then, what do you suggest I do? You say 'please forgive me' and I say something like, 'um sure'? Wouldn't that be rather strange? Besides," he paled, "you said that you'd give up on me in the hospital and left without looking back."

She opened her mouth. "That...that was...shoot, I didn't mean it, I..."

“So, you were the mean one.”

Kaoru concluded.

She chuckled, “And then?”

“Then...” Kaoru paused for a moment, thinking, “You must be nice to me.”

“How nice?”

“As nice as I am to you.”

“Then can I be even nicer than that?”

“Impossible.”

“...?”

“No one can be nicer than how nice I am to you.”

“Instead of saying ‘nice’ all the time, can we change the word?”

“To what?”

“...Love?”

“Or...?”

“I can't hear you.” Koizumi inched closer.

Kaoru kissed her.

The kiss that tasted of fish porridge made the two feel light.

A long time passed.

Koizumi couldn't help ask, “If I had really run away, what would you have done?”

Kaoru hugged her tightly.

He didn't dare think about that, but even so, he was in heaven right now.

Koizumi hid a smile.

How could she give up so easily?

Fire Witch's Super Sure-fire Technique——Persistence and Perseverance! People, who want to be successful, must keep this in mind!

※※※

Tangerine Company's office building.

The moment Koizumi set foot in the building; she was immediately called to Shinyo Kane's office.

Under the bright sunlight.

Shinyo Kane was wearing her dark-coloured qipao and was glaring at her.

She threw a few copies of the latest issues of Tangerine Weekly and sneered, “That sure was disappointing.”

Koizumi guiltily flipped through the magazine. "Hehe, the weekly sales weren't that bad."

Shinyo Kane gave her a cold look. "Are you pleased with just that? That was a live that featured many stars and what, you just wrote about some minor celebrities? I bet it was because they bribed you. Say, is this all you can do?"

Koizumi lowered her head, speechless.

How did she know that it was because they had bribed her? Amazing. The minor celebrities had wanted to become popular, so they had specifically worn seductive lace underwear and invited her to make an interesting article out of that. She recognised their efforts and had agreed to photograph them.

"Koizumi, you've been too soft recently."

"No way, no way. Hehe, my heart is harder than rock." She laughed drily.

"If that was true, you could have easily written an article that those stars were disgusting people to want entertainment reporters to take their photos. Why did you just let them go?"

"Hehe." The palms of Koizumi's hands were sweaty, "I didn't think of that. B...besides it's not good to stiffen our relationships too much. I am an entertainment reporter, so one day we will meet again, if they become popular enough."

Shinyo Kane pondered over this. "Well, that's true."

Koizumi sighed in relief.

"Then how are you going to explain this?"

Shinyo Kane opened a drawer, took out an envelope and placed it on the table.

Koizumi took the contents out of the envelope.

She almost fainted from what she saw.

There were a dozen photos, all of Senya Kaoru and her. It was the usual Kaoru, with his violet eyes that shone in innocence. Crap, if those photos were published, Kaoru would no longer be able to walk unrecognised in a crowd.

Shinyo Kane eyed her. "I've been waiting for you to hand in photos of Kaoru. Why haven't you though? Because you want to see him again?"

Koizumi stared at the photo, dazed.

"I gave you data, time and salary not because I wanted you to fall in love, but because I wanted you to dig out compelling news. You must live up to the expectations I have for you."

Koizumi was still in a daze.

Shinyo Kane gathered up the photos. "You've missed your chance. I'm going to publish these photos and show Senya Kaoru's other side, coupled with his mysterious lover. I'm sure the sales of Tangerine Weekly would be much better."

"Wait a sec!"

Koizumi grabbed her hand.

Shinyo Kane sneered, "I have video clips too."

"Hehe, no way?" Koizumi smiled flattering, "But, there must a reason why you haven't published these."

Shinyo Kane decided to listen to her.

"You see, if you published them, they'd only be popular for a while and its popularity will decrease over time." Koizumi tried to analyse, "You trained me, Koizumi, the most talented reporter out of the newcomers, for a reason. However, if I

were to get trapped and be unable to move freely, Tangerine Weekly would have lost a very valuable reporter and there will be no one else who can write top articles!”

Shinyo Kane coldly smiled.

“Even if you don't care about me, even you know that if my identity is exposed, Senya Kaoru would no longer trust me. Inside information and news would no longer steadily appear in Tangerine Weekly.” Koizumi smiled, “You decided to step back and give me room for development.”

Shinyo Kane clapped her hands. “Good, wonderful deduction.”

“Hehe, thanks for the praise.” Koizumi broke out into a cold sweat.

“But,” Shinyo Kane leaned towards him, “I am a person who makes money and these photos of Senya Kaoru, will definitely be published on the front page no matter what you say.”

“Of course! Of course!” Koizumi repeated.

“Those photos of Senya Kaoru's everyday life are so great and they'll be wasted if they aren't published! But,” the tone of her voice changed, “It doesn't have to be a photo of us. I have a huge sticker of him which is even clearer, even prettier. Wouldn't that be better to publish? Hehe, that can save me as well.”

Something flashed in Shinyo Kane's eyes.

“Boss, give me three days! I'll dig more interesting insider stories from Senya Kaoru, about his upbringing, coupled with coloured stickers. It'll be a real scandal!”

Koizumi waved her fists in the air. “Give me three days! Believe me! It'll be alright!”

Shinyo Kane's pale scar lifted as she smiled, “Fine, three days it is.”

CHAPTER 08

Tsuka Sakura was wearing a crown with a light green veil attached to it. The gentle smile that played on her lips resembled the goddess of spring in the forest.

Her long fingers gently brushed against Senya Kaoru's lips, as soft as a dream and holding countless meanings. She sank into his arms, emotions written all over her face as she went on her toes to wait for his loving kiss...all of the cameras and spotlights were aimed at the two——waiting——the reporters held onto their breaths——and waiting——for Senya Kaoru's first kiss with another star!

“Cut——!”

The MV director, Makishin, waved his arms to stop the staff. He yelled at Senya Kaoru, “This is the kiss scene! Don't just stand there! Hold her! Kiss her!”

Strange, it was obvious that Senya Kaoru was in a good mood, so they had specifically arranged the kissing scene into the schedule. They had thought that he'd be able to except it, but still, he refused.

Senya Kaoru pushed away Tsuka Sakura. “There was no kissing scene in the script.” If there was, he would never have come today. It was his principle to never shoot an intimate MV.

Makishin was frustrated. “Senya Kaoru, why can't you understand? If you and the new singer, Tsuka Sakura feature a kissing scene in this MV, you'll be more popular than ever!”

Senya Kaoru replied, “Never done it in an MV before and the sales were still pretty good.”

Makishin couldn't retort anything back.

It was true that all of his previous albums were bland like that, but all of them were still top selling. Makishin thought that Senya Kaoru's popularity in the entertainment circle was a miracle, one that only he could pull off.

“Please modify the scene.” After all, Makishin was a respectable director who didn't always work according to ‘market needs’ so such changes had been allowed before.

Makishin sighed. It was unusual for Senya Kaoru to reject his idea so much. Never mind, he decided to cut the scene. He waved his hand to the assistant director, to negotiate changes to the program.

The corner was silent.

Tsuka Sakura bit her lip as she approached Senya Kaoru, “Why did you do that?”

Senya Kaoru leaned back on a couch, not saying anything.

“You knew this was a very important chance for me.” If she kissed Senya Kaoru, there'd be lots of news and she'd be in the centre of attention. If she could pull it off successfully, she'd be more popular than she ever wanted.

“Nothing to do with me.” His voice was cold.

Tsuka Sakura stomped her foot. “You know I like you, so why's it nothing to do with you?” A lot of people wanted to be with a pretty girl like her, so he definitely had feelings for her too, but was just too shy to show it. She was sure of it.

Senya Kaoru stood up.

She refused to go, so he decided to go instead.

There was only a short break and Tsuka Sakura was determined to not waste any more time.

Tsuka Kaoru grabbed him and lovingly whispered, “Kaoru——”

Snap!

Light flashed!

A red-haired girl popped out of view. "Cool! A romance between the megastar Senya Kaoru and the new artist Tsuka Sakura!"

Kaoru felt unspeakable joy at the sight of her.

Tsuka Sakura hesitated.

And then she puffed out her chest and smiled. "So what? Your reaction speed sure is fast, only you managed to take a photo out of all of these other reporters." Hah, a scandal would finally be written about Senya Kaoru and her! Thank God the red-haired girl appeared in such a timely manner!

Koizumi put away her camera. "Can't help it, this place is well-hidden, so only the genius reporter from Tangerine Weekly, Koizumi, is able to find it and capture this moment."

"You're that Fire Witch, Koizumi?!" She had long heard of the name and it was rumoured that there was nothing she couldn't write about. Oh, so she was such an energetic teenage girl.

"Yeah!" Koizumi grinned. Hehe, it seemed that she was getting popular. No pain no gain.

Kaoru smiled slightly, "Why are you here?"

"Hehe." Koizumi grinned back at him. "Something was delayed on my schedule. Anyway, anything valuable happening over here?" By 'valuable', she meant 'newsworthy'.

"Nope."

Kaoru handed her a towel and she wiped her sweat away with it.

Tsuka Sakura eyed the two. "You know each other?"

The Senya Kaoru who was always as cold as a fridge would speak so nicely to a reporter?! Something strange was going on.

Koizumi pulled her face. "How can reporters not know stars?"

"I don't think it's like that."

The way the two looked and understood each other wasn't as simple as that. Tsuka Sakura gave Koizumi a calculating look, but apart from her red hair, there was nothing else special about her.

Koizumi hated the look of contempt on her face. She waved and said, "Hey, would mind going out of the room for a while? I need to talk to Senya Kaoru."

Tsuka Sakura's nose shook so much that it looked crooked. "You want me to go?! Who the hell are you?!"

Kaoru wasn't happy from what he heard. His eyes were as cold as daggers. "She's a friend of mine."

"A friend?!" Tsuka Sakura yowled in a funny way. "I bet she's your secret lover. Senya Kaoru, you sure have a very, very weird taste in women!"

The way she yowled had attracted a few reporters.

Koizumi narrowed her eyes. "Are you going or not? If you say anymore, don't blame me if I resort to nasty methods."

"What! What can someone like you do?!"

Tsuka Sakura glared at her.

Koizumi laughed evilly, her voice full of menace. "I just took a photo, didn't I? You want to be popular then I might as well publish you in a scandal!"

Tsuka Sakura's eyes widened.

“Hehe, popular new female artist tried to seduce Senya Kaoru but failed...so, isn't that great?”

Tsuka Sakura gaped at her, “You—you——”

Witch...She believed that Koizumi could do something like that but...

“As I'm in a good mood, I'll let you off if you go.” Koizumi smiled, clearly pleased. “But remember, you mustn't say anything and so won't I.”

Tsuka Sakura disappeared like smoke.

Koizumi sat beside Kaoru, on the couch. She slouched on it wearily. “Geez, I'm exhausted from running around all day.”

Kaoru opened a can of iced drink and handed it to her.

She drank it and heaved a sigh of relief. Then, she tilted her head and smiled at him. “Kaoru, was that a bit mean of me?”

“Threatening Tsuka Sakura?” He handed her another paper towel. She sweated too easily.

“Yeah.”

“She was harassing me in the first place, all you did was tell her to go away. Besides,” his eyes flashed, “you're not as cruel as you think.”

Koizumi swallowed guiltily. “Hehe, oh really?” She wasn't so sure though, as she had almost wanted to hit Tsuka Sakura when she had grabbed onto Kaoru's arm.

Kaoru suddenly asked, “What are you working on?”

Koizumi hesitated then rolled her eyes. “Hehe...” It was probably better to not tell him yet, “Hehe...”

Kaoru smiled, “You don't have to tell me if it's too much of a problem, I just wanted to see if I could help you.”

Koizumi felt her emotions swell up and couldn't help grab his hand. “Kaoru, you're so nice to me.”

Kaoru hugged her.

“I haven't done anything for you.”

Koizumi shook her head, “You care about me, worry about me and that makes me feel very happy!”

Kaoru eyed her, “Did no one care about you?”

“It's not like that.” Koizumi smiled at him cutely, “When the person you like cares about you, you feel especially happy.”

Her words were like a knife that stabbed his chest.

A warm feeling surrounded him and couldn't help take the back of her hand and kiss it.

It was a gentle kiss and a warm sweetness travelled from the hand to her heart.

It took a while for Koizumi to come back to her senses. She hurriedly took her hand away from him and cautioned, “You're crazy, there are a lot of reporters here!”

Kaoru's smile showed that he didn't care about them. “I like you and that's not illegal.” He liked her and even if everyone knew, he would still like her.

Koizumi didn't know whether to smile or to laugh. “You're a celebrity, a public figure. If everyone knows that you've got a girlfriend, your reputation will be ruined.”

“Then if I leave the entertainment circle,” Kaoru gazed at her, “would you still be with me?”

She was shocked.

Some time passed before she looked at the handsome Kaoru and asked, “You like singing right?”

Kaoru thought for a while, “Yeah.”

“Then...”

“If I could only choose one thing, I'd choose to be by your side.”

Koizumi's heart was so touched and her eyes became as soft as a lake on a spring evening. “Kaoru, don't worry, I'll do everything to prevent you from ever needing to make that decision.”

She would protect him.

No one could stop the little witch from becoming an angel!

※※※

Cold drinks store.

Ming Xiao Xi placed a huge file on the table.

Koizumi's eyes shone as she opened it. There were only a few pages and a single photo, but——it was enough!

She leaned back against her chair and relaxed. She grinned at Ming Xiao Xi, “Thanks.”

Ming Xiao Xi fiddled with the ice cubes in her orange juice. She eyed her warily, “Just what are you planning? You've been acting all suspicious since you asked me to get Hitomi to help you and wouldn't tell me what it was for. You even wanted it to be passed around secretly, like a spy. Hey, don't tell me you're going to do something bad!”

Koizumi rolled her eyes. “Tch! I, Koizumi, have a huge sense of justice and I live by it. Action of this justice is the principle of my life!”

Ming Xiao Xi almost spat out all of her orange juice at this. She gave a crushing smile, “Is that really you, Koizumi, the reporter who doesn't mind using heartless methods to dig out news?”

Koizumi was annoyed. “You always seem to remember my mistakes.”

“I'm so unlucky.” Ming Xiao Xi sighed, “I was betrayed numerous times, yet I can't even complain a few times.”

Koizumi shook her. “Fine, fine. Ming Xiao Xi is the most generous person in this world, to forgive a certain someone who happened to make a little mistake.”

Ming Xiao Xi lazily took another sip of the orange juice, but she was still worried. “Would these things harm anyone?”

Koizumi lifted her right hand in despair. “I swear, if I use this information to harm others, then I——”

“Will lose trustworthiness for life.”

Ming Xiao Xi finished for her.

Koizumi blinked. “I thought you wanted me to say that we'll stop being friends.”

Ming Xiao Xi smiled, “A friend one day is a friend for life.”

Koizumi smiled back.

In that moment, she realised that she was actually the happiest person in the world.

“One more thing.” Ming Xiao Xi gave her a solemn look, “Do you know you have any idea of why the yakuza have been targeting Senya Kaoru yet?”

Koizumi shook her head. “I’ve asked Kaoru heaps of times before, but he told me not to worry and wouldn’t tell me.”

Ming Xiao Xi nodded. “He probably doesn’t want to tell you because you’d worry and probably won’t be able to solve the problem anyway.”

“What is the problem?” Koizumi knew that her friend wouldn’t mention it without a reason.

Ming Xiao Xi looked at her. “Probably because the Nikko Yakuza want to get back, but because all of their territory and businesses have been taken away by the Makino Yakuza, so they decided to invest in the entertainment industry.”

Koizumi listened, breathlessly.

“Senya Kaoru is the most popular star at the moment and is sought by millions of people. The thing is, he has never done any major exposing filming.” Ming Xiao Xi hesitated before sighing. “Therefore, the yakuza thought that if Senya Kaoru starred in a pornographic film, huge profits were certain.”

“Pornographic film?!”

Koizumi collapsed. She believed that even if the Earth was going to explode in the next moment, Kaoru would never accept a film like that!

Ming Xiao Xi smiled bitterly. “Yep, that’s it.”

“That’s it?”

“Haha, I’m done speaking, but Nikko Yakuza sure aren’t.”

Koizumi was speechless.

Ming Xiao Xi studied the pale-faced her and sighed. “Get Senya Kaoru to be more careful.”

※※※

Senya Kaoru’s villa.

Long table with fine cuisine arranged neatly on it.

Flickering candlelight.

Romantic and warm.

There was a pot of blooming daisies, which smelled very nice.

Kaoru took out the last dish, roast chicken, from the kitchen and its golden colour made Koizumi drool.

He sat down at the other end of the table and smiled, “You can start.”

Kaoru had changed into a plain shirt. His hair was clean and fresh and his violet purple eyes danced like little daisies.

Koizumi wouldn’t budge. She shook her head, “No need.”

Kaoru was confused. Did she not like these dishes?

Koizumi pursed her lips. “We’re sitting at opposite ends of the table. We’re so far apart that I’m unhappy!” No matter how good the food was, there was no point in it unless Kaoru was closer.

Kaoru laughed, “That’s it?”

Koizumi grinned, while carrying a chair to his side and moving the dishes closer. She put the candles in front of the two. Her smile was like flowers, "Much better!"

He and she sat together, side by side. Two shadows were cast onto the floor by the soft yellow candlelight.

"Hm, you're really good!"

Koizumi had no complaints.

Kaoru smiled as he lowered his head. He was happy to cook for her whole life.

"Why aren't you saying anything?" Koizumi turned towards him, smiling.

Kaoru put a piece of the golden chicken onto her plate. His smile was somewhat shy, "I like listening to you speak."

Kaoru stared at him, "I like listening to you speak too."

"Huh?"

Koizumi put down her knife and fork. "Tell me about those people threatening you into starring in a pornographic film."

Kaoru stiffened.

He studied her. "You know everything?"

Koizumi nodded.

"You really are amazing," he laughed briefly, "only a few people know." No one else should have known, apart from Kamiki and himself.

"How are they threatening you?" she interrupted.

"Koizumi..."

"Tell me!"

Kaoru took a deep breath. "They said that if I didn't agree, they'd beat me up until I was disfigured and disabled. They said they'd make me do it even if I don't want to."

Koizumi shivered!

She seized him, "What did you say?"

"I told them to piss off."

Koizumi stared at him.

"That's all?"

Kaoru smiled, "I'm not afraid of them."

Koizumi leaned limply against the table. Oh my, was Kaoru just ignorant or simply fearless?!

※※※

The angelic teenager, with golden curls, sea-blue eyes and two lovely dimples, was smiling and looking at Kaoru and Koizumi.

Koizumi eyed him from top to bottom. "That's you?"

The teenager looked up, "Yeah, that's me."

To ensure Kaoru's safety, she had asked Xiao Xi to find a clever bodyguard with extraordinary skills. Xiao Xi had quickly found a suitable one and had made appointment to meet up.

But——would this teenager be alright?

It was hard to distinguish whether this person was male or female, but Koizumi was pretty sure he was male. His appearance was very worrying though, for he was very thin.

"I'm Rente." The teenager introduced himself.

Koizumi was still suspicious. "Did Xiao Xi get you to come? Do you know what you're supposed to do?"

Rente grinned, "Yep, my task is to protect Senya Kaoru so he will not be threatened and get hurt."

Koizumi frowned. For some reason, she still wasn't convinced.

"What can you do?"

Rente muttered darkly. Animals from the same species stay together and people were no exception. That hateful Ming Xiao Xi's friends were troublesome indeed.

He put on a confident smile, "You should know about the Makino Yakuza's Onido."

"Yeah." Onido was said to be the best fighter in the Makino Yakuza.

"My rank is the same as his."

Koizumi's eyes flashed, "You?"

Rente secretly gritted his teeth. This damn red-haired brat dared to underestimate him. But, for the plan...so he smiled, "Even if you don't believe me, at least believe in Ming Xiao Xi. She got me to come here."

That was true——Koizumi hesitated.

Ming Xiao Xi never made any major mistakes so maybe this Rente was better than he looked.

Kaoru finally spoke up. "Koizumi, there's no need to get anyone to protect me, the company has professional security."

Koizumi sighed, "But even so, you wouldn't be followed around twenty-four hours a day would you? There are so many opportunities to attack you."

"They were just threatening, no need to make a fuss."

"I'm just afraid what if it did happen."

Kaoru smiled sarcastically. "So you'd rather Rente stay by my side all day?"

Rente laughed while interrupting, "I'll be careful not to appear when there's no danger." Hehe, He'd go out to play. "I'll go out when Koizumi comes to see you." It'd be nauseating with her there.

Koizumi glanced at him, "You're quite the clever little boy."

Rente grinned from ear to ear. "That goes without saying!" Then his face crumpled and he shouted, "I am not a little boy!"

At this point, Koizumi had already pulled Kaoru far away and could barely hear her distant, bored voice. "I know...little girl..."

Rente couldn't help stand her foot, blush and yell out from the top of his lungs——"I am not a little girl! I'm as old as Makino!"

That hateful woman!

No wonder she was a good friend of Ming Xiao Xi!

Far away.

Koizumi couldn't be bothered about Rente.

She looked at the happily smiling Kaoru by her side. His face crumpled——A childish bodyguard...was a problem.

“What's wrong? Koizumi.” Kaoru looked at her.

“Nothing!”

She casually smiled, as if nothing was wrong.

CHAPTER 09

Tangerine Company.

Shinyo Kane closed the files and eyed Koizumi, who had a strange expression on her face. "You're on time."

Yes, there was only fifteen more minutes left until the end of the three day deadline.

Koizumi sat down on a chair, her hands clutching to her huge bag. Her eyes flashed as she said, "Boss, if I plead you to not publish the photos of Kaoru's everyday life, I'll work harder than ever and find other valuable news..."

Shinyo Kane waved her hand, "Forget it."

Koizumi shut up.

Shinyo Kane's eyes were like ice. "I thought you'd become a distinguished reporter and that was your very last chance. I didn't think that you'd just waste it."

Koizumi clutched to her bag, tightly in helplessness.

Shinyo Kane stared, "Reporters must be ruthless. Friends do not exist in the eyes of reporters, only news can. The moment you started to have feelings for Senya Kaoru marked the beginning of your failure."

"Failure?" Koizumi tilted her head and thought. "How is finding someone you like considered failure?"

"Women need a good career."

Koizumi nodded, "That's right. Women who do not have good careers don't lead interesting lives and have no self-confidence. It's that confidence that men appreciate."

Shinyo Kane frowned.

As expected, girls in love always used words such as 'like' and 'appreciate'.

Koizumi suddenly eyed Shinyo Kane and said, "Boss, you probably knew this but, you've been my idol for ages!"

Shinyo Kane's brow furrowed.

Koizumi's face was full of marvel. "Your parents died when you were nine years old and you had to sell discarded cigarette cases for a living. Then somehow, you managed to succeed in the media industry. You founded Tangerine Weekly and started a new era, reporting all sorts of dark and dirty secrets. You let everyone in the world see the ugly truth under the glossy surface. Such courage enabled Tangerine Weekly to thrive and since then, it has expanded at a rapid rate. I really admire your outstanding ability!"

Shinyo Kane gave her a cold look. "Don't say so much, I just want to make money. I'll definitely publish these photos of Senya Kaoru as front page news."

Koizumi forced a bitter smile, "Please reconsider, ok?"

"No."

"Is there anything I can do to stop it?"

"You can go out."

Shinyo Kane opened her file, as if Koizumi was made of air. Sunlight shone on the scar on the right side of her face.

Koizumi stared at her and carefully said, "I've always been curious about the scar on her face."

Shinyo Kane didn't look up.

"It might just be the gossiping nature of a reporter." Koizumi laughed, "Then, one day, I happened to see a very similar

scar, just a lot deeper than yours. That was when I had a strange thought.”

Shinyo Kane seemed to be listening.

Koizumi shook her head. “Theoretically speaking, he's a delinquent from a yakuza, while you're doing legitimate business. You two shouldn't have any connections...but, I was very curious, so I did a bit of research and found...something amazing! I——!”

Shinyo Kane had stiffened and her glare was as sharp as knives!

Koizumi laughed in a low voice. “I found out that President Shinyo of Tangerine Weekly had an intricate relationship with Onido of Makino Yakuza.”

Shinyo Kane sneered, “You want to scare me, just by saying that?”

Koizumi smiled. “To write a popular article, speculation isn't enough. But, hehe...”

She grabbed a few photocopied sheets and placed it in front of Shinyo Kane, with a strange smile on her face. “I wonder if these are enough. Hehe, don't assume that these are the only ones...”

Shinyo Kane leafed through a few of the photocopies and she instantly paled. “Why do you...”

Koizumi's smile was very embarrassed. “Hehe, I am the genius reporter you trained after all. There's nothing I can't find information about. Hah, who would have that the cold yet shrewd President Shinyo had...and has already...” She handed a slightly yellow picture to Shinyo Kane, “What a cute boy, I wonder what happened to his parents...”

The little boy in the photo had spiky brown hair and his lips were shut tightly.

Shinyo Kane accidentally shouted, “Where is he?!”

Koizumi was surprised at the tone of her voice, “So even the ruthless boss would take care of a child?”

“Koizumi!”

Shinyo Kane's voice was dangerously low.

Koizumi laughed breezily. “If I use him as the topic of front page news, I wonder if I'll be even more popular? Even if it's not published in Tangerine Weekly, another competing media company would publish it right?”

“What do you want?”

“Being a reporter means being ruthless, please don't blame me Boss. Reporting about other's private life is fun, but reporting about your own life can be entertaining as well.” Koizumi breezily replied.

“State your conditions.”

Shinyo Kane's eyes narrowed.

Koizumi clapped. “You're the one who wanted me to state the conditions. Hehe, it's very simple——”

She gazed at Shinyo Kane. “Protect Shinyo Kane! Stop all news and articles that might harm Kaoru! As long as you can do that, I swear on my life, that I'll never give away your secret!”

※※※

“And so I succeeded!”

Koizumi was sitting inside the cold drinks store. She played with her cup of bubble tea, while proudly telling Ming Xiao Xi what had just happened.

“In other words, you threatened her?” Ming Xiao Xi scooped up her ice cream with a spoon.

“Yeah.”

Ming Xiao Xi smiled, but didn't answer.

“Hey, I didn't hurt her as I didn't actually spill her secret!” Koizumi nervously shouted. “Look, I haven't even told you the specifics of her secret. Therefore, I didn't hurt her so don't lose your trust in me!”

Ming Xiao Xi glared at her, “Keep your voice down, or others will think I'm bullying you.”

Koizumi covered her mouth.

“I didn't say anything, no need to be so worried.” Ming Xiao Xi thought for a while. “Well done. If someone tries to harm a person you care about, you should fight them back! Who would wait until they were bullied? But, if Shinyo Kane had refused your conditions, would you have announced her secret?”

That...Koizumi rolled her eyes and smiled. “Geez, how could I let that happen? I strike fatally when I threaten. Besides, I have clues to the things she wants to know about the most, so how could she not agree to them?”

Ming Xiao Xi gave her a thumbs up and said, “Good!”

Koizumi gave her a smug smile. “The world's one and only Ming Xiaoxi praised me. What a great honour!”

The two girls laughed hysterically.

After a while, Koizumi bit down on her straw. “Xiao Xi, please thank Hyogoku Hitomi for me. It's all thanks to her.”

“Sure.”

Ming Xiaoxi nodded. Although Hitomi was distant, but she was very nice to the two girls.

“Oh yeah, and thanks for helping me find a bodyguard.”

“I was kinda busy that day so I couldn't go...How was it, Seiki was good right. He's quiet but very skilful. Hitomi said that he's the most reassuring of the Makino Yakuza...”

“Wait a sec!” Koizumi's eyes widened, “What did you just say his name was?”

“Seiki.” Ming Xiao Xi was surprised.

Koizumi's head began to buzz. “Crap, the person who came had a different name...”

Ming Xiao Xi's mouth dropped open.

“He called himself——Rente.” Koizumi grabbed Ming Xiao Xi by the hand. “He couldn't be a spy from the Nikko Yakuza, could he?!”

“Rente?” Something funny flashed in Ming Xiao Xi's eyes. She sighed, “Him? Don't worry, he's not a spy, at the very most, he would be——”

“What?”

“A hilarious idiot.” Rente messed around every day in the Makino yakuza doing nothing while yowling that he was bored. It was very likely that he had overheard someone and had decided to replace Seiki.

Koizumi was still worried, “Can an idiot protect Kaoru?”

Ming Xiao Xi apologised in shame. “I'm sorry, Koizumi. It was all my half-heartedness that allowed Rente to get messed into this.” Damn that Rente, she planned to punch him the next time she saw him! She felt more and more ashamed. Rente that idiot, what if...she fumbled for her phone, “I'll give Rente a call!”

Koizumi collapsed onto the chair and stared blankly at the passing vehicles and pedestrians on the road.

An idiot?

A hilarious one too?

If Kaoru was protected by such a person, wasn't he in even more danger? The worst thing was that she had actually believed Rente and had actually allowed him to go ahead.

Ahh, Kaoru...She was still worried——when a navy blue Mercedes-Benz drove passed her.

There was a small crack on the window and she saw a flash of violet through it.

Koizumi thought that she was seeing illusions, because she suddenly felt Kaoru crying for her! But, she hadn't heard anything! She didn't see Kaoru either! She had only seen moving figures!

However, her anxiety increased and she unconsciously looked at its number plate——The last four numbers were 7474...

“What did you just say——!?” Ming Xiaoxi shouted into her phone——“Kidnapped!?”

Koizumi jumped up like a bullet, wide-eyed in surprise. Sweat trickled down her forehead as she stared at Ming Xiao Xi. Kidnapped?! Kaoru was kidnapped?! Her intuition was always so damn right! No! Intuition! That car! That flash of violet!

“A navy blue Benz?!” Ming Xiao Xi really wanted to crush the stammering Rente!

That moment——Koizumi sweated more than ever. She pulled Ming Xiao Xi's arm towards the direction of the car that had just driven past!

Ming Xiao Xi ran while yelling into the phone, “Tell me its number plate! ...7474?!”

※※※

The motorcycle roared!

Ming Xiao Xi put the engine on full throttle and Koizumi's eyes couldn't help squint in the blast of wind!

The motorcycle jumped onto the road as angry as a Tyrannosaurus!

Ming Xiao Xi had once been acknowledged by car racing teenagers. Now, she was racing in the wind, her heart in a mess! Because of her carelessness, she had let Rente intercept the protection ordered. Senya Kaoru was in danger and Koizumi was scared to death!

So——it was up to her to save everything!

Crossroads ahead!

Ming Xiao Xi's palms sweated, where was she to go?!

Koizumi bit her lip, closed her eyes and shouted——“Left!”

The motorcycle flew to the left!

Flame Witch's Super Sure-fire Technique——Intuition! At critical moments, this was an absolute must!

※※※

The outskirts of a secluded courtyard.

A navy-blue Benz with a number plate ending 7474 was quietly parked there.

Koizumi and Ming Xiao Xi exchanged looks.

“Should be here.”

Ming Xiao Xi took out her phone, “Call the police.”

“No!”

Koizumi stopped her and took a deep breath. “Kaoru is a celebrity and if the police is informed, there’ll be a lot of after-effects, mostly scandals based on speculation that will undoubtedly hurt him.”

Ming Xiao Xi eyed her. “Up to you.”

A dark light flashed in Koizumi's eyes. “The problems caused by the yakuza, should be solved by the yakuza.”

Ming Xiao Xi nodded.

For Koizumi, she would go to that person.

“Also,” Koizumi eyed Ming Xiao Xi, “I suspect they probably announced somewhere that Kaoru would be shooting nude today, so we must immediately go in to save him! But...it’ll be very dangerous...”

Ming Xiao Xi smiled, “Without my help, could you save him?” She started walking towards the building.

A slingshot.

Ming Xiao Xi took out a small but strong-looking slingshot and loaded it with some rocks. “Hurry, pick up as many as you can!”

Koizumi's heart seemed to lower by several temperatures. “That's your weapon? How pitiful!”

Ming Xiao Xi gave her a pointed look. “Don't forget that I'm the invincible Ming Xiaoxi! If I can't help you rescue Senya Kaoru, then I'll find a huge block of tofu to crush myself to death in front of you!”

The burly men were grinning as they tore Kaoru's clothes!

Senya Kaoru struggled to defend himself, but his opponents were still burly men, so his clothes were still torn apart, piece by piece!

A strange hotness emerged from his lower abdomen!

He felt his throat getting hot, his body getting hot. His limbs felt like they were melting, while his cheeks burned like a fire!

His eyes began to dim...He knew what they wanted to do! If they succeeded, he would live forever in humiliation!

The men were getting excited!

The usually distant megastar was now in front of them, blushing, eyes wet while struggling before them. They seemed to hear faint moans escape from his lips...all too sexy!

They itched to touch him!

They stared at the resisting Senya Kaoru, totally oblivious of their surroundings.

The curtains swung open with a boom.

The loaded slingshot stretched——whoosh——!

Whoosh——!

Whoosh——!

All three shots respectively knocked down three of the burly men!

Thump! Thump! Thump! ...Three of the burly men fell with a crash!

Everything happened so suddenly!

The other burly men had no time to react, before they too, were shot down!

Thump!

The fourth man fell down!

“Outta the way!”

Akatsuki, one of the men shouted. The remaining three men spread apart and angrily stared in the direction of their attackers!

They saw two girls at the window.

One of them had bright red hair, her hands full of rocks, as she looked anxiously at Senya Kaoru.

The other one had a slingshot in her hand. There was a small smile on her face, but it did little to conceal her regret. She shouted towards one of them, “Yo Akatsuki, long time no see.”

Akatsuki glared at the girl. “Ming. Xiao. Xi?” He knew her; she had once single-handedly destroyed his success!

Ming Xiao Xi lifted her face proudly. Pretending to be astonished, she said, “Oh, you remember me! Great memory! As we used to know each other, I guess I'll let you off this time!”

Akatsuki was furious. “You came here to die, so don't be so cocky! My brothers, let's get her!”

He waved his hand and more burly men came from all three directions!

Ming Xiao Xi put away her slingshot, warmed up her knuckles and laughed dismissively. “Then come on, don't forget that I gave you a chance!”

“Attack!”

A fight began.

Koizumi stayed by Kaoru and helped him up, feeling the weight of his body as he leaned on her.

“Kaoru! Kaoru!”

She shook him.

Kaoru thought he felt the earth shake, like a volcano was about to collapse. He felt uncomfortable but then he heard a familiar voice——“Kaoru! What's wrong? I'm Koizumi!”

Koizumi...Kaoru forced open his eyes and saw her flaming red hair, her concerned eyes. It was his Koizumi, she had come. His heart slowly relaxed and his body didn't feel as upset as it had been.

His purple eyes were as touching as a dream. “Koizumi...”

Just saying her filled his chest with joy.

Koizumi continued to shake Kaoru, who was in a sleepwalking-like state. “Tell me, what did they do to you?! Did they shoot any nude photos of you or force you to do anything unbearable?!”

“No.” Kaoru said with some difficulty. He felt hot.

Koizumi studied him. His clothes had been torn in several places but he was still wearing them and it seemed that he had no physically injuries. The two had appeared before it was too late at least.

Kaoru wheezed, “Koizumi, I...”

Koizumi smiled. “Your clothes are tattered so you're embarrassed because I happen to see you in this state? Don't worry, I'm not embarrassed myself!”

Just then, the curtain flew towards her!

Ming Xiao Xi punched a burly man straight in the face and shouted at Koizumi. “Perverted girl, hurry up and cover him up! Otherwise, my eyes will fall out!”

Koizumi stared at her.

Mean Xiao Xi, how could she look at her and Kaoru while fighting?!

She quickly wrapped Kaoru up in the curtain. Kaoru was hers; no one else was to look!

Kaoru breathed uncomfortably and the air he blew out seemed to be hot. “Koizumi, I...”

“What's wrong?” Koizumi had finally begun to think something was seriously strange about him.

“I...” Kaoru blushed like smoke, “I was fed...”

“Medicine?” Koizumi asked quizzically.

“It was...that...” Kaoru moaned.

Koizumi thought and thought and then her face suddenly flushed. “Are you saying——that?!”

“Yeah——”

Kaoru clenched his teeth. He was in pain.

Koizumi felt helpless. Crap, what was she supposed to do? Those shameless scum! Despicable scum! But what was she supposed to do now?!

“Take me...to hospital...”

Kaoru was in her arms and as red as a freshly cooked shrimp.

Hospital?

What could the hospital do about him?

That aside, Ming Xiao Xi had finished fighting.

She patted her hands and proudly looked at all of the burly men lying on the floor. Akatsuki had been beaten up the most and there were five huge, shiny lumps on his head. The ones who had been taken down by the slingshot had much lighter injuries. Hah, it couldn't be helped as she had given them a chance. They were the ones who didn't know how to appreciate it, right?

She was so proud.

The door broke open!

A beautiful teenage boy dressed in black came in, followed by a dozen men, all clothed in black. A very guilty-looking Rente was with them!

The Makino Yakuza had arrived!

Ming Xiao Xi blinked. Why did the support team always arrive after the hero had already finished fighting? Hm, maybe it was to give the hero a chance to brag.

Makino Ryuho stood before her, with a gloomy look in his eyes.

“Are you injured?”

He looked at her, like he wanted to swallow her, so that he would never leave her again.

Ming Xiao Xi glanced the other way. She couldn't look at him, for his expression would shatter her heart. She stared at the blushing Koizumi and laughed, “How could I get hurt? I'm the invinci...”

She couldn't go on.

The invincible Ming Xiao Xi was the biggest joke to Makino Ryuho. She knew that she was really stupid and was just a clumsy ostrich who liked to bury its head in the sand.

Koizumi helped Kaoru up. She approached Ming Xiao Xi and Makino Ryuho, gratefully saying, “Makino-senpai, thanks for coming!”

Makino-senpai continued to stare at Ming Xiao Xi.

In his world, there was never a second person.

Koizumi had long gotten used to Makino Ryuho's lack of speech. She smiled at Ming Xiao Xi, “Xiao Xi, I have to leave first, so please handle the rest.”

“Sure.”

Ming Xiao Xi replied.

“Wait!”

Rente blocked Koizumi and Kaoru, his blue eyes flashing.

Koizumi and Ming Xiao Xi gave him a dangerous glare!

He was the root of this trouble!

Rente pouted. “Please don't look at me like that! I know that it was my fault and I will pay the price.”

The moment he said this——Slam!

He punched himself in the nose and blood slowly trickled...Rente looked at Ming Xiao Xi and grumbled, “You always hit me on the nose, so I'm sure you'll be happy at this.”

Ming Xiao Xi and Koizumi turned away simultaneously.

That naive kid.

So annoying!

※※※

A romantic sunset sprinkled in from the villa's windows.

Koizumi's head was too bright in the dwindling light.

Kaoru lay on the bed with white sheets, his pink face sweating. His teeth left white marks on his lips while he continued to moan.

His slender body was full of energy and excited, as he crumpled the blankets.

What a seductive teenager——Koizumi was captivated!

She inched towards the top of his head and softly called, “Kaoru...Kaoru...”

Kaoru's eyes were as moist as a fallen angel. “Ahh——”

Koizumi touched his lips. “Do you know who I am?”

“Koizumi...”

He groaned again, “Koizumi...”

Koizumi smiled mischievously, “And what is the relationship between you and Koizumi?”

“Koizumi...”

Kaoru's smile came from the bottom of his heart. Because of the thing he had forcedly taken, all of his defences and restraints were gone. He now looked at her, moaning. “Koizumi is a bad girl...”

Koizumi pulled a face!

“But...” Kaoru continued to smile, “...I still love her so much...”

Koizumi was dazed.

“...I love her...even if she sends me to hell...as long as she's by my side...I feel happy...”

Warmth punctured her heart.

“What do you love about her?”

She gently asked.

Kaoru's pain was like struggling with fire. “...love her...only love her...love her...can only love her...and happy...”

Koizumi's chest melted.

She leaned on him and gently hugged him. She kissed his neck, kissed his earlobe and whispered, “Let me tell you a secret.”

Kaoru could no longer restrain himself after being kissed by her. He grabbed her closer. The heat he was feeling was driving him crazy!

Koizumi unbuttoned his shirt and kissed his burning chest. “I love you.”

Kaoru heard her, despite his consciousness had slowly begun to drift away. The happiness he felt made him get on top of her. “Koizumi...”

Koizumi threw her arms over her neck and kissed his burning mouth! Her strength, enthusiasm was like one burning fire, completely destroying Kaoru!

Sentimental passion and lingering...The two young teenagers was about to give their first time to each other, in the last few rays of sunlight.

A splendid passion...Kaoru growled and threw his head back as extreme pain and pleasure swept through his every cell!

On the white pillow, Koizumi opened her eyes. She had never known that another's happiness could make her reach heaven...

That sunset.

Kaoru——because of Koizumi, became a man.

Koizumi——because of Kaoru, became a woman.

CHAPTER 10

Morning.

Kaoru's muscles ached as he rolled over and slowly opened his violet eyes. His limbs felt limp and the white blankets seemed to make him look like a fallen angel.

It seemed that he had a very sweet, passionate dream...he remembered that...Kaoru's eyes suddenly widened and jerked up on the bed!

"You're awake."

Koizumi was sitting cross-legged on the bed with a sneaky grin, her evil eyes twinkling.

Kaoru gave her a scared look. "Koizumi, yesterday did I..."

Koizumi pretended to cry, "Uwah~~~You damn guy raped a chaste maiden~~~Uwah~~~"

Kaoru blushed and caught her shoulder. "Sorry, I—I hurt you..."

Koizumi leaned against his shoulder and continued to act. "Uwah~~What are you going to do now?!"

Kaoru hugged her and solemnly replied, "Koizumi, let's get married."

Married?!

Koizumi almost choked to death and started to cough, her cheeks bright red!

Kaoru quickly patted her on the back, but his heart slowly sank. He had done something wrong and had hurt her, so would she really forgive him? His face instantly began to pale at the thought and his limbs felt cold.

Koizumi could finally breathe. She jumped out of the bed and stood glaring at him. "What did you just say?!"

"Let's get married."

Her eyes were staring angrily at him as she thundered, "Kaoru! What the hell! You'll just marry anyone you went to bed with? If you did it voluntarily, then there's no problem, but you were drugged! Yeah, you're a victim too, so how did you end up having to marry?!"

The way she accused him sent his head reeling.

He looked at her, confused.

Koizumi gritted her teeth. "If you didn't do it with me yesterday, but you just pulled a random girl on to bed, would you just marry her?" She sneered, "If you got raped by that Akatsuki guy, would you have married him?"

Kaoru suddenly laughed.

She was even angrier. "Laugh! Laugh! You're such an easy person to fool!"

Kaoru pulled her down by her hand and hugged her indignant, struggling body. He smiled, "How could I not be happy, being fooled by you?"

She stopped.

Kaoru gently continued, "You didn't take me to hospital, wasn't that because you wanted to monopolise me yourself? But you're acting so jealous now, which is so very inconsistent with your image as Tangerine Weekly's super reporter."

She glanced at him, laughing. "What nonsense."

Hey, he seemed a lot smarter.

She poked him in the chest and asked, “Hey, if you did it with someone else, what would you do?”

“Hm,” he thought for a moment, “I’d go die.”

Koizumi was so stunned that her hair stood on an end. “Oh come on! You sure! Go die?! When did such an antique like you first come out?! What sort of man would want to die over something like this?!”

Kaoru's eyes were calm. “If my body was dirty, it wouldn't be good enough for you. Rather than losing you, I'd rather die...”

She collapsed onto the bed, feeling feeble. “Never mind...I'm not gonna talk to you anymore...I'm so damn mad...”

Kaoru crawled over, his eyes as cute as daisies. “So——”

Koizumi listened.

“——You have to protect me, be my angel and never give me an opportunity to lose you and,” He kissed her lightly, “I’ll be the happiest person on earth.”

She sighed and kissed him back.

For her, she would be both the devil and the angel. As long as he was happy.

Of course——only he could be happy with her!

Hehe, that was very important!

During the kiss, Koizumi's eyes glittered. Fire Witch's Secret Sure-fire Technique——For love, any method is appropriate! But, beware: all methods must be grasped with a good sense of proportion.

※※※

Life sweetly continued on.

Kaoru felt that she was born to be Kaoru's girlfriend!

This was because she and Kaoru were just——too similar!

There was no difference between work and entertainment.

A reporter was supposed to chase the footsteps of celebrities; therefore, she always had an excuse to appear in the same place as Kaoru. Having a special relationship with Kaoru made it easier to get exclusive news and insider information from Kaoru. Hehe, of course it was with his permission beforehand.

Moreover, Kaoru gradually became more open to reporters because of her convincing. He had become more open to admitting his private life and was a lot nicer in public. These changes greatly improved his appearance rate and earned the praise of the media. His popularity soared higher than ever.

Koizumi also got used to the different image Kaoru had on in front of others.

The dark and distant, black-eyed Kaoru was a public idol, while the amiable Kaoru with violet eyes and an innocent smile was her intimate boyfriend. Ah, she loved this feeling! Kaoru, the cute Kaoru, belonged to her only.

Koizumi comfortably lay on the living room couch, watching TV.

Kaoru's voice came from the kitchen. “Koizumi, if you're hungry, would you like some snacks?”

She switched channels and yelled back, “I'm not hungry. If you're tired, I'll cook for you today.”

This made Kaoru's heart feel like honey and it felt that his hands softened too. “I'm not tired, I like cooking myself.”

Over there——Koizumi's smile reached the tips of her ears. Hehe, he was really easy to please. (Because she was, in fact, somewhat lazy...)

The TV screen flashed.

Koizumi shook her head while she watched, for the entertainment circle hadn't had any particularly explosive news. Most of it was about having cosmetic surgery, which celebrity might get married to who, which director was hitting on an actor and stuff like that, which wasn't very interesting at all.

Ah, it seemed that when Koizumi was slacking off, the gossip world seemed very lonely.

She hid a smile and switched to Burst Company's 'Bursting Entertainment Road' program.

The Burst Group and Tangerine Group were rivals as they had appeared in the media industry at about the same time. Bursting Road Entertainment and Freshest Tangerine News always competed and fought for the latest news. Burst Company had adopted the motto, 'fierceless ruthlessness' and 'no smoke without fire' and because of that, they had firmly occupied a seat as the top few media companies in the country.

The presenter of Bursting Road Entertainment, Mei, had a mysterious look on her face, earning Koizumi's interest.

Some old photos.

Some old videos.

Koizumi sat up and stiffened.

In front of the camera, Mei's beautiful face was filled with vicious sarcasm. She was pointing at the old newspapers...Koizumi held her breath.

She unwittingly looked towards the kitchen, where she could hear Kaoru humming happily.

She turned the TV off with a pop.

She sat there, dazed.

Kaoru could no longer hear movement in the living room and so he asked, "Koizumi, why aren't you watching anymore? Are the programs boring?"

Koizumi tugged her red hair and bit her lip. What should she do? Everything had happened too fast, and her brain felt out of function.

That was when——the phone in the living room started to ring frantically!

Kaoru's phone rang frantically!

The unexpected ringtones made the quiet room feel uncomfortably noisy!

Koizumi stood up and stripped the phone plug off the phone. She turned off his cell phone. Even her toes knew what the contents of the calls would be.

Kaoru looked at her strangely as he wiped his hands and came out of the kitchen. "Koizumi, what happened?"

She was acting very strangely.

Koizumi stood in the centre of the living room.

She glanced at Kaoru, her face full of determination. As this was something he couldn't hide from, then she would face it with him!

She spoke up. "Kaoru, have you ever heard of the name, Chii Mori?"

Kaoru's face paled.

※※※

A super popular program!

Burst Weekly's exclusive headline——The Ridiculous Unknown Story of the Megastar, Senya Kaoru.

There was evidence proving that Senya Kaoru was the 'illegitimate son' of the president of the Chii company. That year, Chii Mori had been forced into admitting that he had a mistress and had caused a massive public outcry. Moreover, it was said that his mistress, Yanagihara, was an alcoholic and had already given birth to his son. The public had long been curious about the inheritance of the company, as Chii Mori's wife had only given birth to a girl. The question of inheritance had been immediately put forth.

Back then, the reporters had used all sorts of methods to find out about Yanagihara's past. During their digging process, a reporter suddenly uncovered that Yanagihara had a secret boyfriend called Ishiumi. It had become confusing as they realised that Yanagihara might have only pretended that Kaoru had Chii Mori's blood to get money.

Finally, public opinion had unified under the conclusion that Yanagihara was a shameless woman who tried to use another man's son to claim another's inheritance. Chii Mori had just been manipulated by her.

Yanagihara had become the focus of much condemn and had committed suicide not long after. Kaoru was sent to an orphanage and after several twists and turns he disappeared from the rest of the world. No one had ever linked the little boy in that scandal to the extremely popular Senya Kaoru.

“Senya Kaoru!!”

“Senya Kaoru!!”

The parking lot was packed with reporters; some reporters had jumped onto the roofs of the nearby cars while others squeezed as much as they could to the front. Spotlights flashed like lightning at light, making people feel dizzy. Several cameras were only half a foot away from Kaoru's face and the reporters' words jabbed at him like crazy.

Burst Weekly's Hirakawa yelled hoarsely. “Senya Kaoru, are you really the illegitimate son of Chii Mori?”

Senya Kaoru pushed him away and continued to walk forwards with an icy expression.

The reporters blocked his way as much as they could and fought back the security guards. They too, yelled, “Senya Kaoru! You should get a DNA check with Chii Mori!”

“You should charge Chii Mori for abandoning you!”

“If you were denied your relationship by Chii Mori, how would you feel?!”

“Do you want to inherit the Chii Company?”

“Will you and Chii Mori ever meet in court?”

...Senya Kaoru's eyes raged with anger.

He clenched his fist and restrained himself...His security guards beat a clear path for him to walk and they finally reached his BMW.

Seeing Senya Kaoru leave meant that the siege was again without success, a new reporter could help ask, “Hey Senya Kaoru, your mother tried to get rich by shamelessly saying that you were the son of Chii Mori. Don't you feel ashamed?!”

Those words.

The parking lot was eerily silent.

Senya Kaoru was frozen.

The reporter didn't dare to breathe. They clutched onto their cameras, video cameras and microphones...Senya Kaoru slowly turned. His eyes were dark and bottomless.

“Go——and——die——!”

His growl was like a roaring lion. He couldn't care anymore as he whacked away the reporter's hand, which hit her head.

“Ow!”

The reporter covered her forehead and blood began to trickle from her fingers.

“What——”

Her blood stained the cold ground.

The media reporters roared in delight.

The megastar Senya Kaoru had openly assaulted a reporter?!

※※※

It was getting late outside.

Kaoru leaned on the window, looking in the direction of the door.

Yoshisumeragi Company had let him stay at home to avoid the public outburst after the wounded reporter incident.

He had returned home early.

But she wasn't there yet.

Kaoru gazed out of the window, his purple eyes full of sadness.

He knew that she was busy and wouldn't return home until late but, he really wanted to see her. He wanted to hold her, no, he wanted her to hold and comfort him.

He wanted to see her.

His waiting heart was chaotic.

Koizumi, where was she?

Did she know that he was waiting for her?

※※※

Tangerine Company.

Koizumi thumped the table and glared at Shinyo Kane. “You have to help me!”

Shinyo Kane sneered and flickered through the things on her desk. “Koizumi, the same threat won't work twice.”

Koizumi thought for a moment. “It's not threatening, it's because I trust you!”

Shinyo Kane thought she had heard the funniest joke in the world. “Huh, trust me? There's nothing to trustworthy about me, nor is there any about you.”

“You're not as mean as pretend to be,” Koizumi eyed her, “or you wouldn't have that scar on your face.”

“You may leave.”

Koizumi was a little angry. "Oi, are you going to help or not?! How's this going to harm you?! All of the newspapers and magazines are saying the same thing, so if Tangerine Weekly puts in different articles, wouldn't sales increase?"

"Yes," Shinyo Kane nodded, "but all of your reports were fabricated and if published, the company will get sued."

Koizumi gritted her teeth. Oh gosh, her boss was really a bit too clever. Most people who looked at this medical report wouldn't have found any flaws, but she...no——Koizumi blinked, "Why did you say it was fabricated?"

Shinyo Kane leaned against her chair, her body shrouded in darkness. She looked profoundly at Koizumi and it was some time before she said, "I once sent someone to study Ishiumi."

"...?" Koizumi's mouth opened.

Shinyo Kane's laugh was very cold. "He was very problematic as no matter how much we threatened or tried to convince him, he was sure that Senya Kaoru was his son. However..."

Koizumi continued, "There are people who know that Ishiumi could never make a woman pregnant." That was the most irritating point! Her intuition told her that someone had bribed Ishiumi, so that he would refuse DNA examinations and not tell the truth. Therefore, she had come up with this plan.

Shinyo Kane sneered. "Ishiumi would go with you to hospital to prove that his sperm is infertile? Ridiculous."

Koizumi sighed in frustration. "Yes. This report isn't Ishiumi's."

Shinyo Kane studied her.

This unscrupulous Koizumi resembled her when she was still young.

"But!" Koizumi puffed out her chest, "I didn't decide to do this without considering the consequences. If Ishiumi wants to prove this report a fake, he'd have to use a recent report to overthrow it! But——"

Koizumi was smug. "Even if he does it a hundred times, the results will be exactly the same as this."

Shinyo Kane raised an eyebrow.

Koizumi sat on her chair, her eyes twinkling. "I know that our plans to protect Kaoru mustn't backfire! I've actually gotten two prostitutes to get Ishiumi's semen their own way. I took the samples to a hospital to analyse and came up with this report."

Shinyo Kane couldn't help hide a smile. She whispered, "Koizumi, you really are clever at times!"

Koizumi stared.

The smiling Shinyo Kane seemed so young and beautiful. How old was she? Thinking again, oops, it seemed that she was only twenty-nine.

Koizumi shook her head and turned her thoughts back to the problem. "Boss, what do you think, can this be published?"

Shinyo Kane pondered over it.

Koizumi patted her chest. "Believe me! When have I failed you?! Just push all of the trouble on to me, if any!"

Shinyo Kane eyed her then finally smiled. "Fine, go ahead."

Koizumi was so happy that she jumped up and waved her fists in the air. "Yeah! Victory!"

She was laughing as she rushed towards the office door!

When her hand was on the doorknob, Koizumi suddenly spun around and deeply bowed to Shinyo Kane. "Boss, thank you. Thank you for sending someone to study Ishiumi."

Shinyo Kane waved her away.

She gazed at the closed door and lightly touched the scar on her cheek.

That energetic time of doing everything for your loved ones seemed so far away to her...

※※※

Deep into the night.

The curtains were raised by the wind.

Kaoru curled up against the windows. The purple in his eyes had gone bleak.

He had been waiting for her.

Yet she still hadn't come back.

He was a bit flustered as he tried to convince himself that she wasn't like others and wouldn't laugh at him and find his origin such a nuisance. Yes, he didn't know who his father was either. Back then, his mother had cried and cried because he had been such a loudmouth, but she had never said who his father was.

He didn't want to know whether his real father was Chii Mori. He just wanted to let it go, let his dead mother rest in peace, so that he and Koizumi could live on calmly together.

But Koizumi hadn't come over once in the last three days.

There was click at the door lock.

Kaoru held his breath!

There was the sound of the door opening, the sound of shoes and then, her voice!

“Kaoru——! You at home?”

Kaoru closed his eyes. She was back and the night air felt sweet and fresh.

Koizumi saw the childish Kaoru. She put down her things, sighing as she walked towards him. She patted him on the shoulder, “Why are you here? And you didn't turn on the lights either.”

Kaoru stared at her. “You're back.”

“What rubbish, why would I not come to see you?”

Koizumi studied him. Eh, he was acting very differently to usual. She rolled her eyes as she stretched her arms——
“Kaoru, let me give you a hug, ok?”

Against the window.

She hugged him, lightly rocking in a strange rhythm.

In her arms, Kaoru felt sleepy.

“You lost your temper today and hit a reporter.” Koizumi laughed then sighed. “You really are troublesome. The Chii Mori problem hasn't been solved yet and then you hit someone.”

Kaoru's voice was harsh. “Are you criticising me?”

Koizumi hugged him tighter and laughed softly. “Yeah, you're a load of trouble.”

He struggled to push her away.

She leaned towards his ear and grinned, "But, I like that."

He was puzzled.

"The more difficult the problem, the more I can show off the potential of Fire Witch!" She kissed his earlobe and laughed. "Besides, the more it shows you how important I am to you and how nice I am."

Kaoru moaned, "Koizumi..."

She kissed his neck. "Kaoru, if Chii Mori really was your father, what would you do?"

"I don't need a father; I've been living without one for several years already." He took her hand in his, "My father is nothing to me, but to my mother, he was her life."

Koizumi nodded.

Kaoru gazed at her, "You, are my life."

Koizumi shook her head, "I am the witch who protects the angel."

"Can the angel kiss the witch?"

"No."

"...?"

"Because the witch is hungry."

"I'll go cook!" Kaoru jumped up.

Kaoru pulled him down.

"The witch wants to 'eat' the angel."

Kaoru blushed.

Koizumi jumped over and forced him down onto the floor!

Ahem, let's skip the indecent assault for now...

※※※

The next day.

The Tangerine Weekly finally published an article on the Chii Mori's mistress scandal, which included a medical report of Ishiumi that proved that he was born infertile. Rumours that Senya Kaoru was Ishiumi's son was instantly given up on.

Ishiumi angrily threatened to sue Tangerine Weekly for publishing such private details without his permission but he soon gave up for some unknown reason. According to the analysis of informants, he had chose silence after private discussions with the Tangerine Weekly magazine.

The incident of Senya Kaoru injuring the reporter also caused uproar, but began to die away as time passed.

Later, Senya Kaoru paid for the injured reporter's medical fees and explained that he had been in a very bad mood at the time. He gave the reporter's magazine the rights to receive first-hand information on his next MV. Everything had been solved 'reasonably' well.

Koizumi put down her phone and eyed Kaoru, who was playing the guitar. "Do you know who just called?"

Kaoru chuckled. That person had sent messengers asking to see him many times before and he had declined it every

time.

“Chii Mori would like to see you.”

“Get him to open the TV.”

Koizumi laughed. “Hey, are you really going to ignore him?”

Kaoru fiddled with its strings. “Ishiumi may not be related to me, but that doesn't mean he's my father either.”

“He wants a DNA check to prove it.”

“Get him to do it alone.”

Koizumi gave him a thumbs up. “Good! Kaoru is so cool!”

That was how it should be. Back then, he had abandoned Kaoru and his mother in that troublesome time without a second thought, which caused Kaoru to grow up at an orphanage. Now that he realised that Kaoru could be his long-lost son, he decided to shamelessly claim his back. So cheap.

The night sky was studded with stars.

Kaoru's eyes were the brightest purple stars.

He played the guitar and gently told Koizumi, “There is a song I would like to sing for you.”

She ran over and lay in his lap.

*I am a person who walks in the night
No star, no lights, no one understands
The coldness in my expression
Oh, I'm really lookin' for the direction
To guide me in your eyes*

*I want to be the child by your side
Laughin' with you, cryin' for ya and sleepin'
By your side without the blankets
When ya tuck me in bed
I want to be a bad kid and
Get ya to scold me but nah
You can't do anything 'bout me*

*I wanna be a child by your side
Listening to ya say ya love me
Never leavin' me behind
No, please don't leave me
I don't wanna be a person
Who walks in the night*

His singing was wonderful.

A wonderful song.

A wonderful night sky.

And a wonderful Kaoru.

Koizumi smiled as she fell asleep...She blushed in Kaoru's lap. Her eyes were dazzling and bright, with something that resembled a true angel...

/The Little Witch's Sure-fire Techniques fin.

AFTERWORD

Hahaha!!

Let me laugh three times!

Finally finished about Koizumi! I can't help being happy, but it is sad that this story's serialisation has come to an end on JJWXC online website. My Koizumi has been rather controversial as a lot of friends (online) have had an unfavourable attitude to her. Whenever I see these comments, I can't stop feeling guilty because Koizumi was born out of my nasty character. The way everyone criticised her, was like criticising me. Sigh~~~that evil Koizumi.

The gossiping Koizumi.

Laugh all you want, but Koizumi had courage to change anyway.

Kaoru's personality was totally my type: Gentle, simple and having the fragile beauty of youth. It was easy for girls to pity him. He made my readers happy, but torturing those readers with him seems to be a little hobby of mine. Haha.

Out of all the works I've written, I like this one the most.

Love it.

That's because while I was writing, I felt happy. I'd often grin while writing, until my mouth began to hurt.

I like writing and I like giving the girls under my pen true happiness. I hope this lets me give all my readers happiness and joy.

Well, let me thank all of my JJWXC friends who have supported and encouraged me during this serialisation process! Without you, there would be no joy in my life, nor would there be an evil but happy Koizumi bowing before you!

Thanks~~~Ming Xiaoxi 11.30.2003 Noon

Thanks for Reading!!

[FORUM – <http://ckmsscans.halofight.com/>] [Chatbox – <http://ckmsscans.cbox.ws/>]
[FACEBOOK - <https://www.facebook.com/ChinatownKM>]

TRANSLATION NOTES:

- -chan: Endearment, usually used for females and young children.
- -neechan / Oneechan: 'Older sister', not always related by blood.
- -niichan / Oniichan: 'Older brother', not always related by blood.
- -senpai: All manga readers will know this haha. It means "senior" (upperclassman).
- 99.9% effort and 1.1% inspiration: This doesn't even make sense to me...though it probably means that Koizumi considers herself better than the normal 100%...
- Bento: Lunchbox. A traditional bento holds many types of food...
- Bubble tea: Also known as 'pearl milk tea' and it's a popular drink.
- Changpao: A Chinese cheongsam for males. (The female counterpart is Qipao)
- 'Do you know me?' and 'Should I know you?': This play on words doesn't even make a lot of sense in Chinese. The crucial word (in translation) is 'must'.
- Golden Melody Awards: An inconsistency, because this is a real award night, but in Taiwan not Japan.
- Hitomi: She seems to be a spy in the Yakuza who works for Ming Xiao Xi.
- Kouyu College: There isn't enough evidence to deduct whether it's like a 'uni' or 'high school' though, as ages aren't known. 'College' sometimes refers to a secondary or high school (for example my country, New Zealand) so I chose this word...Anyway, what I mean is the main character is most likely somewhere between 16 and 19. At the most 21.
- Law of Conservation: Not the real law of conservation, but the male lead, 'escaping' is very important.
- Lyrics: There's no punctuation and all of the lyrics in Chinese were crammed into a single paragraph (i.e. no line breaks) so it was impossible to tell whether he was actually singing what and what. I think he didn't sing the second bit aloud ~ he was thinking those lyrics.
- Ming Xiao Xi: Kept this name in Chinese but these characters simply don't work out as kanji, unless the 'Xiao' is a middle name which is super highly unlikely. If you want to know her story (and Kazama Tetsu, Makino Ryuho etc., go read 'Ming Ruo Xiao Xi').
- MV: Music video.
- Paparazzi: People who take photographs/interview celebrities while they are going about normal life routines - so it's very much like stalking.
- Qipao: A Chinese cheongsam. A lot of people nowadays simply call it a 'Chinese traditional dress'.
- Red bean ice: A popular drink.
- Shinyo Kane: I don't think the characters in her name exist as kanji or no one uses it...
- Sticker: You may have already noticed it, but it's most likely a big wall sticker, like a poster.
- Tangerine Company's three main publications: Tangerine Weekly (magazine), Daily Tangerine (newspaper) and Freshest Tangerine News (TV program). This was revealed throughout the novel, but I'll put it here for now.
- Yakuza: Japanese mafia.
- Yen: Set in Japan, this is Japanese currency.

xah's (the translator) rubbish comments.

Hope you enjoyed this translation. Only did a very *rough* proofread of it because eugh, I'm starting to get sick of this novel...I think I'd rather translate a real Japanese LN set in Japan rather than a Chinese LN set in China, even if my Japanese > English translating speed is rather slow.

I do encourage you to buy the book btw...like Japanese LN, there are lots of black & white (manga-style, or should I say manhua-style?) illustrations in the book. From what I've seen, the drawings are pretty. The names will be different though. I'm not going to buy the book because I personally did not enjoy this novel (guess why). Haha.

Translated 10 chapters + afterword in eight days, but the PDF making and stuff took ages. Sigh~~

Any queries, contact me at ckmscans@hotmail.com

16/01/14